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CHAPTER 2

UNCOVERING THE LABOUR PROCESS IN RACING

Introduction

Drawing on the review of literature in Chapter 1, the central question which emerges is to understand how the labour process impacts on employment relations in the small firm. This thesis focuses on the labour process in racing stables, capturing the experiences of stable staff and racehorse trainers in the UK racing industry. Racing stables were chosen since they offered the prospect of several hundred small firms, all engaged in a common labour process and providing their product to a single market outlet. This labour process could in turn be studied in the twin contexts of industry structure and the history of pay bargaining in racing, reflecting the argument that organisations are, according to Mir and Mir (2002:106);

A product of history and agency, framed between choice and determinism, and enveloped in webs of power and culture.

The choice of racing stables also allows for an exploration both of small employer strategies of control and the ways in which workers in small firms are able to display agency, through acts of resistance and through expression of voice. Given the gap in the literature exposed in the literature review, there will be a particular emphasis on workers in the racing labour process.

These factors combined to suggest that a qualitative research strategy would prove the most fruitful approach since it would allow for detailed and in-depth interaction with individual actors (Bryman 2008:33), as well as the interrogation of detailed archival material.

The research started with a single project in 2000, commissioned by the British Horseracing Board (BHB) which, while meeting the requirements of the BHB, was an exploratory exercise for the thesis and threw up as many questions for further research,

as it answered questions for the BHB. The BHB project set the wheels in motion for a research strategy that built progressively over a four-year period from 2000-2004, forming a study of the labour process in small firms.

This chapter is structured in nine sections, commencing with the aims and objectives of the research, the associated research strategy, and research design. The discussion then moves to each of the five phases of the research, covering the research brief; access to respondents and other sources; selection issues; the methods used; response rates; data analysis; choice of research methods; and any limitations of the research. An ethical statement is included as the ninth section, showing that all efforts were taken to avoid harm to participants and to secure their informed consent to participation in the research.

Research aim and objectives

As already stated above, the BHB-commissioned study of racing undertaken in 2000 provided preliminary data on racing stables and the racing industry. However, it did also raise a number of new issues that needed to be addressed, particularly with regard to the development of employment relations in racing stables and the structure of the industry within which the stables' labour process took place, as well as providing some insights into the labour process itself. The PhD research was thus focussed on the following question: 'How does the labour process impact on employment relations in the small firm?', using UK racing stables as examples of a group of small firms.

Five individual research objectives were established for this thesis and these were: (1) to discover the industry context of the racing labour process; (2) to establish the history and development of the employment relations context of the racing labour process; (3) to examine and analyse the labour process in racing stables; (4) to establish how racehorse trainers seek to control the labour process; and (5) to show how workers display agency through resistance to their employers.

These objectives were to be addressed through a research strategy and research methods that would secure a wide-ranging set of data from employers and workers. The research design would be qualitative in nature in order to gain rich data from respondents.

Research strategy

The research aims set out above suggest that a qualitative strategy should be adopted since the aims are likely to require the gathering of rich data from a range of sources, in particular from the human actors engaged in the training and production of racehorses. This is consistent with the approach urged by McCarthy (2001:320) in his critique of large-scale surveys and their inability to capture the nuances of workplace realities. He particularly points to the need to explore ‘the basic causes behind...events or non-events’ arguing that industrial relations research, in particular, needs imaginative research with a greater emphasis on the case study approach.

With regard to small firms, there has been an increasing acceptance that qualitative strategies are appropriate and that quantitative approaches may obscure important data, especially from workers (Perren and Ram 2004). In her study of small manufacturing firms, Holliday (1995) took up this point, arguing for a greater use of qualitative methods in the small firms’ field and particularly pointing to the need to get beyond the owner-manager of a small firm. In order to avoid making assumptions and to be able to record experiences in the here and now, Cope (2005:169) argues that a qualitative approach is important in order to explore ‘the world of lived experience’ in small firms. It is not intended that this study should be read across to all small firms, but that it should be able to address some of the gaps in the existing research, particularly the absence of worker voice and experiences.

The use of a labour process framework allows for a consistent thread throughout the research. It is intended that the labour process in racing should be studied within the context of the industry’s structure, in order to gain as complete a picture as possible on

this group of small firms and the context in which they operate. Therefore the concepts of reliability and validity often associated with quantitative studies are not used to underpin the research (Bryman and Bell 2003). Nevertheless, attempts will be made to produce findings which are credible and confirmable, to use the concepts that Bryman and Bell(2003:35) apply when considering the need for qualitative research to be rigorous and authoritative. The fact that the research spans a wide range of sources and in particular interviews were conducted with workers at the very beginning and again at the final stage of the research allows for the data to support each other throughout.

Research design

A qualitative strategy must be operationalised by careful methodological choices in order to gather as much data as possible on the research subject. Methodological approaches should reflect consideration and selection between alternatives, accounting for constraints on the research design such as resources and access. A number of methodological approaches was therefore considered and chosen, each coinciding with a different stage of the research, and these were complementary in nature. They were designed to maximise data and to address the how, why and what of the labour process. Table 2.1 sets out the five phases of the research, showing the methods used at each stage and the respondents involved at each stage. Ultimately, a mixed methods approach was chosen in order to allow a number of sources to be consulted to strengthen the credibility of the results. The findings from Phases A and B 'informed subsequent data collection and analyses' (Woolley 2009:6) and formed part of a progressive strategy of data collection.

Phase A of the research was a preliminary study of the labour process which, although it met the needs of the BHB, inevitably threw up many fresh questions for the researcher, particularly with regard to the integrity of the labour process across all racing stables,

the position of workers in racing stables, the history of employment relations and how ultimately the racing industry was structured; it was clear that a number of gaps needed to be filled. The first opportunity to move forward with these questions came when the Low Pay Commission commissioned research into young workers and training, also in 2000 (Phase B). Valuable insights were gained into employer pay and training practices, and other conditions of service such as the provision of accommodation. A picture was building of a labour process which brought with it low wages, long hours of work and low status for stable staff, while the rewards for trainers were of a higher order, including public recognition in the racing world for the most successful. This picture was also one of an enclosed set of institutions, with their own rituals and practices, which did not necessarily welcome external scrutiny, whose participants felt they were in some way different from other types of business and were in some way special as a result. This was particularly evident with regard to industrial relations issues, which met a crisis point in the 1975 stable lads' strike at Newmarket.

This was an event that was often mentioned whenever the phrase 'industrial relations' came out in discussion. Some older staff had alluded to their experiences of the strike when being interviewed in 2000 and by now the author had become a regular reader of the *Racing Post*¹, which occasionally harked back to the strike. It was clear that an appreciation of the history of the labour process was needed and in 2001/2 this was addressed through archival research in Phase C. While satisfactory in uncovering a wealth of information about the strike and its settlement, the research also revealed something of the way in which racing stables fitted into the wider racing industry,

¹ The *Racing Post* is the industry's newspaper, which mainly focuses on the fortunes of individual racehorses, carrying each day's selection of race cards from individual race meeting. It is the successor to the *Sporting Life* and owned by Mirror Group Newspapers. It also carries job adverts for the industry. Some racing coverage is also carried in *Horse and Hound*, a weekly magazine aimed at the hunting fraternity and other branches of equine sport such as eventing and show jumping, horse breeders and the leisure rider.

which depended on their product, racehorses. The labour process was located in its wider industry context in Phase D, in order to understand the forces that influence employer and worker actions.

Perren and Ram (2004:88) point to two key themes from the labour process literature which they believe need to be explored more fully in small firms, namely 'how employers secure consent at the workplace, and the varying patterns of accommodation that result'. Throughout the first four phases of the research, an underlying theme was the very low status that stable staff held, despite undertaking work which was crucial to the accomplishment of a well-trained racehorse and despite being heavily relied on by their individual employers to transport horses safely to and from the training grounds and to and from racecourses. In the racing labour process, workers did not seem to display agency or to have voice and Phase E was therefore designed to address these issues, and to fill a wider gap in the literature. This was the absence of worker voice from studies of small firms and increasingly from studies of the labour process more generally (Ram 1991; Martinez Lucio and Stewart 1997; Ram 1999; Marlow and Patten 2002).

The remainder of this chapter discusses each research phase in turn, considering the following seven elements: research brief; access; selection issues; research methods used; response rate; data analysis; limitations of the research. The discussion commences with the first fieldwork phase in 2000.

Phase A - British Horseracing Board study of working practices May-September 2000

In early 2000, an approach was made to the National Trainers' Federation (NTF) for information about the industry. This led in turn to a commission by the then British Horseracing Board (now the Horse Racing Authority) to review working practices in Flat racing. In 1999 the pattern of racing had been expanded to seven days a week by

the BHB but this expansion had happened at a time when the industry was facing a shortage of stable staff (BHB 2000).

Research brief

The BHB wished to identify whether the adoption of a system of rolling shifts would alleviate the burden on stables of increased racing. The brief from the BHB was ‘to gain a full picture of current arrangements and to identify any problem areas’ (Winters 2000a:6).

Access

The BHB research project was undertaken between May and September 2000 (Winters 2000a), involving fourteen racing stables. The stables were selected for the BHB by the National Trainers Federation (NTF) for their willingness to participate and to represent views from trainers and staff located in five different regions.

Selection issues

All bar one of the stables were Flat racing stables and were located in Newmarket, Epsom, West Sussex, Lambourn, the West Midlands and North Yorkshire; thus, they had a geographical and regional spread. The one National Hunt stables was selected because the trainer had chosen to use a 9-5 working day, as a basis for comparison. This stable was located in Northamptonshire. Table 2.2 sets out the locations and respondents for each stable. The sample selected by the NTF was very small and not representative of the whole Flat racing membership. Nevertheless, the NTF had tried to stratify by region, size of establishment, male and female trainers as Table 2.2 shows.

Each sample contained male and female respondents, and a small number of non-stable staff also offered themselves for interview. Age and length of service were not taken in to account. In 2000, 54 staff were interviewed (including non stable staff) at their primary workplace, the stables. This represented 50 stable staff out of a total of 400 stable staff employed by all the stables taken together.

Table 2.2
Breakdown of respondents 2000

<u>Location</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Total</u>
Newmarket	Stable staff	5	8	13
(5 stables)	Head lad/lass	4	1	5
	Other	4	0	4
	Trainer	5	0	5
South East	Stable staff	3	6	9
(2 stables)	Head lad/lass	1	0	1
	Other	0	0	0
	Trainer	1	1	2
Lambourn	Stable staff	3	0	3
(2 stables)	Head lad/lass	1	0	1
	Other	0	0	0
	Trainer	2	0	2
Northants	Stable staff	3	0	3
(1 stables)	Head lad/lass	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0
	Trainer	0	0	0
Yorkshire	Stable staff	3	4	7
(2 stables)	Head lad/lass	1	2	3
	Other	0	0	0
	Trainer	2	0	2
Midlands	Stable staff	2	3	5
(2 stables)	Head lad/lass	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0
	Trainer	2	0	2
TOTAL		42	25	67

As discussed below, however, the staff sample was extended by the addition of a questionnaire, devised after the first round of visits to stables. Five stable lads and two stable girls, together with five head lads and two head girls, answered the questionnaire, a total of fourteen additional responses.

Interviews with trainers

The original intention was that the 14 trainers would be interviewed once a month from May to September but it only proved possible to meet trainers at the initial stage in May

2000, due to the pressures of the Flat racing season. A topic guide was devised, in consultation with the NTF, to structure this meeting and to gather comparable data. Questions to trainers were grouped around four areas: work patterns, staffing levels, pay, going racing. Respondents were also free to make additional comments as they wished. Interviews were held in the trainer's office and generally lasted no more than an hour. Trainers were anonymised, although with a small sample, devised by their Federation, it was clear to the main recipients of the report which stable was being referred to.

Interviews with staff

Visits were arranged to the 14 racing stables over a period from May to September 2000, interviewing and re-interviewing 40 members of staff and informally observing their daily pattern of work and working relationships. The aim of the interviews was to establish how staff were coping with the increased demands of the Flat racing calendar and whether working practices could be changed in response to increased work levels and the staff shortage. Questions to staff were grouped around five key areas: pay and conditions of employment; working hours; training and career progression; intention to remain in the industry; staff consultation and the SLA. Respondents were free to provide additional comments as they wished. All interviews were undertaken at the primary workplace, the stables.

Staff were generally interviewed either mid-morning/just before the lunch period, once their daily care and exercise duties had been completed; or just before 'evening stables' when horses were to be settled down for the night, usually mid-afternoon. Interviews lasted around an hour and, in the main, they were conducted as group interviews. On subsequent visits, interview durations were more varied, dependent on racing duties facing staff.

Respondents were anonymised, allowing staff to speak freely which they often did. It was very evident, given the reaction to the initial round of staff interviews, that staff were unused to having their views sought out. A typical reaction was that of Respondent A35² who said ‘I supposed you’re going to the boss with all this, then?’ or that of Respondent A22³ who asked ‘Why is anyone interested in us?’. There were clearly issues of trust and confidence in the interviewer who had, after all, been invited to interview staff at the behest of the employer and the BHB. This is a difficult aspect of face to face to interviews, when time with the respondent is often brief and a great deal has to be accomplished in a very short time. Bryman and Bell (2003:122) suggest that it is important to establish rapport with the respondent but that this must be balanced against over-familiarity. What did help in the case of stable staff was the fact that their interviewer was knowledgeable about horses and aware of the riding stables environment; she was also a keen racegoer. This naturally led her to adopting a style of dress which was compatible with their working environment – jeans and riding boots and a warm jacket make considerably more sense than office clothing. Once respondents were able to see that she did not immediately go to their trainer with the results of the interviews, they were more reassured that their trust would not be breached and this was confirmed at each subsequent interview.

Staff questionnaire

At the initial meetings employment issues had been raised by interviewees about many aspects of their work, from pay to housing, not just the new working pattern stables were trying to accommodate. Some of these were being raised as quasi-grievances, pay and pay related issues being at the forefront. It was agreed with the BHB and trainers that an important opportunity was being offered to capture a wider range of worker responses and that a questionnaire would be the best way to achieve this (see Appendix

² Stable lad interviewed at Epsom stables May 2000

³ Stable lad interviewed at Newmarket May 2000

A). The questionnaire used the same questions as the staff interviews and was distributed by hand at the second visit to each stable, with a covering letter explaining the purpose of the BHB study. Respondents were assured of anonymity. They were asked to answer mainly tick box questions on a range of employment issues, with an opportunity to provide their own comments at the end. Questionnaires were self-administered and returned in a reply paid envelope and a total of 27 responses were received from a potential 140 respondents. Of those 27, fourteen offered further comments. These responses were in addition to the interview data.

Staff diary

As one of the key issues was that of workload, a staff diary (Appendix B) was also devised to try to capture the workload undertaken during the weeks in between the monthly visits. Diaries are regarded by Bryman and Bell (2007) as a form of self-completion questionnaire, and this was the case for the 54 interview respondents, who were asked to complete the diary and return it at a subsequent visit to the stable. However, it was a 'researcher-driven' diary (Bryman and Bell 2007:251) in that it had a predetermined structure, covering start and finish times; number of horses being cared for; number of horses being exercised; meal breaks; and time spent away racing. A final section allowed respondents to report any new or special work problems.

The purpose of the diary was to aid recollection of what had been happening week by week but was not wholly successful; some weekly work diaries were completed, but only five were returned to the author, out of a potential 54 respondents. When asked why more diaries were not forthcoming, staff said that time pressures made it impossible to comply with this request. The diaries that were returned came from five stables, four in Newmarket and one in Yorkshire, as shown in Table 2.3 below.

Table 2.3
Respondents to the staff diary

Location	Respondent	No. weeks completed
Newmarket	Yard Man	Five
Newmarket	Stable lad	One
Newmarket	Stable girl	Five
Newmarket	Head lad	Three
Yorkshire	Travelling head girl	Five

Informal observation

Observation was not explicitly part of the research design but it emerged as part of the monthly activity of interviewing staff. To the extent that this activity can be labelled, it was a form of unstructured, non-participant observation but was not used to develop ‘a narrative account of...behaviour’ at the stables (Bryman 2008:257). Rather it formed part of the background information inevitably gained when interacting with respondents in the workplace setting.

Bryman and Bell (2007) refer to this as micro-ethnography, that is to say the researcher lacks time and access to fully employ participant observation. During several visits to the stables, observation of workers at close quarters occurred naturally on more than one occasion; also two trainers gave a conducted tour of their establishments. Additionally, interviews with staff were either undertaken in the tack room (used to clean and store horse apparel), the staff rest room, on one occasion while a member of staff was mucking out and on another when evening feed was being taken round to the horses. This gave valuable insights into working life in a racing stable.

Data analysis

A note was taken of all interviews, recorded by hand and written up the same day. Interviews were analysed around the key themes wherever possible and data organised around these. Staff responses were grouped around five key areas: pay and conditions of employment; working hours; training and career progression; intention to remain in

the industry; staff consultation and the SLA. Any recurring themes were also recorded. The data was used for each data chapter in this thesis.

The questionnaires from stable staff were analysed using SPSS, to identify and analyse patterns in the data. Questions were numerically coded after the questionnaire was administered. Data coding and the compilation of a dataset took around an hour to complete. Data from the questionnaire were analysed using key themes. The data was then organised and used for each data chapter in the thesis. Eight attribute questions were asked, followed by forty-nine, closed questions, grouped around key themes – pay and conditions of employment; working hours; training and career progression; intention to remain in the industry; staff consultation and the SLA. A section contained at the end of the questionnaire allowed staff to add any additional comments they might wish to make. A total of 14 respondents provided additional comments, 54% of the total, and these were categorised and coded.

The weekly diaries were analysed for qualitative comments and evidence of workload pressures. The observation of staff activities was not formally recorded but helped immeasurably in gaining an understanding of the routine and reality of working in a racing stable.

Research methods used

To a large extent, the research design for this exercise was constrained by the brief laid down by the BHB. The interview approach had already been chosen by them in consultation with the NTF, who had written out to their members seeking volunteers on the basis of a mixture of staff and trainer interviewees. This worked well as an exploratory method and provided much useful background information but, given that the study implicitly relied on capturing worker views, additional techniques became necessary.

A questionnaire was initially excluded from the design because it was not perceived that this would be necessary. However, as greater familiarity of stables life was gained, it was clear that, to fulfil the BHB brief of gaining full information about current working practices and identifying problem areas, data should be drawn from the widest range of respondents.

Response rates, for all respondents, were constrained by the demands of racing that grew throughout the survey period, from May to September 2000. However, the addition of the questionnaire did help to mitigate this effect as it was administered at the second visit in June 2000 and before the busiest period of racing in the summer months. The diary method could have worked well and been a valuable aid to capturing respondents work routines during intervening weeks. However, as Bryman and Bell (2007) point out, diaries can suffer from respondent fatigue and respondent inaccuracy as time elapses. Experience of this method was so brief that its longer-term success could not be evaluated.

Informal observation did make an important contribution to the research. As discussed at the beginning, respondents were more inclined to cooperate because they felt able to talk to someone not alien to them, who understood the kind of practical attire to be worn around horses and who also had some knowledge of horse behaviour and care. This also allowed the researcher to be 'closer' to respondents, once they were confident that their views would be respected and treated in confidence.

Limitations of the research

The two main limitations were those of time, and the physical resources embodied in one researcher. This was a short run project, which was required by its sponsors to be undertaken immediately and to be submitted for consideration before the end of the Flat racing season in October 2000. Nevertheless it did capture a range of problems facing

the industry and allowed for an expression of staff views, which might otherwise not have been gathered collectively.

A possible problem area was that of interviewer bias, arising from two sources: a keen interest in racing and a background as a trade union official. However, mindful of the BHB's research brief, questions were designed to seek information in as neutral a fashion as possible.

The research also pointed up a major gap - the history of industrial relations, particularly surrounding the 1975 stable lads' strike. Several respondents referred to the strike as a key event that had influenced employment relations in stables, without a clear explanation of how or why. It was clear that further research was needed into this historical event and its outcome; this is discussed below, after the section on a second, separate research project which was also undertaken in 2000.

Phase B - Low Pay Commission survey of young workers and training July-December 2000

In the summer of 2000, the Low Pay Commission (LPC) invited expressions of interest in their third round of research on the National Minimum Wage (NMW). The Low Pay Commission were keen to review the youth labour market and 'to consider whether there was a case for changing the age at which workers become entitled to the adult rate' of the National Minimum Wage (LPC 2001:4). This survey thus overlapped with Phase A, commencing in July and concluding in December 2000.

Research brief

Specifically the aims of the project were to ascertain what impact the NMW had had in addressing low pay issues; to establish the extent of part time work and whether this was being adopted to reduce wage costs; to establish the impact of the minimum wage on the employment of younger workers; and to establish the impact of the NMW on the training of younger workers.

The LPC agreed that a survey of racehorse trainers on these specific questions would be beneficial to their study, as the industry had a reputation for low pay and as it had not been surveyed in this way in the past.

Access

Access to trainers was sought by corresponding directly with members of the NTF whose names and addresses were contained in the 2000 NTF Yearbook. An explanatory letter was sent with the questionnaire (Appendix C), explaining that the Low Pay Commission (LPC) wished to ascertain how the industry had coped with the introduction of the NMW. The letter pointed out that the LPC would be advising Government on future developments and it was therefore important to gain the fullest picture of the sector. Respondents were assured of anonymity and provided with a replied-paid envelope.

Selection issues

It was decided that the sample would comprise the total population of trainers who were members of the NTF, some 456 in all. It was believed that this group would be more likely to respond, given the on-going study of Flat racing discussed above which overlapped with the start of the LPC fieldwork. The sample covered both codes of racing, Flat and National Hunt. Although the sample was not stratified, other than by virtue of NTF membership, it will be seen from the discussion in this section that many features of this population, such as size of establishment, region and type of training licence were captured by the data. Unfortunately, BHB statistics on numbers of trainers were not available for 2000 but the publication, *Horses in Training*, shows a total of 506 trainers in the UK for 1999, meaning that the NTF membership represented some 90% of these.

Response rate

77 responses were received, of which 69 were valid responses. Of the other eight responses, three respondents had ceased training; one had no time to complete the questionnaire; one believed the business was unaffected by the NMW and did not complete the questionnaire; one wished to charge £100+VAT for completion; one paid ‘well in excess’ of the NMW rate; finally, one was answered by an indignant racing secretary who believed it was none of government’s business what wage rates were paid.

The details of respondents are set out as follows. Table 2.5 shows that respondents came from a spread of locations, right across the United Kingdom, with concentrations in the main racing centres of Newmarket and Lambourn, followed closely by the racing centre of Middleham in Yorkshire. This generally reflected the distribution of stables in the UK, as discussed in Chapter 3 (see figure 3.4). Respondents were based mainly in rural locations throughout, save for the concentration of stables in racing towns such as Newmarket, Lambourn and around Middleham in Yorkshire.

Table 2.4
Location of trainer questionnaire respondents

Location	Stables
Newmarket	12
Lambourn	13
South East	8
South West	8
Midlands	3
North West	3
Yorkshire	10
North East	6
Scotland	1
Wales	2

Source: Phase B questionnaire

Table 2.5 shows the numbers of horses each respondent had in training. When considered against the profile of training establishments discussed in Chapter 3 (see Figure 3.1), it will be seen that respondents reflected the general pattern of organisational size throughout the industry, with a preponderance of small firms at the 1-40 size range.

Table 2.5
Number of horses trained by trainer questionnaire respondents

1-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
9	18	14	3	9	8	8

Source: Phase B Questionnaire

Finally, Table 2.7 shows the type of licence held by respondents. By far the largest group of respondents held either National Hunt or combined licences, thus filling in a gap from the earlier study of working practices in Flat racing stables. The Low Pay Commission study reflected the fact that the overwhelming majority of trainers held a Combined licence (see also Table 3.5 in chapter 3) which allows for the training of horses for both codes of racing. Of 67 respondents, nine held a Flat only racing license, ten held a National Hunt only license and 48 held a combined license.

Contextual information on training was also necessary and a direct approach was made to the British Racing School at Newmarket and the Northern Racing College in Barnsley⁴. Interviews were arranged with the head of each training establishment for the autumn of 2000.

Questionnaire to Trainers

A total of 456 trainers were surveyed by a postal, self-administered questionnaire (copy at Appendix D). Five attribute questions established the type of training, region, and

⁴ These two establishments provide induction training for new stable staff and supervisory and management training for head lads/girls and trainers respectively.

experience of the trainer. A second section asked for wage rates for all staff, including non-stable staff. The third section asked a mixture of 27 closed and open questions, covering staff accommodation, hours of work, staff training, and labour supply. Finally, there was an opportunity for respondents to add any remarks they wished to. The questionnaire was devised by and was piloted with colleagues before administration. Respondents were assured of anonymity.

Interviews

Two qualitative interviews were held with the head of each of the training colleges. A topic guide was devised (Appendix E) to structure these meetings which were held in the autumn of 2000. The Director of the British Racing School kindly offered a tour of the training facilities but this did not prove possible at the Northern Racing College, as the interview took place late one afternoon. Both respondents were happy to be identified by their job title and did not seek anonymity.

Data analysis

The questionnaires from trainers were analysed using SPSS, to identify and analyse patterns in the data. Questions were numerically coded after the questionnaire was administered. Data coding and the compilation of a dataset took around an hour to complete. The attribute questions were used to identify and analyse key features of the stables. The pay data was presented in tabular format to show the impact of the NMW. The seventeen closed questions and five open questions, were analysed and grouped around three key themes – the impact of the national minimum wage on employment; training; and labour turnover. Trainers' additional comments were analysed and grouped around the key themes where possible. A total of 27 respondents provided additional comments, 35% of the total, and these were categorised and coded.

Both interviews with the heads of the training colleges were recorded by hand and written up the same day. The interviews were analysed around the key themes

wherever possible and data organised around these. Any recurring themes were also recorded.

Research methods used

This was an almost entirely questionnaire-driven project, with two qualitative interviews with key informants forming part of the background to the study. Questionnaires are advocated as a means of gaining large amounts of information from a wide range of respondents, quickly and at low cost (Bryman and Bell 2007). However, they are not without their problems and certainly cannot capture the nuances of a respondent's direct answers to interview questions. The most obvious limitation of self-administered questionnaires is that there is no room to prompt respondents or probe their answers further. This is coupled with the problem of low response rates, which was the case with this questionnaire, 77 out of 456 being a very low response indeed. However, the LPC was content for this information to be reported as a set of qualitative responses.

The interviews with the heads of the training schools were allowed to guide the discussion but were not there to limit the discussion. Indeed, both respondents were generous in their responses and keen to share with us their undoubtedly wide-ranging experiences of horse racing and training of young workers. These interviews coincided with the period before questionnaires had been returned, so it was not possible to use the opportunity of the interviews to follow up on key issues raised in the survey.

This research was dependent on the willingness of potential participants to respond. It was not supported or sponsored by the National Trainers Federation. Nevertheless, it did provide important data about aspects of the employment contract, particularly with regard to pay; about some non-pay benefits, such as the provision of housing; and about the uptake of staff training provision by individual racing establishments.

Phase C – December 2001/August 2002 Archival research into 1975 strike at Newmarket

During the BHB study in 2000, several respondents had presented the 1975 strike as an event of major significance but with little explanation of what this meant in practice. As it happened, the Racing Post (Ashforth 2000a; Ashforth 2000b) had been campaigning to improve the pay of stable staff at the same time as the visits to racing stables. The second of these articles covered the 1975 strike, holding that this event had altered the course of employment relations in racing stables. This led to a visit to the Post's on-line archive to fill in the detail but the archive only went back as far as 1996. Other sources of information were needed to fill in the gaps, not least the fact that stable lads had in the past been members of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) and it was the TGWU which had called them out on strike.

Research brief

Many sources remark on the importance of historical narratives to an understanding of contemporary phenomena (Dunkerley 1988; Hobsbawm 1997; Patmore 1998); in particular, it was stated by Edwards (1990:126) that 'workplace relations have their own histories'. It was therefore the intention to uncover as much of that history as possible for stable staff and racing stables.

Access to sources

A visit to the Modern Records Centre at Warwick University was undertaken in 2001, specifically to examine the TGWU archive. The General Executive Council minutes (TGWU 1975a; TGWU 1975b) recorded basic information about the official nature of the strike, numbers of strikers involved and outcome; the union's journal, The Record, gave some further details of the strike. An unexpected find was an extract about the strike published in the Sporting Life. This suggested a visit to the British Library Newspaper Archive at Colindale, North London.

The Archive was visited during 2001 and 2002, specifically to examine back issues of the *Sporting Life*, which proved to carry substantial and daily reports of the lead into the strike, its conduct, its settlement and the immediate aftermath. Wider news reports in the sporting pages of national daily and weekly newspapers, in particular *The Telegraph* and *The Times*, proved helpful.

However, perusing the *Sporting Life* also led to other secondary sources, in particular the 1974 report on manpower in the industry, the Blackwell report (Joint Racing Board 1974); the Rothschild Royal Commission on Gambling (Command 7200); and Hansard, which charted relevant parliamentary debates on racing and the employment of stable staff. Access to these was sought via the House of Commons Library for the period coinciding with the settlement of the strike.

The records of the NTF and the SLA were both important potential sources of information in this regard. However, both organisations proved reluctant to participate and thus to share historical information. Moreover, the NTF had destroyed all its records of the 1970s. It would have helped to interview leading protagonists in the 1975 strike and the subsequent creation of the SLA. In 2002, an approach was made to two of the main protagonists in the creation of the SLA but they declined to be interviewed.

With regard to more general historical accounts, a range of material was also found in the biographies of trainers and jockeys and in social histories of the racing industry (Nicholson and Powell 1985; Munting 1987; Huggins 2000).

Selection issues

As Bryman and Bell (2007:554) observe, the search for relevant documents ‘can often be a frustrating and highly protracted process’. The attempt here was to read as widely as possible in order to understand the context of the strike, how it came about, what the issues were, its duration and its outcome. It was therefore a case of uncovering as much

information, from as wide a range of sources, as possible. As discussed below, there were inevitably some gaps

Data analysis

Historical material was analysed by reading and re-reading key documents to find a narrative strand and to chart the course of union involvement from the 1930s till the 1975 stable lads' strike. Notes were taken by hand and transcribed the same day. Inevitably, there was reliance on the degree to which events had been accurately reported, given that much source material was contained in contemporary newspaper reports, written from varying editorial perspectives. However, key official reports were available. The analysis is therefore supported from a wide range of sources. The data were organised around key themes to provide context and a background to the present day situation for stable staff and trainers.

Research methods used

Patmore (1998) regards newspapers as primary documents, along with union journals and minute books, all of which were researched where possible. Newspapers are of course redolent of their proprietor's views and editorial policy and this came across most strongly in the debate between leading commentators in the *Sporting Life* (predecessor to the current *Racing Post*), which was on the whole supportive of the striking stable lads. The *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* on the other hand both regarded them as a danger to the integrity and future of racing.

Inevitably there were limitations on this study, chiefly those of resources and access. The structure of the industry could have been more fully reported by seeking interviews with key actors in each industry body, rather than relying on documentary sources. The views of the betting industry have not been sought, nor have the views of race goers or horse owners. However, it is likely that these would have been used for contextual purposes, rather than for information directly relevant to the labour process.

Nevertheless, sufficient information was gathered to allow for an analysis of the racing labour process in its most immediate industry context, which is considered in the next chapter.

It is clear from the foregoing that two major gaps still exist. Firstly, there is the work of the SLA and the NTF during the period from 1976 to the present day. A further study of this part of the racing industry is recommended as it could shed useful light on the two major industry bodies most closely concerned with racing's labour process. Secondly, it did not prove possible to elicit the views and experiences of key actors involved in the 1975 strike and the creation of the SLA and the National Joint Council for Stable Staff. It is hoped that the transformation in 2007 of the SLA into the National Association for Stable Staff, with a new Chief Executive drawn from a trade union background, may facilitate fresh study of both aspects.

Phase D - Research into context March 2003/May 2004

During the research on the strike, a growing awareness developed of the number of different interested parties who had a range of roles to play and influence over the regulation and presentation of horse racing in the United Kingdom. However, it was still unclear how these fitted together and what influence, if any, they had over the labour process in racing.

Research brief

The brief now was to uncover the structure of the racing industry, in order to locate the labour process in that structure. This was intended to provide as complete a picture as possible of the industry's participants and to fill in a knowledge gap stemming from the three earlier research phases. The British Horseracing Board, National Trainers' Federation and, to an extent, the Stable Lads' Association had all been encountered directly. An awareness of other industry bodies, such as the Jockey Club, the Racehorse Owners Association and the Race Course Association, had emerged from the study of

the 1975 strike. A combination of methods was therefore used, specifically archival research and interviews with key respondents, to develop together and consolidate this existing knowledge.

Access

The archival research was conducted using a range of sources, specifically social histories of the industry; the Racing Post archive from its website; the BHB Information Desk on its website; and the websites of the various industry bodies.

Access to key respondents was achieved through prior contact with each individual or organisation in Phase A of the research. It became apparent that management information was not going to be forthcoming in large measure. Access was also required to documentary and other sources in order to extend and complete knowledge of context and history. This also proved to be more difficult. The NTF had been approached at the preliminary stages of planning the 2003/4 fieldwork but had found it difficult to offer extensive access to their members as they believed their members had been ‘reviewed to death’ since the earlier involvement Phase A in 2000⁵. They also revealed, in a telephone interview with the NTF Legal Officer⁶, that the organisation maintained no archive of papers from the National Joint Council for Stable Staff for lack of space at their offices.

Access to the SLA proved to be particularly difficult. Despite giving some general information at the initial interview⁷, the National Secretary was not to be persuaded that sufficient anonymity could be assured for him to be very forthcoming, and although future cooperation was promised, it did not materialise. The NTF had earlier suggested that the SLA might be a more reliable source of archived material on the NJCSS but, despite the SLA promising access to their archives and other material, this was not

⁵ Telephone interview with Chief Executive of NTF March 2003

⁶ Telephone interview with Legal Officer of NTF November 2003

⁷ Interview with National Secretary of SLA, March 2003

forthcoming. It is believed that this is because the National Secretary was under increasing attack from his members which intensified over the period of the fieldwork in 2003/4, resulting in his resignation in December 2006 (Wood 2006).

Selection issues

The views of key respondents from four out of the eleven industry bodies were included. These were the SLA, NTF, BHB and Weatherby's⁸. It is not claimed that these are representative of the industry as a whole but as Buchanan et al (1988:54) argue 'In the conflict between the desirable and the possible, the possible always wins'. They argue strongly that researchers must be prepared to be opportunistic in their approach and not be bound by the ideal type of research presented in the array of textbooks on research methods. This is the route taken here, bearing in mind the resource constraints of this research project.

Secondary sources

The racing industry comprises a wide range of industry bodies, either tasked with regulation of racing or representing trainers, bookmakers, racehorse owners and other similar interest groups. Chapter 3 discusses the different and sometimes competing interests of these bodies and their members and is largely descriptive, deriving from secondary sources such as industry reports and social histories, with websites being consulted for contemporary material on each body. As the documents consulted were in the public domain, it was reasonable to rely on these to paint a picture of the industry but interviews were also undertaken with five key industry respondents (Respondents D1-5) which allowed some of the data to be cross-checked (Table 2.7).

Other secondary sources were used to compile a structure for the industry and were analysed to establish key relationships and power structures. Again this was largely a

⁸ The racing industry's statistical bureau

process of reading and cross checking industry reports from the BHB and website information from industry bodies to construct the context of the racing labour process and the forces that shape it.

One major development during the course of Phase D was the publication of a new report on staffing in racing stables and stud farms, resulting from an inquiry chaired by Lord Donoughue (BHB 2004). The results of this report (otherwise known as the Donoughue Report) were considered and discussed at appropriate points in the thesis.

Interviews with key respondents

Five interviews took place (see Table 2.7). While the interviews were not confined to matters of industry structure, they did reveal useful general information about the industry and suggested areas that could be followed up in order to complete the picture. It therefore proved possible to assemble a picture of how the industry is structured and how racehorse training and its participants fit in.

Table 2.6
Interviews with key respondents

Date	Interviewee	Location
7 March 2003	BHB Council Member	BHB
14 March 2003	SLA National Secretary	SLA Offices
29 September 2003	Former Chief Executive of NTF	Weatherby's
16 October 2003	Member of NTF Council	Stables in East Sussex
9 November 2003	Legal Officer of NTF	Telephone interview to NTF Offices

The interview with the SLA National Secretary, the former Chief Executive of the NTF, and the BHB Council member were largely unstructured interviews, varying in length from an hour (BHB), two hours (SLA) and three hours (Chief Executive); the telephone interview with the NTF Legal Officer lasted for thirty minutes. The SLA interview was intended to find out more about how the organisation was funded, conducted its work,

how it was structured, and something of its history and the workings of the National Joint Council for Stable Staff.

The BHB Council member had been part of the Stable Staffs Study Group, charged with resolving the problem of staff shortages in Flat racing, which had in turn commissioned the 2000 Review of Working Practices in Flat Racing, forming Phase A of the current research (Winters 2000a). She particularly responded to questions on the structure of the industry, as did the former Chief Executive of the NTF, now working for Weatherby's. The NTF Council member was able to give details of his own activities as a trainer and also on the conduct of negotiations between the SLA and the NTF. The interview with the NTF Legal Officer was specifically aimed at uncovering what archived material was held by the NTF, particularly minutes and other documents related to the National Joint Council for Stable Staff. Unfortunately, she was only able to state that the NTF had destroyed its archives for lack of space and thus there were no documents to be viewed. A suggestion was made that an approach to the SLA might prove more fruitful but this did not prove to be the case for the reasons discussed above.

Data analysis

Each interview was recorded by hand and transcribed the same day. A wide range of qualitative data was collated from these respondents which was analysed and grouped round key themes where possible. The data is presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

Research methods used

This was a small group of respondents and did not include the current Chief Executive of the NTF who found himself too engaged with other projects to be able to assist. Nevertheless, a rich set of data was collected and it was possible to clarify a range of issues from respondents who had a long term involvement with the industry, from the perspective of employers and industry regulators in particular.

Phase E - Race course survey of stable staff October 2003/May 2004

By the time the racecourse staff survey was under consideration, a large amount of contextual and historical information had been amassed, as had key data about employment in the industry. However, it was clear that there was one further gap which needed to be addressed – the voice of workers.

Access

Access to staff, such as those involved in National Hunt racing, was a particularly important aspect of this phase, as they had not been interviewed in Phase A and it was important to elicit their experiences of the labour process. It was also important to observe and ask questions about the ‘going racing’ part of the labour process which again had not been tackled in Phase A. Finally, and most crucially, Phase E would address issues of worker voice and worker resistance. However, access was unlikely to be achieved as easily as in 2000. The National Secretary of the SLA was very helpful in this regard, suggesting the adoption of the same approach that he used when seeking to meet his members, namely attending race meetings. A letter was therefore sent to all 59 UK racecourses, seeking to visit and have access to staff in the staff canteen. In the event 20 courses were able to assist, giving an opportunity to meet staff from all over the UK, and a programme of interviews at 11 racecourses was arranged from November 2003 to June 2004 (Appendix G).

Selection issues

It was likely that the size and composition of the staff group would very much depend on factors such as the workload of respondents, their trust in the interviewer, and the presence of trainers. Total numbers of those interviewed at racecourses are found in Table 2.8, and as can be seen, four trainers also self-selected as they happened to be in the staff canteen when interviews were being conducted and showed an interest in participating in the research.

Table 2.7

Total number of racecourse respondents in 2003/4

Venue	Stable staff	Head lads/lasses	Trainers	Others	<u>TOTAL</u>
Racecourses 2003/4	36	7	4	4	51

The sample was opportunistic in nature, which is regarded by Buchanan et al (1988) as a realistic approach to the difficulties surrounding access. The nature of opportunistic sampling gives no guarantee of numbers of interviewees, or types of employee and some types of employee are under-represented, particularly women and first line supervisory staff, ie head lad/lasses.

Table 2.8 records all staff interviews conducted at each racecourse, with box drivers and Jockey Club security personnel labelled 'Other'.

Further constraints were placed on this fieldwork by the amount of time and resource available to visit racecourses throughout the United Kingdom but in a seven month period it proved possible to visit racecourses in seven regions of the country, including Wales and Scotland. The sample was as strong and as varied as it could be, capturing regionality, gender, age, grade, type of racing stables. It proved more difficult to gain reliable information about length of time in the racing industry in 2003/4, although this was recorded in staff interviews and questionnaires in 2000.

Table 2.8

Breakdown of stable and other staff respondents 2003/4

<u>Racecourse</u>	<u>Grade</u>	Men	Women	<u>Total</u>
Warwick	Stable staff	3	1	4
	Head lad/lass	1	0	1
	Other	2	0	2
Cheltenham	Stable staff	0	2	2
	Head lad/lass	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0
Taunton	Stable staff	2	2	4
	Head lad/lass	0	0	0
	Other	1	1	1
Chepstow	Stable staff	3	4	7
	Head lad/lass	0	0	0
	Other	4	0	4
Haydock	Stable staff	1	2	3
	Head lad/lass	1	0	1
	Other	0	0	0
Uttoxeter	Stable staff	1	0	1
	Head lad/lass	1	0	1
	Other	2	0	2
Perth	Stable staff	1	1	2
	Head lad/lass	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0
Hamilton Park	Stable staff	2	0	2
	Head lad/lass	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0
Market Rasen	Stable staff	1	1	2
	Head lad/lass	1	0	1
	Other			
Great Yarmouth	Stable staff	1	3	4
	Head lad/lass	0	0	0
	Other	0	0	0
Goodwood	Stable staff	2	2	4
	Head lad/lass	1	0	1
	Other	2	2	2
	TOTAL	32	19	51

Interviews with trainers

The trainers who effectively self-selected, did provide an entirely unplanned sample, albeit a small one. This had the advantage of representing personal views of trainers on the racing labour process, rather than the collective views espoused on their behalf by the National Trainers Federation.

Interviews with staff

The schedule was operationalised by arriving at the racecourse early to catch people, and booking a time for the interviewing in the period between horses arriving and being

stabled and the start of racing. This procedure enabled the researcher to gain data before potential respondents were distracted by the racing or needs of their work to tend to the horses.

The interviewer introduced herself, and explained the research project, giving assurances of anonymity to potential participants. Once trust was established, stable staff were enthusiastic respondents and it became, at times, very difficult to keep up with the views being expressed. As in Phase A, respondents were struck by the novelty of being interviewed and of their voice being heard and taken seriously. Interviews were open-ended in order to allow free expression of worker voices, although a number of issues had been compiled as guidance to the interviewer (Appendix I). It proved impractical to tape record interviews that mainly took place in the staff canteen and were often group interviews in any event, so notes were taken. Some interviews took place outside the entry to the stable yard, which was only accessible by workers equipped with a racing security pass, and proved to be a good place to catch up with staff once they had settled the horse(s) in their care for that particular race meeting. At Goodwood, for example, a beautiful May day meant the researcher needed to position herself outside and persuade staff to join her on a bench in the sunshine. Inevitably this caused much speculation, curiosity and some teasing on the part of potential respondents.

Data analysis

All interviews were recorded by hand and written up the same day. Interviews were analysed around the key themes wherever possible and data organised around these. Any recurring themes were also identified.

Research methods used

It is believed that the use of interviews in this final phase of the research enabled the collection of a richer data set from which to analyse the labour process within the racing

industry, particularly from the standpoint of employees. This ensured the inclusion of employees' voices in the study.

Ethical statement

This research was conducted in line with the ethical policy of London Metropolitan University which in particular asks researchers to address the following fourteen questions: suitability/experience of researcher; rationale and statement of value for the research; informed consent; openness and honesty; right to withdraw without penalty; confidentiality and anonymity; protection from harm; briefing and debriefing; reimbursements, payments and rewards; ethics standards of external bodies and institutions; continuous ethical monitoring; research for client organisations; modification of proposal; intended dissemination.

Suitability and experience of the researcher and rationale of the research had been dealt with during the application/registration process for a doctoral thesis by the University's ethics panel. Reimbursements, ethics standards of external bodies and research for client organisations did not apply to this research project and were not addressed. When arranging the fieldwork, respondent organisations were informed of the research aims and of who would be conducting the research. They were also told its purpose and were given the opportunity to decline to participate, which the NTF and SLA both did in part. Racecourses were written to explaining the research project and the reasons why we wanted access to stable staff at race meetings. When interviewing respondents, either at racecourses or in other organisational settings, we set out the aims of the research, the reasons for conducting the study, and the background of the researcher. Participants agreed to assist on the basis that anonymity, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw without penalty were assured. Stable staff were identified by the type of stables they worked at and general location. Individual names and names of employers were not elicited as, in the small world of racing, this could have substantially breached

an implied protection from harm by identifying individual workers. Some key respondents were prepared to be identified by job title or role and this is reflected at appropriate points.

Questionnaires were administered anonymously and it was not possible to identify individual responses with individual employees or individual workplaces. Questionnaire respondents knew the purpose of the research and were given a free choice over responding or not. Anonymity was thus ensured.

Respondents were told that they were contributing to a doctoral thesis which would not be for general publication and they were assured of continuing anonymity should any of the results be published, for example in journal articles. Confidentiality would need to be reconsidered as some respondents spoke candidly on occasion. Ethical monitoring was on going, as care had to be taken in reporting individual responses.

Given the high level of anonymity given to stable staff, it would be impossible to advise them on dissemination of research findings. However, the NTF and SLA have both shown interest in the general outcome of this research and consideration will be given to the most meaningful way of accomplishing this.

Conclusions

It may be argued that no research project is entirely quantitative or qualitative in approach and an authoritative research project may contain a subtle blend of quantitative and qualitative methods, not least to address the issue of triangulation of data (Strauss and Whitfield 1998). As discussed above, this was taken into account at all stages of the research design. For example, questionnaires were used to gather data from employers and workers in racing stables, in order to reflect the fact that the samples were geographically widespread throughout the UK and often in isolated rural locations. Interviews were used to explore the reality of working life in racing stables

and to sample the secondary workplace at the racetrack. Interviewing was chosen as the most direct way to interact with key informants and staff respondents. Documentary sources were consulted to construct the historical and contemporary contexts in which the labour process took place.

The use of multiple methods increases the credibility of qualitative research, allowing for findings to be corroborated from a number of sources and this was the case throughout the five phases of the research. With regard to the authenticity of qualitative research, Guba and Lincoln (1994) particularly point to the fairness with which the views of different social actors are represented through the research. Cumulatively the phases of the research here sought to develop a complete picture of the industry, ensuring the inclusion of the perspective of major parties. Phase E, in particular, sought to address the gap in the small firms literature concerning employee voice. Two phases of archival research provided important contextual information about the industry, in order to locate and analyse the labour process experiences of these social actors. Chapter 3 now moves to a discussion of the first set of contextual data, namely industry's structure and the forces which influence the labour process in racing stables.