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### Barabara A. Hanawalt. *Growing up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History*

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Barbara A. Hanawalt. *Growing up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

One former "conventional wisdom" was that childhood and adolescence were invented in the western world at the time of the Enlightenment. If childhood existed at all, it was thought to be a very short period after infancy.

Barbara Hanawalt- determinedly revisionist- says no. Medieval London did recognize childhood and adolescence as stages in life, although these stages were not labeled as such and there was no formal youth culture.

It is during childhood that indoctrination into cultural and civilizational pattern occurs. Presumably, the more complex such patters, the longer the period of indoctrination. Childhood and adolescence also describe sociological roles which presumably are redefined when socioeconomic structure changes. There are variations based on social class and gender as well as in different historical periods.

After meticulously careful research in primary sources, the author (professor of history at the University of Minnesota) has written a lively historical reconstruction using a technique of composite profiles that makes the book read almost like a novel. The book has been skillfully packaged, with numerous black and white drawings. There is an appendix of statistical tables. Notes and bibliography occupy 52 pages.

Hanawalt says that "London children spent their early years much as did their country cousins"(p. 63). Indeed, most of London's children did not spend their early life there. The welfare of children was carefully nurtured by "parents, godparents, family, servants, apprentices and neighbors"(p.67). Children played freely in the streets in unsanitary conditions but were closely monitored. From 1348 the uppermost concern was that the children might die.

Children were taught the virtues of clean and healthful living; and were encouraged to be courteous and to honor their parents and masters. They were told to tell the truth, revere hierarchy and authority, be kind to the poor, and accept conservative Christian social values. Corporal discipline began at about the age of four.

There were no ceremonies marking the advent of physical puberty. Girls could marry at 12, boys at 14. "Criminal law, canon law, and taxation set twelve to fourteen as the age of entrance in legal liabilities"(p.202). Not until age 21 could males and unmarried females come into their inheritance. In the 15th century the age might be several years later.

Servants were ubiquitous in London. A child might enter into service as early as age 7. To be in service was not necessarily a sign of low status. Service was "a period in which the young people learned skills, accumulated capital and dreamed of moving on to adult, nondependent roles"(p.173).

Since many guilds required functional literacy before an apprentice

could be enrolled, schooling became increasingly important. The majority of apprentices did not grow up in London. Not all London young people became apprentices. For the young men who did, "apprenticeship marked a decisive break from the status of a child"(p.129). For young women, "apprenticeship was not perceived as a stepping stone to an independent life as a citizen of London"(p. 142). A woman's primary function was sexual.

In the 15th century, the age of entry into apprenticeship was changed from 13 to 16 or 18. The average term was lengthened from seven years to cover ten. This was a period when wealth and power were becoming more concentrated. Dominant elites were not eager to have their privileges diluted.

Although apprentices signed contracts promising not to fornicate, sexual lapses were commonplace. Rowdiness was a problem. There is no evidence of gangs, but there were riots and there was youth crime.

All in all, the experience of childhood in medieval London does not seem very different from childhood in the western world today. To draw conclusions from this book- which is primarily descriptive- one would have to take a comparative approach.

*Corinne Lathrop Glib*