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‘Uncle Tom was there, in crockery’: material culture and a Victorian working-class childhood

V. A. Crewe and D. M. Hadley

Abstract

British archaeologists have long recognised the potential for the archaeology of working-class neighbourhoods to illuminate communities that typically left few direct traces of their own in the written record. They have also emphasised that the ‘rich and diverse material culture’ from such sites provides alternative perspectives to the textual evidence, which is often moralizing and condemnatory (Giles and Rees Jones 2011, 545-6). Drawing on a case-study from Sheffield (Yorkshire), this paper explores what material culture can reveal about working-class childhoods. It argues that childhood was depicted and experienced at the intersections of the chapel, mine and pub, and that competing conceptions of childhood and family were pivotal to the struggle for working-class identity.

Keywords: working-class; Methodism; temperance; ceramics; work; nineteenth century

Childhood among the British working-classes of the nineteenth century has been extensively researched by historians and literary scholars. Approaches adopted range from broad surveys of social and economic conditions, based on governmental records and other institutional sources, such as those of charitable and educational bodies (e.g. Tuttle 1999; Heathorn 2000; Humphries 2010), to analyses of individual life stories, as recorded in autobiographies (e.g. Vincent 1982) and interviews conducted by social reformers (e.g. Shore 1999). The literature published for children (e.g. Bottigheimer 1996; McGeorge 1998; Shuttleworth 2004) and paintings and photographs of children have been shown to have both reflected and shaped lived experience (e.g. Cunningham 1991; Arscott 2004; Rose 2009). Yet, childhood has largely been overlooked by archaeologists, despite a growing body of work exploring the domestic archaeology of nineteenth-century Britain, which has nuanced the study of industrialisation (e.g. Casella and Croucher 2010; Owens et al. 2010). Childhood did not feature, for instance, in a 2011 volume of the *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* dedicated to the archaeology of poverty since the eighteenth century, and is similarly neglected in recent reviews of historical archaeology (e.g. Hicks and Beaudry 2006), unlike in studies of earlier periods where the archaeology of childhood is now well established (e.g.

Kamp 2001). In contrast, in their analyses of nineteenth-century domestic assemblages, North American and Australian archaeologists have long endeavoured to uncover the experiences of children, and their influence upon the archaeological record (e.g. Praetzelis and Praetzelis 1992; Wilkie 2000; Mayne and Murray 2001; Yamin 2002; Baxter 2005). Taking a lead from such pioneering approaches, this paper draws on material culture produced for children, and interweaves it with documentary evidence, in order to investigate the conceptualisation of childhood within one working-class community living on the outskirts of nineteenth-century Sheffield (Yorkshire). The ways in which this may have contributed to, but also conflicted with, the realities of daily life are also explored.

The nineteenth-century community of Sheffield Manor

The community at Sheffield Manor lived in cottages built among the remains of a Tudor hunting lodge, c. 2km to the east of the nineteenth-century industrial centre of Sheffield, internationally famed for its steel industry (Hey 2005, 19, 32, 34). From the eighteenth century, the landowners, the dukes of Norfolk, sought to exploit the economic potential of the lodge and the surrounding parkland, and, consequently, the banqueting tower ('Turret House') was leased as a farmstead and enveloped in a complex of barns and outbuildings. The deer park was divided out among other farmsteads, pits for coal extraction were dug across the park and coke burning ovens were constructed (Scurfield 1986, 168), while houses for the mine workers were built in the ruins of the hunting lodge (Crewe 2012, 333-4) (fig. 1). A Methodist chapel and school were founded there c. 1810, and a pub, the Norfolk Arms, was opened in 1819 (Graham 1914, 42-4; Crewe 2012, 334). However, by the end of the nineteenth century the priorities of the dukes had changed, and Henry Fitzalan-Howard, the fifteenth duke, commissioned architect Charles Hadfield to restore the Turret House and remove the attached farm buildings (Leader 1874; Hadfield 1875). In the following years, the other post-Tudor buildings were cleared away, and the community was evicted and the ruins fenced off (Crewe 2012, 333).

Prior to its demise, the nineteenth-century census records suggest that Sheffield Manor was occupied by around twenty households, typically comprising parents and their children, although members of the wider family and lodgers are occasionally recorded. The working-class nature of the community is emphasized by the occupations listed in the census returns for 1861: miner, coke burner, colliery engine tender, labourer, blacksmith, white metal smith, table knife cutler, shoe maker and blade joiner (PRO RG 9/3491). Children aged between four and twelve/thirteen years are described by the censuses as 'scholars', and presumably

attended the local Methodist school (see below, p. 00). The censuses also reveal the heterogeneous origins of the inhabitants, some of whom had been born as far away as Cornwall, Dorset, London and Scotland. Some families had evidently moved around the country, probably in pursuit of work. For example, the 1851 census reveals that the eldest child of the Butson family had been born in Sheffield, but was followed by children born in Manchester and then Liverpool, with the three youngest children born in Sheffield (PRO HO 107/2341).

Contemporary commentary suggests that childhood must have been lived amid squalor and immorality at Sheffield Manor, which had a reputation as a place occupied by ‘wicked people’ who engaged in such vices as ‘Sabbath-breaking, swearing, drunkenness and cock-fighting’ (Staniforth 1858, 48). The antiquarian John Leader (1874, 42) bemoaned the stench of the site, and contrasted its ‘ancient luxury’ with the ‘modern filth’ of the current inhabitants, while architect Charles Hadfield (1875, 110) complained that ‘squalid and rickety cottages, like parasites, have fastened themselves about the tottering walls’ of the Tudor remains. He was pleased to discover that the cottages and their inhabitants were only there ‘on sufferance’, until they could be removed and the ruins closed off and protected from further destruction. However, despite the impression that emerges from these contemporary commentaries, excavation has revealed that householders decorated their allegedly ‘squalid’ homes with ceramic ornaments, many with religious or political significance, and they had keepsakes and souvenirs of places visited (such as the Great Exhibition of 1851). They also owned items intended for children, such as cups and plates depicting nursery rhymes, the alphabet, or children’s games, as well as toys (figs 2 and 5) (for similar evidence from other working-class sites, see Owen et al. 2010; Casella and Croucher 2010, 116-21).¹ Hence, while the written record is unpromising for understanding childhood at Sheffield Manor, material culture offers an alternative perspective, and one under-exploited by scholars of British nineteenth-century working-class communities.

Methodism, temperance and childhood at Sheffield Manor

The Methodist chapel had an immense impact at Sheffield Manor, albeit, as we shall see, one that came in to conflict with other aspects of community identity. Methodist preaching at Sheffield Manor was led from 1810 by William Cowlshaw, a penknife-blade forger who was a recent convert from a life of criminal activity, who also founded a school for the community (Staniforth 1858, 48; Tyerman 1896, 5-11; Graham 1914, 42-3). According to a biography of Cowlshaw published in 1856 by a fellow Methodist minister, upon his arrival among the

community Cowlshaw organised a prayer meeting in a cottage ‘turned into a Sabbath-school’ to oppose ‘the Manor cock-pit filled with a godless and cursing rabble’, with the result that ‘Christ in the cottage was stronger than the devil in the pit’, and a veritable revolution in behaviour ensued (Tyerman 1856, 11). However, the subsequent opening of the Norfolk Arms pub and archaeological evidence for gaming and gambling (see below) suggest that this account was selective, and probably derivative from other Methodist conversion narratives (Hindmarsh 1999, 921-8). Nonetheless, the influence of the Methodist chapel and school emerges from excavation of the cellars, yards and gardens of the houses, in the form of large numbers of cups and plates decorated with religious images, temperance messages, and depictions of acts of charitable good works, many incorporating images of children. Some pieces, such as mugs commemorating the centenary of Methodism in 1839, were certainly distributed by the chapel, while ceramics bearing religious and temperance messages are known to have been popular gifts and prizes at nineteenth-century Sunday schools (Riley 1991, 226-47). Many items carried mottoes encouraging good behaviour (e.g. ‘Diligent’, ‘Faith’, ‘Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise’), while others depicted Biblical scenes (fig. 2). Such moralizing messages may have been intended to train children in expected behaviour and to respect private property (Praetzelis and Praetzelis 1992, 90), and may also have provided a rare opportunity for children to possess an object of their own (Yamin 2002, 121). The following discussion explores the attempts apparently made at Sheffield Manor to instil in children and their families Methodist and temperance values. An important strategy was the distribution of material culture that, to judge from its small size, was specifically intended for use by children (Riley 1991, 7-12); as we shall see, this was unquestionably highly contentious.

‘What little girls can do’

A fragment of a plate recovered during excavation depicts a formerly well to do gentleman who has evidently fallen on hard times to judge from his dishevelled appearance (fig. 3).² The full scene in which this image belongs portrays three young girls offering him assistance, in an apparent message about Christian charity and the virtue of girls; the accompanying inscription reads ‘What little girls can do’ (Riley 1991, 258-9). In the Temperance Readers that were popular in the late nineteenth century, the lesson entitled ‘What can little girls do?’ depicts young girls learning from female proponents of temperance and then playing an active role in dissuading men from drink (Bailey 2009, 94). The temperance movement placed great store in children ‘as formidable weapons in the battle for a temperate society’, as Lucy Bailey

(2009, 92) has put it, with young girls seen as liable to be especially enthusiastic advocates of temperance, and effective in the face of the fecklessness of men. In their study of Methodism, temperance and childhood in late nineteenth-century Cornwall, Adrian Bailey et al. (2007) have highlighted that temperance discourse entered the family home not only in magazines and other temperance literature, but also through children, who, it was hoped, 'might advocate temperance principles within the family'. The Band of Hope, a temperance movement for working-class children, was another means of promoting temperance ideals, reinforced through prominent displays of membership cards, the wearing of ribbons and participation in parades. The movement stressed the importance of young girls as temperance messengers: 'Was it not likely that a little girl singing a verse of some sweet melody in the hearing of her poor drunken father would melt his heart' (UK Band of Hope 1868, 13, cited in Bailey et al. 2007, 153). Hence, the plate from Sheffield Manor seems to conform to the widely recorded practice of using children to promote temperance ideals, as it not only depicted children saving a man who had lost his way through drink, but this child-sized item was also undoubtedly intended to be presented to a child at Sunday school and taken home, where the message was expected to be reinforced. Whether or not such aspirations were met was, however, unpredictable, and, as we shall see, such material culture was employed in contexts with competing demands on community loyalties.

Uncle Tom's Cabin

Fragments of child-sized plates have also been recovered at Sheffield Manor depicting scenes from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the 1852 American anti-slavery novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe (fig. 4). That these plates reflect awareness among this working-class community of the anti-slavery movement is reinforced by other finds including a small bust of the anti-slavery American president Abraham Lincoln (Hadley and Crewe 2012). The plates also reveal something of the way in which children were positioned within this movement. One plate features the slave girl Topsy with Miss Ophelia, an abolitionist from the North, who, nonetheless, cannot bear to have contact with black slaves. When visiting her cousin Augustine St Clare, to care for his daughter Eva, she is given the mischievous Topsy to educate, which reveals her own secret racism and hypocrisy, and also the difficulties of teaching a brutalized slave girl. Only after the tragic death of young Eva does Miss Ophelia announce that she will try to follow her lead and love Topsy, which is a transformative experience for Topsy who subsequently becomes a Christian missionary (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*, chs 15, 18-20, 22, 25-8, 43). This plate provides another example of the centrality of children

to the articulation of religious and political ideals, depicting a troubled child who challenges but also improves the lives of the adults around her, and is, in turn, transformed by love.

Joseph and his brethren

Several fragments of child-sized plates feature scenes from the story of Joseph, which was one of the most popular Biblical stories for children, widely depicted both on ceramics and in illustrated Bibles (Riley 1991, 17; Bottigheimer 1996, 44). In the book of Genesis, Joseph, the second youngest son of Jacob, incurred the wrath of his brothers after he predicted from his symbolic dreams that he would one day rule over them. In retaliation, the brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt. After enduring numerous trials there, Joseph rose to a prominent position at the court of the Pharaoh, and was eventually reconciled with his brothers. Children were being presented with ceramics bearing scenes from a story that operates at many levels; it is the tale of an especially blessed individual, arguably a human manifestation of God, but it also serves as an account of a child lost but miraculously protected and eventually found, and it is a story of forgiveness, reconciliation and reunion, which valorizes loyalty and hard work (Bottigheimer 1996, 71, 98). It is also possible to read in to the story ideals that would have chimed with the contemporary anti-slavery rhetoric (see below, p. 00).

Discussion

The power of literary messages on ceramics has been highlighted in studies of middle-class households (e.g. Lucas 2003), but how far would the working-class community at Sheffield Manor have understood the messages that were intended by these ceramics? Biblical stories would undoubtedly have been familiar from the chapel, and the school evidently offered instruction in literacy to younger members of the community, as suggested by the recovery of glass ink bottles and slate pencils (Hadley and Crewe 2012). Working-class communities were not unfamiliar with contemporary literature, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in particular, became widely known in England soon after its publication (Meer 2005, 134). A play based on the novel was performed in Sheffield as early as 1853 (Bolton 2000, 337), and the novel was recorded in compensation claims among the possessions of working-class households devastated by the Sheffield flood of 1864 (Schmoller 2005, 17).

Visual imagery was an important component of novels aimed at the Victorian masses, and when *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published in England the accompanying images rendered the story more readily understandable to its readership by portraying the landscape and architecture in a more English fashion (Thomas 2004, 43-4). The novel's publication sparked

the manufacture of a plethora of related objects, including games, ornaments, embroidery patterns, spoons and even wallpaper, known rather disparagingly at the time as Tomitudes (Hirsch 1978). These served to give ‘visual representation in domestic and leisure life to values derived from literature’, as Louise Stevenson (2007) has commented. A glimpse into the household context of Tomitudes emerges from a passage in the *Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*, a short story first serialized in 1857 by Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins. In the description of the interior of the house of a rural innkeeper, the apprentices are struck by the evident ‘taste for little ornaments and nick-nacks’, including dolls and ceramics, one of which depicted a scene from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*: ‘Uncle Tom was there, in crockery, receiving theological instructions from Miss Eva, who grew out of his side like a wen [cyst], in an exceedingly rough state of profile propagandism’ (Dickens and Wilkie Collins 1890, 14). Thus, as this story hints, the intersection of literature, material culture and domestic surroundings in Victorian England was not simply the concern of the better-off members of the community (discussed in Lucas 2003). The emphasis in this passing comment on the proactive role of a child, albeit a fictional one, is striking in the context of the material culture found at Sheffield Manor, where the virtues and potential contributions to community harmony of children are also stressed in material form.

The importance of visual imagery in conveying particular religious messages is confirmed by an account from Sheffield Park Methodist chapel, which had close institutional links with the Manor chapel, being located just a mile away. From the 1870s, Sheffield Park chapel used a magic lantern to project images from educative stories, such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which notably feature the redemptive role of children, who are also shown to suffer from their parents’ failings (Graham 1914, 39). For example, images were shown from the temperance story of Little Jamie, in which a young boy tries to lead his father away from the drink that has plunged their family into destitution. After being forced to work on the streets, Jamie and his friends found the Cold Water Army, a temperance society, and Jamie’s father finally gives up drinking, but not before his young son dies (Eifler 2010, 379). Also projected by the magic lantern were scenes from *Christie’s Old Organ*, a novel by Mrs O. F. Walton (1874), which recounts the discovery of spiritual salvation by the aged organ grinder Treffy through the encouragement of the young orphan Christie. Meanwhile, scenes from the dark tale *Danesbury House*, written by Mrs Henry Wood (1860) for a competition held by the Scottish Temperance League, would have presented the suffering caused to whole families through the horrors attendant on drink. The use of a magic lantern at Sheffield Park chapel emphasizes the importance of images, especially those in which children were central, in

conveying Methodist and temperance messages. Furthermore, it reveals that, whilst working-class communities were not necessarily producers of written sources, they could, nevertheless, be consumers of the written word through a range of visual media.

This account of the importance of visual imagery in Methodist teaching prompts us to consider how the aforementioned images on the ceramics from Sheffield Manor may have been employed. Some, at least, of the plates and cups may have been intended more as display pieces than as tableware (Riley 1991, 9), which were, perhaps, both referenced in the teachings of the Manor chapel and school and also subsequently intended to serve as an aide-memoire in the home. Yet, it would be mistaken to assume that the messages presented on this material culture were readily accepted. The Methodist chapel and school were located just yards from another focal point for community identity, the Norfolk Arms pub (fig. 1), rendering it likely that temperance messages, in particular, would have been questioned, if not wholly rejected. There was widespread tension created by the middle-classes promoting abstinence from drink for the working classes while advocating moderation for themselves, although Reid (1977, 263-4) has downplayed such class tension within the temperance movement of Sheffield, arguing that the small workshops that characterized much of its industrial organisation may have made the working classes alert to the dangers of absenteeism through alcohol. Nonetheless, a history of the neighbouring Park Methodist chapel acknowledged that the temperance movement struggled to become established among its congregation, and although it formed a Band of Hope for children in 1866 ‘it cannot truthfully be said that the cause of Temperance is, even now, a popular one, but in the early days its very name irritated the nostrils of the majority of the people as would a pungent odour, and tremendous opposition was experienced by the men and women who first advocated its principles’ (Graham 1914, 148). Thus, while temperance could exert strong influences on some communities, or certain individuals within them, it was not universally acceptable to working-class communities, and we should be alert to this when examining the ceramic evidence from Sheffield Manor and the roles it advocated for children. Indeed, the discovery of a cup bearing a temperance message that had been discarded in a privy at Five Points – ‘New York City’s archetypal nineteenth-century slum’ (Yamin 2002, 114) – is a reminder that whatever the intended meanings of such forms of material culture they could also be rejected (Brighton 2011).

A recent study of nineteenth-century mining communities elsewhere in northern England has emphasized that both Methodism and heavy drinking were options for escaping the harsh reality of everyday life (Bruce 2011, 340). Moreover, analysis of Methodist chapel

membership revealed that the impact of Methodism on Victorian pit communities in north-east England was regionally varied (Bruce 2011, 355). There are no such detailed insights for Sheffield Manor, but archaeological evidence suggests the strong influence of the pub and a continuing inclination towards gaming and gambling, through the recovery of large numbers of white glazed ceramic balls used in the game of knurr and spell, which was particularly popular among northern mining communities, who commonly formed pub teams to enter local competitions, at which gambling was rife (Huggins 2004, 115). Knurr and spell was essentially a game for men, but the whole community would typically be involved, whether gambling on the outcome or assisting in the retrieval of the knurr and measurement of the distances it had been hit, often hundreds of feet. Accordingly, the game required open spaces, which would have been available in the fields around Sheffield Manor; it could not have been played adjacent to buildings and in the gardens at Sheffield Manor, where large numbers knurrs, often broken, have, nevertheless, been recovered (Hadley and Crewe 2012). It is tempting to suggest that the knurrs may have been retrieved and brought back to the community for reuse by children; many were split in half and could have served as flat-bottomed counters for some other game, such as hopscotch (fig. 5). Play was a powerful medium for learning particular value sets in working-class communities, as Yamin (2002) has recently emphasized, and it can be suggested that involvement of children in knurr and spell allowed adults to acculturate them to a way of life different from that promoted by the chapel. Yet, children apparently then used the broken knurrs to make their own games, engaging in competition and role play, as reflected by the wide range of other gaming pieces and dolls recovered from the gardens of Sheffield Manor (fig. 5).

Ideal and reality: the family and the household

We can see even more clearly the tensions between the ideals conveyed on ceramics and the daily experiences of children's lives when we examine the nature of the family and household at Sheffield Manor. Many of the scenes on the ceramics from the site emphasize the importance of women in bringing harmony and setting a good example to children. For example, Miss Ophelia, who features on a plate discussed above, was central to the improvement of the St Clare household, having arrived to find it in a state of disarray, and Beecher Stowe advocated the positive influences of women in her novel (Brown 1984). A woman reading in a domestic scene is accompanied by the inscription 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth' (Matthew 5:5). Another vessel depicts a mother and daughter, in a scene based on an illustration published with the poem *My Daughter* by Richard Gregory

in 1812, which focusses on the duty of a daughter to learn from her mother (Riley 1991, 32) (fig. 2). This plate also features a verse from *Divine Songs attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children* by Isaac Watts (1674-1748):

‘Twill save us from a thousand snares
To mind religion young.
Grace will preserve our following years
And make our virtue strong

Tea drinking may have been another arena in which women were encouraged to educate their children, as it was promoted by temperance advocates, and tea mornings for women and children were encouraged by Methodist chapels (Graham 1914, 76, 140; Bailey et al. 2007, 149-51; Twells 2009, 83-114). Indeed, tea drinking emerges as an important part of domestic life in mining communities in the report of Lord Shaftesbury Children’s Employment Commission in 1842,³ which investigated the living and working conditions of children in the mining communities of Yorkshire’s West Riding; the children interviewed spoke of regularly drinking tea in the home before and after work (Winstanley 1997, 106). While much of the tea-related ceramic assemblage from Sheffield Manor is plain or only simply decorated, there are, nonetheless, many tea cups decorated with transfer-printed designs, among which feature English rural landscapes with castles and grand houses, and chinoiserie. Previous work on the significance of this imagery has focussed on the ways in which it both reflected and shaped the aspirations of the social elite (e.g. Brooks 2003), yet such ceramics were also consumed within working-class communities, albeit that the wares were often poorer quality versions and seconds (Casella and Croucher 2010, 81). Indeed, in recent work on broadly contemporary working-class communities in Minneapolis, John McCarthy (2001, 147-8) has argued that ‘the demand for, and acquisition of, material non-essentials’ – including decorated tea cups – was the exhibition among such communities of ‘socially meaningful values and behaviours that can be considered “middle class”’. The limited numbers, and diverse decorations on the tea cups from Sheffield Manor, as well as the apparent paucity of saucers, suggest that the Manor households did not have access to complete ‘middle-class’ sets of crockery, but they hint, nonetheless, at engagement in what was typically regarded as a genteel activity, influenced by middle-class ideology and associated with domestic comfort (Fromer 2008, 3-4, 9, 18; Casella and Croucher 2010, 80-1). The recovery of children’s toys in the form of miniature tea cups and saucers indicates that

notions about a particular form of household were conveyed to the children of Sheffield Manor. These items, along with ceramic dolls, suggest that children were prepared through play for adult life, and that parents in this poor community made some small level of investment in their children through the acquisition for them of these playthings (fig. 5) (see also Yamin 2002, 115, 118).

The aforementioned ceramics presented a positive image of childhood and of female parenting, but life at Sheffield Manor was considerably more complex. Children came to harm while their parents were not at home: three-year-old Joseph Woodcock was left alone in the house with his brother and was burnt to death ('Inquests', *Sheffield Independent*, 30th January 1836). Furthermore, contemporary newspaper articles reveal the direct, and sometimes violent, involvement of women at Sheffield Manor in community politics, and the impact of this on children. This emerges, in particular, from newspaper accounts of a miners' strike in the late 1860s, which hinged around unionisation. With many pro-union residents on strike, their non-union neighbours continued to work at the colliery, assisted by miners who had travelled from elsewhere in Sheffield to work at the pit, leading to bitter rivalries. Matters came to a head in summer 1869, when on 9th June Susan Dixon and Ann Lawton banged objects to intimidate the miners working at the Manor colliery, and then assaulted John Liddimore, a non-union miner, by hitting him over the head with a shovel and tongs ('Assault on a Non Unionist', *Sheffield Independent*, 10th June 1869). Three days later, a crowd of 'about 40 boys' jeered and assaulted non-union miners on Manor Lane ('Another charge of assault of a Non-Unionist', *Sheffield Independent*, 14th June, 1869). The disputes were evidently focussed around particular households, and a disturbance around 10pm on the 17th June involved a crowd of some fifty striking union men throwing bricks and stones at the house of a neighbour who had provided lodgings for non-union miners working at the colliery ('The colliery dispute. Attack upon a house at the Manor by Unionists', *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 19th June, 1869). The most serious incident occurred around midnight on the 10th July, when Sarah Sykes, wife of a striking union miner, was shot in one of the Manor gardens by Thomas Davis, a non-union miner still working in the pit. From details of the ensuing trial, recounted in local newspapers, we learn that there had been several preceding altercations involving women. Sarah Sykes had recently been in a physical fight with the wife and daughter (her age is unknown) of Davis, and had previously appeared in front of magistrates alongside one of the witnesses to the shooting, Ann Norton, on a charge of assaulting another of the non-union miners. A lawyer at the trial notably reminded the jury that the principal parties had consumed a great deal to drink; indeed, Sarah and her husband were returning

home from a pub at the time ('The Outrage at the Manor Pit', Sheffield Daily Telegraph 23rd July, 1869; 'Leeds Assizes. Monday, before Mr Justice Lush. The shooting case at the Manor', Sheffield Independent, 7th December, 1869). Children must, then, have witnessed the women of their community enacting much more public and much less genteel roles than were conveyed on some of the ceramics they possessed.

In a study of South Yorkshire colliery villages, Andrew Walker (1997) has similarly questioned the idealised view of Victorian 'model miners' wives' as confined to the domestic sphere that emerged in the wake of the 1842 Mines Act, pointing out that the contemporary illusion of the male head of the family as sole breadwinner with women as curators of domestic havens, was challenged by the paid – albeit often unacknowledged or unrecorded – work undertaken by the wives and daughters of these men, particularly as domestic servants. Women in these colliery communities frequently combined roles that were both private and public, family-orientated and wage-earning, thereby subverting contemporary ideals about the organisation of the home and domestic life (Walker 2007, 331). The involvement of women in political disputes at Sheffield Manor was another challenge to such ideals.

The peripatetic nature of mining communities offers a partial explanation for this disjuncture between images portrayed on the material culture from Sheffield Manor and lived experiences. Miners were frequently required to travel from one coal-mining region to another in search of work (Rymer 1898, 8, 10), and, indeed, a relatively high turnover of families can be seen in the census returns from Sheffield Manor. In this context, the idealised images of childhood and family life depicted on the ceramics may, in part, represent attempts to portray a settled, comfortable and homely existence, promoted by the community's Methodist preachers who were perhaps seeking to create a harmonious, cohesive and pious community in the face of constant change. This ideal may also have been embraced by households themselves, as suggested by the provision of miniature tea sets and ceramic dolls for their children. Perhaps this was a model to which the Sheffield Manor householders – at least, sometimes – aspired, serving to maintain the patriarchal myth of men as breadwinners and women as homemakers, a model essential to an industry in which domestic income relied heavily on men's physical strength and was therefore intimately tied to the construction of a particular form of masculine identity (Walker 1997, 331-2).

Conclusions

In recent decades archaeologists have commenced studies of urban poverty on a global scale (Giles and Rees Jones 2011, 546), but the need to underpin such perspectives with detailed

case-studies has also been acknowledged (Casella and Croucher 2010, 1-3; Murray 2011, 579). Nineteenth-century archaeology has been justifiably lauded as a powerful tool for uncovering the lives of ‘ordinary’ people, enhancing, for example, ‘our appreciation of the dramatic transformation of domestic life forged over the industrial era’ (Casella and Croucher 2010, 1). Yet, despite a growing body of material from British nineteenth-century working-class sites, the social agency of children and constructions of childhood have only recently begun to be addressed in this discourse (e.g. Casella and Croucher 2010, 170-6). This paper has explored the potential of the domestic material culture from one working-class site for exploring the lives of children and contemporary understandings of childhood, in which depictions of children spoke of the need to lead them to a better future, and also, perhaps, of perceptions of the working classes as unruly children in need of taming. Simultaneously, it has highlighted the centrality of children to broader nineteenth-century historical processes, such as the growth of the Methodist and temperance movements, and revealed that archaeologists can make important contributions to discussions already underway among historians (e.g. Bailey et al. 2007; Bailey 2009; Twells 2007).

There was clearly contemporary concern about the fate of children in Britain’s nineteenth-century industrial communities, as expressed, for example, in the Shaftesbury Commission and the ensuing Mines Act, and the potential of children to shape a better future for working-class communities was recognised at the time (e.g. Cunningham 1991; Tuttle 1999; Bailey et al. 2007; Bailey 2009). However, the capacity of material culture to enhance our understanding of such issues within individual communities and households has arguably been subordinated to concerns with the insights it provides into ‘narratives of consumerism and bourgeois projects of “material improvement”’ (Owens et al. 2010, 213). In this paper, the weaving together of multiple strands of evidence has revealed the complexity of the messages about childhood conveyed by material culture at Sheffield Manor, the tensions within the community, and the competing influences of such local institutions as the Methodist chapel, the pub and the mine. This has enabled us to explore something of the intricacies of children’s lives, and their pivotal importance to community identity, within neighbourhoods whose occupants were apt to be characterized by contemporary commentators as little more than ‘modern filth’ (Leader 1874, 42).

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¹ Pottery from recent excavations is reported in Burgess 2011 and Hadley and Crewe 2012. Excavations conducted between 1968 and 1980 remain unpublished, but the authors have examined the archive held by Museums Sheffield, and examples from that collection also inform the current paper.

² The sherds discussed in this section were recovered from contexts associated with the gardens of cottages built in to the Tudor long gallery (Burgess 2011; Hadley and Crewe 2012). The sherd depicting *Uncle Tom's Cabin* came from a yard surface, and the other two sherds were recovered from garden soils, c. 10m east of the cottages.

³ The Commission's findings led to the Mines Act of 1842, which banned boys under ten and all females from working underground in mines (Walker 1997, 318).