

5

MASTER SWEEPS' LIFESTYLE (18TH & 19TH CENTURIES)

Depiction in Art

Some idea of the way chimney sweeps lived and spent their leisure time can be gained by studying contemporary paintings and engravings. An impressive oil painting, measuring approximately 3' x 4' entitled *The Curds and Whey Seller* (c1730) can be seen in the Museum of London. It features a blind countrywoman seated beside a brimming tub of curds and whey (the watery part of milk when it separates). Several chimney sweeps are gathered around her. The group is centrally placed beside the Little Conduit, with the buildings of Cheapside and the church of Mary-le-Bow behind them. The boys wear curiously shaped head coverings and carry large sacks. Two are enjoying their curds and whey - a favourite summer-time beverage - while the third hands over money.

During the 1730s-1750s London's most popular engraver was William Hogarth. He was born in the City of London (1697) and later apprenticed to a goldsmith. Although Hogarth studied art at St Martin's Lane Academy, he became more proficient as an engraver. It was his aim to 'compose pictures on canvas', and to treat his subjects 'as a dramatic writer'. Sweeps, young and old feature in many of his engravings. Part of a caption on one of his prints (1724) mentions chimney sweep Jack Hall (See Chapter 8). William Hogarth was an early benefactor and active governor of The Foundling Hospital.¹

Nineteenth-century illustrations of chimney sweeps - mostly portraying the Cries of London - were reproduced on packs of cards (ace of clubs, and ace of diamonds). The 'SWEEP SOOT, HO!' cry is shown on number 12 in the first series of cigarette cards issued by John Player & Sons. And in the Happy Families card game, 'The Sweep Family' and 'The Soot Family' (Mr, Mrs, Master and Miss) are both characterised by Sir John Tenniel the *Punch* cartoonist.

Artist George Cruikshank frequently included chimney sweeps when illustrating the works of Dickens and Mayhew. 'The Streets, Morning'



The Curds and Whey Seller, Cheapside c 1730 (British School, oil on canvas). (Reproduced with permission from the Museum of London)