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The Provincial Social Survey in Edwardian Britain¹

Social surveys reflect the anxieties of the periods in which they are carried out, and an examination of their theories and methodologies can illuminate our understanding of those periods. Seebohm Rowntree's inquiry into poverty in York, which first appeared in 1901, and Arthur Bowley's 'five towns' studies of 1915 and 1925 are particularly well known to historians, and are frequently cited as exemplars of early twentieth century developments in survey technique.² Many other surveys, however, were carried out at this time, and as Brian Harrison pointed out a quarter of a century ago, 'it is important to realize that the [Charles] Booths, the Rowntrees and the Bowleys – who at present dominate the social survey's historiography – were only the most prominent of a veritable school of Edwardian social investigators'; and more recently the scope of Edwardian social investigations examined by historians has broadened.³ This article examines three surveys: Eglantyne Jebb's *Cambridge: A Brief Study in Social Questions* (1906), C. B. Hawkins's *Norwich: A Social Study* (1910) and Violet Butler's *Social Conditions in Oxford* (1912). It also considers the series of mini-surveys, of Portsmouth, Worcester, Cambridge, Liverpool, Edinburgh, Oxford and Leeds, which appeared originally in the *Charity Organisation Review* and were subsequently published as *Social Conditions in Provincial Towns* (1912), with an introduction by Helen Bosanquet. All these authors were closely associated with organised philanthropy, mostly with the Charity Organisation Society, except for Hawkins, who was a resident and a member of the council at Toynbee Hall.⁴ Harrison has shown that '[t]he worlds of the COS and of systematic social investigation ... were not at all distinct, and Miss Butler's involvement with the COS naturally led her towards the ... general Edwardian movement for social survey work.'⁵ This article shows how contemporary concerns about the efficiency of the nation and its workforce, which helped to prompt Rowntree's survey of York, impinged upon the survey work of those engaged in charity organisation at a local level; and suggests that the conception of community life that informed the discourses of charity organisation and settlement work was attached to national concerns to produce a more integrated social survey that located social problems in their historical context and promoted local community-based solutions.

The backgrounds of the authors of the Cambridge, Oxford and Norwich surveys were similar. Jebb was born in 1876, a native of Shropshire, educated at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford and Stockwell Training College, from where she moved to Marlborough in Wiltshire and thence to Cambridge, where she was a member of the Cambridge Education Committee and the COS. She became better known after the first world war, when she and her sister, Dorothy F. Buxton, founded the Save the Children Fund, to which Jebb dedicated most of the rest of her life, dying in 1928.⁶ Butler was also educated at Oxford (the Society for Home-Students) and worked at the LMH settlement, in the foundation of which her father, Arthur Gray Butler, had been involved; and according to Harrison she 'credited the Settlement with giving her the expertise in social investigation that she needed' to carry out her survey.⁷ She was also involved with educational charities in Oxford, and with the COS, where she was active in organising the visitation of invalid children, and contributed regularly to the Society's publications. Hawkins was actively involved in settlement work, and he co-edited a summary edition of the poor law commission reports in 1909 for the *Daily News*.⁸ His survey of Norwich was one of a number of social studies that emerged from Toynbee Hall and other settlements in this period.⁹ All three surveys were of provincial towns, all of which

were experiencing social problems associated with casual unskilled employment, and all of which, like York, had experienced substantial nineteenth-century growth and change around a medieval hub. All the authors were members of urban elites who attempted to lead social reform through either legislative or philanthropic channels, or more usually through a combination of both; and all were concerned to illustrate processes of social change and to inspire readers to undertake the social work that they considered vital to the continuing progress of their towns.

Their surveys grew out of a tradition of voluntarist welfare provision and social service, which emphasised the necessity to social improvement of cooperative effort at a local level. They subscribed to a concept of citizenship that resulted from a recognition of the inability of the individual to achieve his full potential without a sense of active membership of a community and the practical benefits this conferred. This ideology was pervasive: as Vincent and Plant have argued, the social philosophy of groups as diverse as the COS, the 'New Liberal' theorists and university settlement residents were all informed by an Idealism which emphasised citizenship and participation.¹⁰ Jane Lewis has explained that the charitable efforts of the COS and the newer Guilds of Help and Councils of Social Welfare were directed towards 'social efficiency and participation' rather than 'poverty *per se*'.¹¹ The COS, the Councils and the Guilds were concerned not only with the poor, but with the community as a whole;¹² and thus the relationships between members of the community and the institutions that existed within it were the key to the COS social survey. Thus neither Jebb, Hawkins nor Butler followed Rowntree or anticipated Bowley in carrying out a house-to-house survey in order to ascertain the numbers and proportion of the population in poverty; rather they aimed to describe and assess the nature and extent of a variety of social problems and their potential solutions. Jebb described the occupational structure of Cambridge, unemployment and underemployment, housing, domestic management, temperance and thrift agencies, social clubs and other leisure activities, higher education, the juvenile labour problem and, in great detail, charitable and religious work in Cambridge and the problems it faced. Butler and Hawkins both proceeded through employment and unemployment, going on to discuss municipal and charitable provision for the problems of their towns and how they could be improved. The problem of poverty, narrowly defined, was not central to their surveys, nor was a statistical analysis, although all made some limited use of statistical material. However, Rowntree clearly had some influence on them: Harrison has pointed out that Butler was particularly impressed by his York survey, and Jebb noted that in Cambridge there must have been 'a vast amount of what is sometimes called secondary poverty'.¹³

Moreover, all three surveys were carried out in the climate of fears about 'national efficiency' that also informed Rowntree's researches. The surveys of Booth, Rowntree and Bowley have all been linked to this wider question.¹⁴ Booth's survey was initiated against a background of association between casual employment and physical and moral deterioration in the eighteen-eighties;¹⁵ and Rowntree was clearly influenced by reports of the widespread unfitness for military service of recruits during the second Boer war, accompanying his poverty survey with an anthropometric and medical examination of schoolchildren in different areas of York, an examination which he thought showed 'evidence of serious physical deterioration amongst the poorest section of the community'.¹⁶ By basing his primary poverty line on 'physical efficiency', he linked the physical efficiency of the individual to the military and economic efficiency of the nation; and quoting at some length the remarks of his father Joseph Rowntree and Arthur Sherwell in their study of *The Temperance Problem and Social Reform* he made this link explicit:

It is the more necessary to concentrate attention on this point by reason of changes that are rapidly shifting the centres of commercial activity and intensifying the forces of industrial competition ... Other nations have been moving up to our own standards of efficiency ... Within the last thirty years Germany, Belgium, and even Russia, have transformed themselves economically ... while we are also face to face with the unprecedented competition of the United States. The conditions of industrial competition are, therefore, wholly changed, and the question of efficiency - mental and physical - has become of paramount importance.¹⁷

It has been suggested that national efficiency, however inchoate as an ideology in the Edwardian period, provoked a reappraisal of the role of the state in social service and social reform.¹⁸ Rowntree remarked in the conclusion to his survey that '[t]here is surely need for a greater concentration of thought by the nation upon the well-being of its own people, for no civilisation can be sound or stable which has at its base this mass of stunted human life.'¹⁹ Standish Meacham has argued that this focus on the nation issued a particular challenge to the ethos of the settlement movement: its advocates, by emphasising the need for 'widespread centralization', 'though arguing the importance of community, redefined it in national rather than local terms, thus denying its function as a focal point for individual connection'.²⁰ This challenge also applied to the COS; and the surveys of Jebb, Hawkins and Butler all employed the same rhetoric of 'degeneration' and 'deterioration' that dominated much of the social literature of the period. They both grew out of and reinforced the national efficiency discourse. Their remit was most definitely local, but this did not entail an abandonment of national efficiency: they were all able to link national efficiency to the local community in their surveys.

This was achieved through an emphasis on industrial and social efficiency, and was explained in the context of the rural depopulation that was thought to bear a large proportion of the blame for the apparent decline of the population, whose crowding into towns and cities sapped their physical strength and moral fibre. All described their communities in terms of their historical development: Butler's book began with an examination of 'Social Conditions in Old Oxford', going back as far as the Tudor period, Jebb's with two historical chapters, and Hawkins's with a brief discussion of the history of Norwich. Even Rowntree included some historical information about York in his introductory chapter. However, Rowntree did not follow this up with any connecting material in the rest of the book; and as Patrick Geddes later argued, '[n]o modern city, and probably York less than most, is to be adequately understood, as [Rowntree] has treated it, apart from its past history, even as regards the problems of poverty and of irregularity of employment which seem so modern.'²¹ Jebb, Hawkins and Butler remained preoccupied with the historical dimension throughout their surveys; they were concerned to portray the past as a living element in their communities' present. The driving force behind this was an awareness of the fundamental changes wrought to industrial and social organisation during the previous century. New patterns of labour, in particular the creation of large casual labour markets, appeared to threaten the social stability associated with the organic communities of the pre-industrial age. For the inhabitants of Cambridge, the railway had brought with it new industries and new housing, and with them new social problems:²² slum housing, disease, an inadequate water supply and changed work patterns, which necessitated the intervention of municipal authorities.²³ Similarly, Butler pointed to the fivefold growth of Oxford's population in the nineteenth century, and she gave historical accounts of Oxford's poor relief, housing and local government.²⁴ Norwich's population had roughly tripled over the same period, and Hawkins also emphasised the importance of the changing character of the city, its industries and housing.²⁵ The ongoing

suburbanisation of the artisan labour force, for example, was turning the old city into a slum district inhabited mainly by casual labourers and their families.²⁶ Norwich, like Oxford and Cambridge, was a city whose past ran through its present. It had also experienced substantial changes in its economic and social life during the nineteenth century, with the rise of new industries, especially boot-making; and, like Cambridge, its agricultural hinterland had provided most of its immigrants, and (thus) the bulk of its large casual labour force.²⁷ Its special status as ‘the metropolis of the eastern counties’ made it a magnet for agricultural labourers driven from the land by wretched Norfolk wages and attracted by the opportunities for women’s and children’s work in the city as well as the casual labour market.²⁸ In Cambridge, Jebb thought there was something of the inevitable about the unsavoury aspects of this transition: ‘It was impossible that the new town should spring up without the danger of grave evils accompanying its growth.’²⁹

The surveys all linked irregularity of employment with physical and moral deterioration. Jebb was in no doubt that the transition to an urban society had ‘impaired the vitality of the wage-earning population’;³⁰ and both Butler and Hawkins both remarked on the industrial and social inefficiency of the casual labourer.³¹ The casualisation of the labour force compromised productivity, and although neither Jebb, Hawkins nor Butler were as explicit as Rowntree had been on the effects of industrial inefficiency on Britain’s international economic competitiveness, they emphasised the industrial implications of an irregular workforce and suggested means by which casual employment could be reduced. Even among the regularly employed, productivity could be improved through better facilities in the workplace. Hawkins, linking industrial efficiency with a healthy community life, described the improved sanitation and ventilation in boot and shoe factories in Norwich, and explained ‘the influence which such things have on the health and efficiency of workpeople. It is the very lowest price at which good work and good citizenship is to be obtained.’³² The casual worker was demoralised as well as unproductive, and as a result unable and unwilling to participate in the kind of community activities that these surveys tried to promote; and therefore better social organisation was required to help solve the casual labour problem. As Butler explained, although she had no panacea to offer, ‘[o]rganisation and forethought can at least help to ... prevent the waste of the human instruments of production’.³³ Thus one form of intervention in the labour market that was endorsed in all these surveys was the development and extension of the labour exchange, through which the necessary evil of the industrial reserve could be minimised.³⁴ By this means the aims of industrial and social efficiency could be advanced, and the labour exchange as a body was acceptable both to the individualist and collectivist wings of Edwardian social thought.³⁵

A significant contributing factor to the creation of a casual labour force was the unsystematised employment of the young; and problems of juvenile life and labour were central to the analyses offered in these surveys. Children and youths were placed at the heart of discourses of national efficiency, and other investigators in this period showed that, while the short-term effects of ‘blind-alley’ employment were of economic benefit to a boy’s family, in the longer term the system created a class of unskilled and irregular workers which threatened the nation’s future industrial efficiency. R. H. Tawney, approaching the juvenile labour problem in British towns from the national efficiency perspective, argued that ‘[i]t is impossible for a nation or a city, by employing boys solely with reference to their “immediate commercial utility”, to live on its human capital.’³⁶ He viewed young workers as capital in which the community and the nation needed to invest wisely in order to get the best from them later in life. Jebb, Hawkins and Butler followed this line of argument and employed similar language. The young received an almost disproportionate share of their attention: in

Butler's chapter on 'The City and its Working-Class Citizens', arranged on a life-cycle basis, only six pages, of a total of thirty-two, were devoted to the adult population, and Hawkins also commented on the health and physique of schoolchildren.³⁷ All explained that the paucity of technical education and the unattractiveness of existing continuation classes hampered the improvement of the labour supply.³⁸ As Hawkins argued,

It is this want of training and efficiency which seems to lie at the root of the problem; modern industry, in its anxiety to secure some cheap labour, destroys the potential efficiency of those who must some day recruit the ranks of adult labour. The unemployed and the unemployable are manufactured in the first stages of life. Individual employers cannot perhaps help themselves very much, though they can do something, and they have to bear their share with the rest of the community in the ultimate loss of productive power which this waste involves.³⁹

More helpful than the actions of employers, however, was the local community and the local authority. For Butler, the Scouts and the Boys' Brigade, themselves seen as stimulants to future national efficiency,⁴⁰ could turn errand-boys from poor homes into 'good unskilled labourers' by inculcating industriousness and discipline, and prevent the drift into blind-alley employment.⁴¹ Jebb, who noted the ill effects of domestic service and shop work on the physique of girls, argued that more could be done by clubs 'to impart to boys and girls greater physical and intellectual efficiency'.⁴² Indeed, such social activities could overcome many of the problems associated with casual employment: athletic clubs in Cambridge, for example, led her 'to question ... whether physical deterioration is the inevitable accompaniment of town life'.⁴³ The youth of the nation gave these historically-minded surveys their future direction, and cemented the role of the community in shaping its collective future.

Furthermore, the belief that urbanisation had spawned a deteriorating casual labour force was reinforced by an awareness that the rapid changes of the previous century had left the administrative and social institutions of British towns trailing in their wake, unable to adapt quickly enough to new circumstances. Jebb, for example, showed that the transition to urban life had created huge social problems and thrust new social responsibilities onto urban institutions,⁴⁴ and her account of Cambridge considered the responses of administrative and philanthropic bodies to this change. The industrial revolution had shattered the old rural social organisation, which necessitated the experimental charitable efforts made in the new urban environment of the mid-nineteenth century. After a long experience of town life, the classes with the time and money to devote to charitable endeavour had, Jebb asserted, acquired a better sense of their responsibilities towards the working classes, and had begun to understand the causes of urban poverty.⁴⁵ The distribution of charity had become more complex:

In old days, under the feudalistic regime, charity could undoubtedly do its work more simply. The mass of the poor were collected into villages under some roughly benevolent despot, whose lady too, often busied herself with the friendly oversight of village affairs. Under the different circumstances of the times the plan may have worked tolerably well, and the help may have been effective in a way it cannot be now, with our system of town life...⁴⁶

Jebb, Hawkins and Butler sought to reknit a social fabric that had been torn by an insensitive and profit-driven process of industrialisation; and their strategies were geared towards the reaffirmation of older community values in a new urban setting. Therefore, the rhetoric of

citizenship was employed regularly in the surveys, which are characterised by the repeated use of terms like ‘corporate life’, ‘character and citizenship’, ‘civic responsibility’, ‘social progress’, ‘the necessity for corporate action’, ‘this new sense of citizenship’ and ‘common effort for the common good’.⁴⁷ A collectivist concept of the urban community was central to their agenda for social advance.

In practical terms, ‘this new sense of citizenship’ meant a greater and more sensitive involvement by all classes and all available institutions in the work of alleviation and prevention of distress and in the wider and more ambitious project of creating a more active and sustained corporate life among the citizenry. Building social bridges between elites and masses was a fundamental tenet of the social philosophy of both the COS and the settlement movement: the community was to be reintegrated through the re-establishment of neighbourly contacts between members of different social strata within the urban unit, and Jebb, Butler and Hawkins all expounded an ethos of careful and patient visiting of working-class homes, taking pains to overcome potential class animosities and resentments.⁴⁸ Again, the historical perspective of the investigations was significant in this context: home visitation had been developed as a strategy in response to the perceived dangers of social segregation in the new urban settings of the first half of the nineteenth century;⁴⁹ and the COS aimed at a restoration of the social relationships associated with pre-enclosure rurality. As Stedman Jones has explained, with reference to London, through new forms of ‘guidance’ like home visitation ‘the capital city would be turned into a gigantic village, and its poor would be led back to manliness and independence under the firm but benevolent aegis of a new urban squirearchy’.⁵⁰ There was, for Stedman Jones, an agenda of social control behind this voluntarist impulse, and we should not underestimate the perceived urgency of the inculcation of the virtues of thrift and self-help; but there was also a community-based impetus behind the development of visitation strategies. Only through personal contacts, it was argued, whether made through visitation or other forms of social involvement, could the reforming elite encourage the working classes to rediscover their sense of participatory citizenship and play their full role in the new municipal democracies. The element of personal and educative contact between the urban elites who produced these surveys and the working-class populations they investigated was central to the concern of the period to reunite a divided society in which sectional interests posed a threat to the social evolution of urban communities.

This interest in evolutionary processes and community-based social reform was characteristic of a period in which society was viewed by diverse groups in terms of a biological organism. Eileen Yeo has remarked on the diffusion of ‘body metaphor’ in late Victorian and Edwardian social science. National efficiency emphasised the health of the national body and the efficiency of the workforce; and the ‘New Liberal’ and Fabian version of the social body emphasised the vitality of community life and the role of specialist and professionalised groups in organising future social growth.⁵¹ Thus, in this vision, as Yeo shows, ‘the casual poor ... became casualties of social disease like destitution or unemployment ... the pathology was no longer located in individual inadequacy but in social processes’.⁵² Yeo refers here mainly to the Fabians, but this conception of the social body also affected the social surveys considered here. Although neither Butler, Jebb nor Hawkins wrote the individual out of their analyses, they wrote the history of their communities as an organic whole, Butler portraying casual labour, for example, as a ‘social disease’.⁵³ The body here was not the nation, but the town or city: Hawkins saw Norwich as ‘a living organised thing’.⁵⁴ In this evolutionary perspective on the social life of the town, then, these authors brought to their surveys a developmental scheme of analysis which drew on the

precepts of the 'New Liberalism' and Fabian social thought; but this was achieved without abandoning the principles of voluntary social service. Their surveys can be viewed as applications of the COS case-work methods of inquiry to a social body: case-work involved the detailed investigation of each individual and all the inter-connected facts that might conceivably apply to the case, and this approach, as far as possible, was taken in these surveys, applied to a community rather than to an individual. Each community, like each individual, was unique. The concept of the community and the reciprocal duties of the individuals who made it up, although vague, enabled these surveys to offer an agenda for social change which emphasised the role of local social and political institutions.

The solutions they offered, as a result, were generally expressed in the form of exhortations either to local authorities or to local voluntary bodies, or more frequently to both, to work together or intervene in some way to attack the structural problems encountered at a local level. They concentrated on the role of local authorities in the alleviation of distress and the social advancement of the community, and on the effectiveness and future potential of organised philanthropic enterprises. Official inspection by sanitary authorities and medical officers of health was recognised as a necessary feature of modern urban government, and Butler and Hawkins described in some detail the work of the different council committees in Oxford and Norwich.⁵⁵ Both listed recent municipal expenditure;⁵⁶ and Butler and Jebb both showed how sanitary and other conditions had improved following the progressive municipal democratisation of the previous century.⁵⁷ For example, the granting of County Borough status to Oxford in the reforms of the eighteen-eighties had enabled the various and expanding administrative functions of local government to be brought under the control of one body, with consequent improvements in efficiency.⁵⁸ Although COS spokesmen disapproved of 'municipalisation',⁵⁹ the Society did not hold back from cooperation with public bodies, or even withhold its support for state measures, when it believed its own objectives would be advanced or administrative efficiency would be improved;⁶⁰ and the social surveys often urged local authorities on to greater efforts and commended what had already been achieved.⁶¹ All this took place in a climate of efficiency, and it was through organisation that administrative efficiency – and hence the industrial and social efficiency of the population – could be advanced.

Administrative efficiency went hand-in-hand with efficiency in charitable provision; and these writers were steeped in a conception of the socially unifying power of organised charity in urban communities. Jebb, Butler and Hawkins also described in some detail the effectiveness or otherwise of organised social work. The complexity of the system of urban charity is evident from the wide range of organisations discussed: in Butler's section on children and youths, for example, she mentioned the NSPCC, the Penny Soup Kitchen, the Police Aided Association for Clothing Poor Children, the Band of Hope, the Children's Co-operative Guild, the Girls' Friendly Society, the 'Happy Evenings Association', the Boys' Brigade, the Scouts, volunteer swimming classes, Sunday Bible classes and summer camps;⁶² and referred in her chapter on temperance to seven different temperance organisations as well as other bodies which promoted temperance as a part of their work.⁶³ The long-standing concern of the COS and Guilds of Help with the evils of 'overlapping' charitable assistance is evident in all three surveys:⁶⁴ all emphasised the need for better coordination of public and private provision of relief and amenities, as these bodies were to be the leaders of necessary social change in urban communities.⁶⁵ Improved organisation would avoid both administrative inefficiency and the exploitation of the system by unscrupulous and fraudulent claimants on the public and philanthropic purse, and would better direct the hoped-for upsurge in active citizenship. Hawkins suggested the formation of a Representative Social

Council in Norwich, on which committees of the council, guardians, churches, chapels, charities and other groups would be represented: 'There are many ways in which official action is strengthened by association with voluntary enterprise: it lessens the danger of divided responsibility, and it makes for healthy citizenship.'⁶⁶

Not only were local government and private charity potentially useful agents of social change, but they were also institutions – the former elected from an increasingly broad franchise – in which the working classes themselves could, sometimes did, and in the opinion of these authors more frequently should, participate. Self-government would strengthen the improved and inclusive community. Thus Jebb was concerned to involve the respectable members of the Cambridge working classes in the administration of relief. This stemmed partly from a belief that this class would be more rigorous in applying the principles of 1834 and 1869,⁶⁷ but there was also, as Harrison has pointed out, a social impetus behind such prescriptions: the artisan classes, it was hoped, would act 'as a leaven for working-class districts', raising the social status of their working-class neighbours.⁶⁸ Involvement in social activities and local government was not to be restricted to the artisan classes – all sectors of the community had a part to play in the reawakening of community life – but the skilled workers were viewed as the natural leaders of the working classes. Jebb envisaged a greater role for them in other public projects, in particular the self-administration of working men's clubs: 'the working classes must shape their own institutions in their own way if they are to meet their own needs ... and to develop [*sic*] their powers of government'.⁶⁹ Similarly, Butler pointed to the opportunities available to the skilled worker to engage in social work, while regretting that few as yet took an active managerial role in such institutions.⁷⁰ Hawkins expressed disappointment that the athletics facilities at Colman's Carrow Works were managed not by the workers themselves but by the firm, who played 'the part of a benevolent despot',⁷¹ and he hoped for a better-managed and better-used public library as a 'centre of organised study',⁷² which could give the workers of Norwich greater self-knowledge. Of all the investigators, however, Jebb was the most pressing on this point: she expressed a wish to involve working men in social inquiry itself, 'making a serious study of problems which so vitally concern the welfare of their class'.⁷³ As matters stood, the urban working classes, and many of the community's natural leaders, failed to participate in community activities, to the detriment of the lives of the urban industrial poor, who were in need of preparation for 'the wider duties of citizens' life in the world outside'.⁷⁴ In espousing a participatory ideal, these investigators sought to restore the damaged individual to a community outside which he could not fully realise his potential.

All the above applies in equal measure to the series of seven mini-surveys collected by Helen Bosanquet. Each survey (one of which was a briefer version of Butler's own Oxford study) began with a historical introduction, and each moved on to discuss local social problems, often the unsystematised nature of the labour market, and the effectiveness or otherwise of municipal and charitable efforts at alleviating them. Frederick D'Aeth, for example, in his survey of Liverpool, itself one of the largest centres of irregular employment, remarked on the social and industrial inefficiency of casual labour, and suggested the improvement of the labour exchanges as a remedy.⁷⁵ Similarly, Clara Dorothea Rackham, in her survey of Cambridge, hoped that labour exchanges would decasualise the labour market;⁷⁶ in Edinburgh Helen Kerr noted that the exodus of the respectable artisan class to the suburbs had turned the Old Town into 'rookeries' inhabited by the 'slum-dweller and the casual labourer';⁷⁷ and E. H. Kelly described the many boys in Portsmouth who between leaving school and entering the armed services aged fifteen or sixteen, 'are obliged ... to spend two of the most important years of their lives in casual work, as newsboys or errand

boys', with poor consequences for their future industrial efficiency.⁷⁸ The high level of military employment was specific to Portsmouth, and like Jebb, Butler and Hawkins, these authors tended to emphasise the individuality of their towns: thus, for Kerr, Edinburgh's 'chief characteristic is her uniqueness'; and Margaret Tree thought that Worcester's inhabitants were peculiarly affected by the dampness of the local climate.⁷⁹ The historical development of each town was important: thus the inhabitants of Leeds (and other industrial towns in the north), according to L. V. Shairp, suffered from having 'nothing in the past to remember ... no personal links with the romance of history; no steadying and softening tradition'.⁸⁰ Leeds had grown quickly without planned physical and social development, and whereas Cambridge, Oxford and Norwich had all, apparently, lost a former civic spirit that was only just beginning to be rediscovered, the civic spirit of Leeds had to be newly created.

Central to all seven surveys was the provincialism of the towns studied and the possibility of creating or re-creating a new spirit of citizenship. This would lessen the problem of 'overlapping' charity and assistance, and would make the provision of relief and amenities more efficient. Rackham urged Cambridge to follow other municipal authorities in taking control of trams, gas and water, but praised the 'admirable' system of health visiting which had contributed to a decreasing infant mortality rate.⁸¹ Similarly, in Leeds, Shairp was glad to note that '[v]oluntary effort co-operates closely with the municipality in the war against infant mortality', following the Children Act (1908);⁸² and Kelly described the workings of the Education (Provision of Meals) Act (1906) in Portsmouth, where cooperation between the local authority and the National Union of Women Workers was so successful that three of the volunteers had been co-opted to the Council's Canteen Committee.⁸³ Not all groups were able to participate in community life: thus D'Aeth found the Irish in Liverpool lacking in 'the sense of corporate citizenship which should be essential characteristics of the town dweller',⁸⁴ but he failed to suggest any strategy by which they might be helped to attain this sense. However, generally it was to a reawakening of local pride that these investigators looked to as the driving force behind social change. Bosanquet argued that the word 'provincial', with its negative associations, should be recaptured as a 'positive and acceptable' term, reflecting the fact that each town was a seat of government and each had 'certain ideals of social and civic life towards which both official and voluntary action are striving'.⁸⁵

This was also the key feature of Jebb's, Butler's and Hawkins's surveys: they were based on local circumstances and their conclusions were intended to apply locally. The historical approach emphasised the specificity of each community and its distinctive institutions and traditions. None attempted, like Rowntree, to suggest that their own scene of operations was 'typical': their surveys were surveys of Cambridge, Norwich or Oxford, not attempted extrapolations to 'town life' from the experience of one community. Rowntree's somewhat dubious assertions about the typicality of York were made in an attempt to give his survey a national applicability. However, as Bowley discovered when his surveys showed that the proportion of the population in primary poverty varied greatly between urban centres, no one town could necessarily be taken as representative or typical. Each town had its own government, its own systems of charitable provision, and its own distinctive history of industrial and residential development. As Bosanquet explained, 'this individuality of the towns affects the people of the towns; they are not, of course, all alike, but the characteristic life which they share in common develops a characteristic mode of thought and action and a strong civic patriotism'.⁸⁶ The 'civic patriotism' of the town was reflected, for example, in the Guilds of Help: as Keith Laybourn has shown, for the Guilds, '[c]ivic betterment by the community was the desire and intense localism was the result.'⁸⁷ The COS itself was

organised on local lines, and the guiding principles and practices of the metropolitan Society were not necessarily shared by the provincial bodies.⁸⁸ Therefore, the potential solutions to the problems uncovered by the surveys of Jebb, Butler and Hawkins, which they discussed in as much detail as the problems themselves, were to be primarily local. This was the case even where national efficiency was a motivating factor: for example, the importance of technical and other education, and other services for the child and the adolescent, lay in the fact that they were locally provided; and thus although national efficiency was an important concern, the spurs to its promotion came from the local community.

The most forceful statement of the link between national efficiency and community-based social service was in Jebb's conclusion to her survey of Cambridge. She contextualised the 'Principles of Social Service' within a longer historical frame, relating her prescriptions to the comparisons then commonly drawn between Britain's relative economic decline and the decline of historical civilisations:

The continued progress or decadence of the nation seems bound up with this question. Hitherto in the history of nations periods of material prosperity have been followed by periods of decadence ... the cause of national decadence is surely often to be found in the previous prosperity which sapped the national vigour. Strength comes from struggle. In primitive civilisation the struggle is forced upon men by poverty. As a nation's wealth accumulates this is less and less the case. A growing proportion of citizens are exempted from the necessity of living healthy and working hard. This is the case in England.⁸⁹

Inefficiency was a social disease that affected not only the poor, among whom 'a life honourable, independent, virile' needed to be built with the help of middle-class philanthropic effort, but also the very classes who should be leading the revival of efficient community life. Thus, Jebb explained,

Those ... who are exempted from the necessity of struggling for themselves must surely undertake a voluntary struggle for the sake of others, if they are not to deteriorate through the possession of wealth ... Service is the safeguard of the wealthy, and when we consider what a large proportion of the people have been affected by the increase of wealth, we see how important it is that the principle of service should be engrafted upon the national life if the nation is not to decline.⁹⁰

Thus although the challenges of national efficiency appeared to many to necessitate national solutions to widespread social problems, charity organisation and social service could be allied with it through the encouragement of industrial and social efficiency at a local level; and the community itself needed to become efficient as well as its individual members.

This aim was recognised in the local reception that the surveys received. Most reviews in the local press endorsed the authors' proposals for better organisation of social welfare provision and for combating the problems of unskilled labour and 'blind-alley' employment. The *Cambridge Independent*, seizing on Jebb's calculation that only one per cent of Cambridge's population was engaged in any kind of organised social work and endorsing her call for greater social involvement, pointed in particular to the 'Bradford system' (the Guild of Help) and the importance of boys' and girls' clubs to the solution of the juvenile labour problem.⁹¹ The *Oxford Times*, reviewing Butler's survey, also remarked on the unskilled labour problem, although it suggested few practical remedies.⁹² Although

Hawkins's survey received less notice in the local press, the city of Norwich was addressing many of the issues he raised. In April 1910 William Beveridge spoke at a conference on labour exchanges at the Technical Institute; and the Dean of Norwich, Russell Wakefield, who wrote the introduction to Hawkins's book, interested himself in labour exchanges and the employment of the young. Wakefield called the child a 'great national asset', and suggested the systematic registration of school-leavers with a Labour Exchange Juvenile Employment Advisory Committee, which would in turn appoint 'After-Care Committees' to deal personally with them.⁹³ Both Jebb and Hawkins had suggested the amalgamation of their cities' diverse charities under a central board; and 1910 saw the passage of the Norwich Charities (No. 2) Bill, which aimed to consolidate the haphazard and highly localised parochial charities into a city-wide system.⁹⁴ Soon after Jebb's book was published, a new reading room, under the auspices of the Cambridge Free Library, was opened in the New Town district, following similar ventures in Mill Road, Castle End and East Road – the very districts Jebb singled out as exemplars of the unregulated nineteenth-century growth of the town – and both the Mayor and Alderman Campkin, in their speeches at the opening ceremony, stressed the importance of library provision to the youth of Cambridge, and hence 'to the advantage of the nation generally'.⁹⁵ Where Rowntree's survey seemed to chime harmoniously with concerns over physical efficiency prompted by military failure and international economic competition, Jebb's, Hawkins's and Butler's studies responded to a climate of opinion in which national concerns influenced local circumstances but in which local endeavour was viewed as a vital contributor to efficiency – national, industrial and social.

These surveys, then, grew out of a voluntarist and philanthropic tradition of social welfare provision, and reflected the growing importance of local government in the period, together with concerns about industrial productivity and national vigour. They brought the principles of charity organisation and neighbourly contacts to the Edwardian social survey. Unlike Rowntree and Bowley, these investigators did not aim at quantifying the social phenomena they observed; rather they were concerned to describe their communities and the institutions that formed them in a more relational and synoptic way. They revealed a cultural poverty that transcended the economic condition of the individual or the household, and was experienced collectively as well as individually, and thus they focused on the community as an organic whole rather than a statistical abstraction of the individuals who formed it. Having said this, they had much in common with the distributional poverty surveys, and should be regarded as part of a wider and developing interest in the problems of urban working-class life in the period. The background of all the authors in practical social work gave them two things: firstly, a series of contacts from whom crucial information for their surveys could be obtained, and, secondly, a desire to fashion an agenda for social inclusion that sought to reintegrate their splintered communities through localised strategies based on participation and citizenship. The social survey, then, for these investigators, was intended as an attempt to show a community the position at which it had arrived in its historical development, and the possible outlines of its future progress.

¹ I am grateful to Anne Crowther and to an anonymous referee for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

² B. Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty A Study of Town Life* (1902 [1st. ed. 1901]); A. L. Bowley & A. R. Burnett-Hurst, *Livelihood and Poverty: A Study in the Economic Conditions of Working-Class Households in Northampton, Warrington, Stanley and Reading* (1915) (the fifth town, Bolton, was investigated separately); A. L. Bowley & M. H. Hogg, *Has Poverty Diminished? A Sequel to Livelihood and Poverty* (1925). For a recent example of Rowntree historiography, see J. Bradshaw & R. Sainsbury (eds.), *Getting the Measure of Poverty: The Early Legacy of Seebohm Rowntree* (Bristol, forthcoming).

³ Brian Harrison, 'Miss Butler's Oxford Survey', in A. H. Halsey (ed.), *Traditions of Social Policy: Essays in Honour of Violet Butler* (Oxford, 1976), p. 27. For examples of other historical analyses of social investigations, see Ross McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain 1880-1950* (Oxford, 1990), ch. 6; M. Loane, *The Queen's Poor: Life as They Find It in Town and Country* (1998 [1st. ed. 1905]), introduction by Susan Cohen and Clive Fleay.

⁴ Standish Meacham, *Toynbee Hall and Social Reform 1880-1914: The Search for Community* (New Haven, Connecticut, 1987), p. 125.

⁵ Harrison, p. 60.

⁶ See Edward Fuller, *She Championed Children: The Story of Eglantyne Jebb* (1956 [1st. ed. 1953]), for an account of Jebb's life.

⁷ Harrison, p. 46.

⁸ C. B. Hawkins & J. S. Nicholson, *Poor Law Commission: What It Proposes: Full Summary of Both Reports* (1909).

⁹ See for example E. J. Urwick (ed.), *Studies of Boy Life in Our Cities* (1904); E. J. Howarth and Mona Wilson, *West Ham: A Study in Social and Industrial Questions* (1907) (carried out under the auspices of the Outer London Inquiry Committee, which involved many prominent settlement workers including William Beveridge) and T. R. Marr, *Housing Conditions in Manchester and Salford* (1904). Marr was joint warden of the Ancoats settlement and secretary of the Manchester Citizens' Association.

¹⁰ A. W. Vincent & Raymond Plant, *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship: The Life and Thought of the British Idealists* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 117-20, 140.

¹¹ Jane Lewis, *The Voluntary Sector, the State and Social Work in Britain: The Charity Organisation Society/Family Welfare Association Since 1869* (Aldershot, 1995), p. 26.

¹² Michael J. Moore, 'Social Work and Social Welfare: The Organization of Philanthropic Resources in Britain 1900-1914', *Journal of British Studies*, xvi (1977), p. 101.

¹³ Harrison, p. 61; Eglantyne Jebb, *Cambridge: A Brief Study in Social Questions* (1906), p. 32.

¹⁴ Asa Briggs, 'The Welfare State in Historical Perspective', in Briggs, *The Collected Essays of Asa Briggs* (3 vols., Brighton, 1985), ii. 201-5; *Social Thought and Social Action: A Study of the Work of Seebohm Rowntree* (1961); E. P. Hennock, 'The Measurement of Urban Poverty: From the Metropolis to the Nation 1880-1920', *Economic History Review*, 2nd. ser., xl (1987), pp. 214-15; Karel Williams, *From Pauperism to Poverty* (1981), pp. 348-50; Eileen Yeo, *The Contest for Social Science: Relations and Representations of Gender and Class* (1996), pp. 223-9; G. R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought 1899-1914* (1990 [1st. ed. Oxford, 1971]), pp. 64-5.

¹⁵ Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society* (Harmondsworth, 1984 [1st. ed. Oxford, 1971]), chs. 6, 16.

¹⁶ Rowntree, pp. 214, 216-21.

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- ¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 220-1, quoting Joseph Rowntree & Arthur Sherwell, *The Temperance Problem and Social Reform* (1899), p. 48.
- ¹⁸ See for example Searle; Bernard Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform: English Social-Imperial Thought, 1895-1914* (1960); Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870-1914* (Harmondsworth, 1994 [1st. ed. Oxford, 1993]), pp. 206, 216-17.
- ¹⁹ Rowntree, p. 304.
- ²⁰ Meacham, p. 88.
- ²¹ Patrick Geddes, *Cities in Evolution: An Introduction to the Town Planning Movement and to the Study of Civics* (1968 [1st. ed. 1915]), p. 341.
- ²² Jebb, pp. 1-11.
- ²³ Ibid., pp. 19-22.
- ²⁴ C. V. Butler, *Social Conditions in Oxford* (1912), pp. 10, 20-9, 98-104, 142-4.
- ²⁵ C. B. Hawkins, *Norwich: A Social Study* (1910), pp. 5, 12, 22-4, 141, 159, and *passim*.
- ²⁶ Ibid., pp. 74-6.
- ²⁷ Ibid., chs. 1, 2; Jebb, pp. 13-14.
- ²⁸ Hawkins, pp. 10, 65.
- ²⁹ Jebb, p. 14.
- ³⁰ Ibid., p. 82.
- ³¹ Hawkins, pp. 63-72, 173-4; Butler, pp. 244-5, and pp. 65-8, 79 for women's work.
- ³² Hawkins, p. 30.
- ³³ Butler, p. 93.
- ³⁴ Ibid., p. 91; Jebb, pp. 73-4, 80; Hawkins, pp. 179-83.
- ³⁵ W. H. Beveridge, *Unemployment: A Problem of Industry* (1910 [1st. ed. 1909]), pp. 197-209. See also Williams, pp. 361-2; Jose Harris, *Unemployment and Politics: A Study in English Social Policy 1886-1914* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 278-95.
- ³⁶ R. H. Tawney, 'The Economics of Boy Labour', in J. H. Whitehouse (ed.), *Problems of Boy Life* (1912), p. 50.
- ³⁷ Butler, ch. 8; Hawkins, pp. 80-7.
- ³⁸ Hawkins, pp. 118-27, 193-207; Butler, pp. 54-6, 175-8; Beveridge, pp. 125-31; Jebb, pp. 76-8.
- ³⁹ Hawkins, p. 207.
- ⁴⁰ Searle, pp. 66-7; Joseph Bristow, *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man's World* (1991).
- ⁴¹ Butler, pp. 53-5. Original emphasis.
- ⁴² Jebb, pp. 78, 175.
- ⁴³ Ibid., p. 138.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 1-2.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 184-5. See Butler, pp. 107-8, 148-50.
- ⁴⁶ Jebb, pp. 197-8.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 28, 32, 257; Hawkins, pp. 297, 301; Butler, pp. 3, 228.
- ⁴⁸ Hawkins, pp. 90-4, 293; Butler, pp. 156-8; Jebb, pp. 207-22, 234-42.
- ⁴⁹ Anne Summers, 'A Home from Home – Women's Philanthropic Work in the Nineteenth Century', in Sandra Burman (ed.), *Fit Work for Women* (1979), pp. 35-7; Frank Proschaska, *The Voluntary Impulse: Philanthropy in Modern Britain* (1988), pp. 25-7, 34-58.
- ⁵⁰ Jones, p. 261; partly quoted in Harrison, p. 53.
- ⁵¹ Yeo, ch. 7.
- ⁵² Ibid., p. 201.
- ⁵³ Butler, p. 93.
- ⁵⁴ Hawkins, p. 287.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 107-18; Butler, pp. 146ff.

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- ⁵⁶ Butler, pp. 154-5; Hawkins, pp. 108ff.
- ⁵⁷ Butler, pp. 142-5; Jebb, pp. 18-29.
- ⁵⁸ Butler, p. 145.
- ⁵⁹ Lewis, p. 71.
- ⁶⁰ Helen Bosanquet, *Social Work in London 1896-1912: A History of the Charity Organisation Society* (1914), pp. 89-91, 95-7; A. W. Vincent, 'The Poor Law Reports of 1909 and the Social Theory of the Charity Organisation Society', *Victorian Studies*, xxvii (1984), pp. 343-63; Alan Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England* (1999), pp. 104-5; Jose Harris, 'The Webbs, the Charity Organisation Society and the Ratan Tata Foundation: Social Policy from the Perspective of 1912', in Martin Bulmer, Jane Lewis & David Piachaud (eds.), *The Goals of Social Policy* (1989).
- ⁶¹ Jebb, pp. 72-8; C. D. Rackham, 'Cambridge', in Helen Bosanquet (ed.), *Social Conditions in Provincial Towns* (1912), p. 31; Hawkins, pp. 125-7.
- ⁶² Butler, pp. 172-3.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 222-4.
- ⁶⁴ Bosanquet, *Social Work*, pp. 70-1 and *passim*; Lewis, *passim*; Keith Laybourn, 'The Guild of Help and the Community Response to Poverty 1904-c.1914', in Laybourn (ed.), *Social Conditions, Status and Community 1860-c.1920* (Stroud, 1997), pp. 15-17.
- ⁶⁵ Hawkins, ch. 10; Butler, pp. 174, 295, ch. 12; Jebb, pp. 193-6 and *passim*.
- ⁶⁶ Hawkins, p. 261.
- ⁶⁷ E. P. Hennock, 'Poverty and Social Theory: The Experience of the 1880s', *Social History*, i (1976), pp. 78-9; J. M. Keynes (ed.), *Official Papers by Alfred Marshall* (1926), evidence to the Royal Commission on the Aged Poor, pp. 210, 231-4, 245-6 and *passim*.
- ⁶⁸ Harrison, pp. 51-2.
- ⁶⁹ Jebb, p. 132.
- ⁷⁰ Butler, pp. 185-6.
- ⁷¹ Hawkins, p. 305.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 307.
- ⁷³ Jebb, pp. 80-1.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 134-6.
- ⁷⁵ Frederick D'Aeth, 'Liverpool', in Bosanquet, *Social Conditions*, pp. 40-2.
- ⁷⁶ Rackham, pp. 29-30.
- ⁷⁷ Helen Kerr, 'Edinburgh', in Bosanquet, *Social Conditions*, p. 53.
- ⁷⁸ E. H. Kelly, 'Portsmouth', in Bosanquet, *Social Conditions*, p. 9.
- ⁷⁹ Kerr, p. 50; Margaret C. Tree, 'Worcester', in Bosanquet, *Social Conditions*, p. 21.
- ⁸⁰ L. V. Shairp, 'Leeds', in Bosanquet, *Social Conditions*, p. 79.
- ⁸¹ Rackham, pp. 30-1.
- ⁸² Shairp, pp. 75-6.
- ⁸³ Kelly, p. 10.
- ⁸⁴ D'Aeth, p. 38.
- ⁸⁵ Bosanquet, *Social Conditions*, pp. ii-iii.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. ii.
- ⁸⁷ Laybourn, p. 13.
- ⁸⁸ Bosanquet, *Social Work*, pp. 392ff; Kidd, pp. 99-100; Proschaska, pp. 25-6.
- ⁸⁹ Jebb, pp. 268-9.
- ⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 269-70.
- ⁹¹ *Cambridge Independent Press*, 11 Jan. 1907, p. 4.
- ⁹² *Oxford Times*, 17 Aug. 1912, p. 12.

⁹³ *Norwich Mercury*, 25 June 1910, p. 6; *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 9 Apr. 1901, p. 10; 24 Dec. 1910, pp. 4, 5.

⁹⁴ *People's Weekly Journal*, 16 July 1910, p. 5.

⁹⁵ *Cambridge Independent Press*, 4 Jan. 1907, p. 7; Jebb, pp. 5-11.