

“OLD HABITS PERSIST”  
CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN BLACK COUNTRY COMMUNITIES:  
PENSNETT, SEDGLEY AND TIPTON, 1945-c.1970

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## Abstract

This thesis examines continuity and change in the three Black Country localities of Pensnett, Tipton and Sedgley between 1945 and c1970. The dominant historiography of the period suggests that the prosperity of post-war British society, the safety-net of state welfare provision and unprecedented levels of consumer spending mostly eradicated the inter-war behaviour patterns of individuals, families and communities. Utilising the oral testimony of sixty residents from the three localities, and supplemented by a range of primary sources, the thesis demonstrates that growing affluence impacted only marginally upon the customary social mores of the lower-middle and working-class inhabitants. Whilst aspirations to new housing and increased consumption affected perceptions of status and social standing, the economic strategies of the pre-war period prevailed. The thesis evaluates the effect of affluence upon earning, spending and saving. It questions assumptions that the support of kinship networks, matrilocality and community cohesion disappeared as slums were replaced with new housing estates. It demonstrates that the Welfare State impacted little upon attitudes to income and employment and that the wages derived from formal employment were augmented by informal work, penny-capitalist ventures and illicit activities. It shows that despite embracing the consumer society, families within these localities adhered to traditional methods of shopping and the financing of consumption. The thesis challenges the work of a range of historians who have emphasised change over continuity in characterisations of British society in the post-war period and endorses Hoggart's claims that despite post-war innovations "old habits persist".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hoggart, R., *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life with special reference to publications and entertainment*, Chatto and Windus, 1957.

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## INTRODUCTION

Given the protective safeguard of post-war state benefits, the economic recovery of the 1950s, and the unprecedented growth of consumer spending, which, according to some commentators, contributed to the blurring of class barriers,<sup>1</sup> it seems likely that the traditional behaviour patterns of the lower-middle and working classes would modify with their growing prosperity. In light of increasing affluence and security, this thesis will examine three areas of the Black Country between 1945 and the early 1970s: Tipton, Sedgley and Pensnett. Previous tentative research in Tipton suggested that inhabitants of this area continued to utilise traditional strategies for the alleviation of poverty into the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> They eschewed state assistance, instead employing the support of neighbourhood networks, augmenting formal paid work with a range of penny-capitalist ventures,<sup>3</sup> in addition to ‘spare time’ work and petty crime.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence of these revelations, this thesis evaluates the impact of post-war prosperity upon earning, spending and saving in the Black Country. Essentially, the research will assess the extent of continuity and change in working and lower middle-class communities, in light of the comparative deprivation and poverty of the inter-war period.

There appears to be ample justification for a study of this kind. Sociologists and historians have investigated and examined the entire gamut of responses to poverty from childhood to old age.<sup>5</sup> However, utilising oral interviews to provide a detailed examination of income and expenditure in the immediate post-war period will contribute to the existing body of knowledge, and enhance understanding of the issues confronting families and communities following the introduction of state-funded

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<sup>1</sup> Goldthorpe, J. H., D. Lockwood, F. Bechhofer and J. Platt, *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971.

<sup>2</sup> Watkiss, R., ‘‘Old Habits...?’ An examination of Working-Class Survival Strategies in Tipton, 1945-1970’, (University of Wolverhampton, MA dissertation, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Benson, J., *The Penny Capitalists: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Entrepreneurs*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1983.

<sup>4</sup> Watkiss, ‘Working-Class Survival Strategies’.

<sup>5</sup> See for example Alcock, P., *Social Policy in Britain*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008; Birch, R., *The Shaping of the Welfare State*, Harlow: Longman, 1974; George, V., and I. Howards, *Poverty Amidst Affluence: Britain and the United States*, Surry: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1991; Glennister, H., and J. Midgley, eds., *The Radical Right and The Welfare State*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991; Gordon, D., R. Levitas and C. Pantazis (eds.), *Policy and Social Exclusion in Britain: The Millennium Survey*, London: The Polity Press, 2008; Harambalos, M., and M. Holborn, *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, London: Collins, 2004.

welfare. Furthermore, the issue of poverty and prosperity in the Black Country has been largely ignored, particularly after 1945. It is the author's contention that, despite the undoubted improvements wrought by state welfare, and escalating levels of affluence and consumption, *perceptions* of poverty remained firmly established within some communities, and that traditional methods for the alleviation of poverty continued because the local culture perpetuated this behaviour. Certainly it appears that there is just cause to re-think the impact of the Welfare State, particularly upon the psyche of the intended beneficiaries, the working and lower-middle classes, the very citizens who were considered most receptive to social welfare.

Contemporary wartime experiences, combined with memories of the consequences of the 1914-18 conflict, led to the search for an effective policy of post-war social reconstruction intended to provide income security 'from the cradle to the grave'.<sup>6</sup> Changing wartime social values resulted in intense pressure for reform<sup>7</sup> and a complex plan for social security emerged, identifying the causes of 'Need'<sup>8</sup> and proposing allowances to "provide for all the basic and predictable needs of the population", regardless of class, age or gender.<sup>9</sup> Explained in White Papers and pamphlets, debated in the press, by political parties and a complex network of discussion groups,<sup>10</sup> these recommendations for post-war reconstruction were widely anticipated and welcomed.

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<sup>6</sup> Jones, K., *The Making of Social Policy in Britain, 1830-1990* London: Athlone, 1993, p. 126.

<sup>7</sup> As early as 1941 the Conservative Party's Post-War Problems Committee, chaired by R. A. Butler, began meeting to discuss possible reconstruction strategies, whilst Labour politicians and the Trades Union Congress campaigned for a "more egalitarian social provision". In 1942 the Labour Party Conference aired demands for an extensive scheme of social security designed to provide 'adequate cash payments, whatever the contingency' and for the universal right to medical attention from a *National Health Service*.

<sup>8</sup> William Beveridge chaired an inter-departmental committee of civil servants. The five giants identified by the report were: Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness. The eight primary causes of Need were: Unemployment, Disability, Loss of Livelihood, Retirement, Marriage needs of a woman, Funeral Expenses, Childhood, Illness and Disability. These causes of poverty were adapted and extended from the work of Booth and Rowntree (who was one of Beveridge's advisors).

<sup>9</sup> Jones, K., *Social Policy*, p. 127; Bourke, J., *Working-Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity*, London: Routledge, 1994. Contributions and benefits were fixed at a flat rate for all, designed to eliminate discrimination; Birch, R.C., *The Shaping of the Welfare State*, Harlow: Longman, 1974, contains a brief and concise introduction to the concept of a Welfare State.

<sup>10</sup> The Army Bureau of Current Affairs produced pamphlets for use by Forces discussion groups and The Workers' Educational Association and University Extra-Mural Departments also ran debates. Clarke, P., *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-2000*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2004, p. 214. 600,000 copies of the report were sold.



As VE Day signalled imminent peace, the Coalition Government ceased to exist. In July 1945 the newly elected Labour Government prepared legislation to eradicate poverty in Britain.<sup>11</sup> The scheme was intended for the “safeguarding [of] the insured person from the hazards of injury at work, disability, sickness, unemployment, old age and even death (in the form of widows’ pension).”<sup>12</sup> Local and national newspapers optimistically informed the expectant British public that the new measures would abolish the causes of ‘Need’, in a “New Britain”.<sup>13</sup>

As post-war economic recovery was underway in the mid 1950s, attention was turned to the improving living conditions and the growing prosperity of the British public, who were the beneficiaries of escalating wages, full employment, higher living standards and a burgeoning consumer culture, which was underpinned by the safety-net of the Welfare State. As Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, informed a Conservative Rally at Bedford in 1957, “Go around the country, go to the industrial towns, go to the farms and you will see such a state of prosperity such as we have never seen in my lifetime – nor indeed in the history of this country”.<sup>14</sup> Given the undeniable improvements, it would seem logical to assume that the practices and tenets of the pre-war era would dissipate in the security of post-war life. However, the reality was that behaviour in Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton altered slowly and cautiously; their customary habits resulting, perhaps, from enduring memories of the precarious nature of prosperity.

## **Definitions and Concepts**

### ***Periodisation***

1945 to the early 1970s encompasses a period of significant transition. In the immediate euphoria surrounding the Allied victory, the British public confidently anticipated a new era, but the expectation and optimism engendered by the cessation of hostilities was rapidly dispelled with the realisation that privations and shortages were to continue for the foreseeable future. As the government strove to regain stability and economic recovery, rationing and the necessity to ‘tighten belts’ became

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<sup>11</sup> For example, National Insurance, Pensions and Family Allowances (which were, in fact, instigated by Churchill’s caretaker administration). The benefits were for all regardless of contributions or social class. The government was under the leadership of Clement Attlee.

<sup>12</sup> Clarke, *Hope*, p. 221.

<sup>13</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1948; *Daily Mail*, 12<sup>th</sup> July 1948.

<sup>14</sup> Harold Macmillan, 20<sup>th</sup> July 1957.

a contentious issue, when “wartime acquiescence in civilian sacrifice [was] replaced by civilian discontent”,<sup>15</sup> which epitomised a time of austerity.

Despite acknowledging its importance, historians rarely concur about precise periodisation. As Marwick argued, “we do need the concept of periods...though such periods do not automatically coincide with decades or centuries, nor do they have any immanent or natural existence, independent of the analytical needs of historians”.<sup>16</sup> There is little consensus concerning the precise length of post-war austerity, or the longer period of affluence which followed. According to some, the period of austerity began in 1945, ending somewhere between 1951 and 1955.<sup>17</sup> Although, most recently Kynaston confirmed that the period of austerity ended in 1951.<sup>18</sup> The length of the ensuing period of affluence also provokes debate and discussion, as to whether it ran from 1951 to 1964,<sup>19</sup> or from 1951 to 1967.<sup>20</sup> Some have claimed that the “unprecedented Golden Age” of affluence continued until 1973,<sup>21</sup> promoting the view of a “long sixties” embracing a period from the mid-fifties to the early seventies.<sup>22</sup>

The problems of periodisation are “greater for the social and economic historian than...for the writer of political history,”<sup>23</sup> who is able to identify particular periods from what may be deemed as political ‘turning points’. Since the date upon which ‘apparent affluence’ began, or indeed ended, is hotly contended it will, to some extent, be influenced by the political views of individual historians. Therefore, given the complexities and pitfalls of periodisation, particularly for the social historian, this thesis will consider the years between 1945 and c1970, from the cessation of hostilities until the early 1970s when economic problems and industrial conflict

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<sup>15</sup> Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I., *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls and Consumption, 1939-1955*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 35.

<sup>16</sup> Marwick, A., *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France and the United States, c.1945-1974*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Sisson, M. and P. French, (eds.) *The Age of Austerity, 1945-51*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964; Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity*, considers that the period of austerity ended with the abolition of rationing in 1955.

<sup>18</sup> Kynaston, D., *Austerity Britain, 1945-51*, London: Bloomsbury, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Bogdanor, V. and R. Skidelsky, *The Age of Affluence: 1951-1964*, London: Macmillan and Co., 1970.

<sup>20</sup> May, T., *An Economic and Social History of Britain, 1760-1970*, Harlow: Longman, 1987, p. 365.

<sup>21</sup> Marwick, *Sixties*, p. 5. Hobsbawm also asserted that the age of affluence continued until the mid 1970s.

<sup>22</sup> Green, J., *All Dressed Up: The Sixties and the Counterculture*, London: Jonathon Cape, 1998, p. xii-xiii.

<sup>23</sup> May, *Economic*, p. 365.

became major concerns of the British state.<sup>24</sup> As Hopkins indicated, the years between 1951 and 1974 denoted a time of material progress on an increasing scale,<sup>25</sup> whereas from the mid 1970s the country entered a period of inflation and industrial unrest. Therefore, the thesis will encompass the period of post-war austerity and continue through the years of affluence, which were characterised by increasing prosperity and gradual disassociation from traditional mores and beliefs of pre-war society, until c1970.<sup>26</sup> This may seem an arbitrary date but it coincides with the years of what many have characterised as a period of political consensus.<sup>27</sup> Ending this work in the early 1970s also facilitates some comparison with Roberts' study of families in North West England, Ogersby's examination of the South East coast, and Badger's work in Coventry and the Black Country, as well as the author's earlier research on Tipton.<sup>28</sup>

### *Class*

The complexities of the issues surrounding the definition of a class-based society are virtually insurmountable. Social stratification in Britain has been debated to the

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<sup>24</sup> Hopkins, E., *The Rise and Decline of the English Working Classes, 1918-1990: A Social History*, London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson Ltd., 1991, pp. 112-126; Turner, A.W., *Crisis? What Crisis? Britain in the 1970s*, London: Aurum Press Ltd, 2008; *A Century of Change: Trends in UK Statistics since 1900*, Research Paper 99/111 21<sup>st</sup> December 1999, <[http://www/bankofengland.co.uk/publications](http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/publications)>.

<sup>25</sup> Hopkins, *Rise and Decline*, p. 158.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Sandbrook, D., *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties*, London: Little Brown, 2006, p.78; Green, *All Dressed Up*, p. 447; Bernstein, G.L., *The Myth of the Decline: The Rise of Britain Since 1945*, London: Pimlico, 2004, p. 447. Bernstein argues that "The Sixties looked like a transforming decade to those who lived through them, and thirty years later still do...seemingly all of the traditional values of society were challenged."

<sup>27</sup> Dutton, D., *British Politics Since 1945: The Rise and Fall of Consensus*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991, p. 9; Lewis, J., *Women in Britain Since 1945: Women, Family, Work and the State in the Post-War Years*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992. Consensus was the period the political parties, although not in complete accord, "shared assumptions" concerning the Welfare State, employment figures and a mixed economy. Although, Lewis warns that claims of political consensus between 1945 and 70 "has been overdone". p. 1; Clarke, *Hope*, p. 245. Clarke described the use of the term 'Butskellism' – a combination of the names Gaitskell and Butler – used by the *Economist* in 1954 to explain a "supposed" continuity of government policy.

<sup>28</sup> Roberts, E., *Women and Families: An Oral History, 1940-1970*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995; Roberts, E., 'Neighbours: North-West England, 1940-1970', *Oral History*, Autumn, 1993; Roberts, E., 'Women, the Family Economy and Homework in North-West England, 1900-1970', *Labour History Review*, Winter 1991; Ogersby, W.J., 'One for the Money, Two for the Show: Youth, Consumption and Hegemony in Britain 1945-1970, With Special Reference to a South East Coastal Town', (University of Sussex, PhD thesis, 1992; Badger, S., 'Household Consumption, Food and the Working Class: The Black Country and Coventry, 1930-1970', (University of Wolverhampton, PhD thesis, 2004); Badger, S., 'Consumption and the Emancipation of Women? Household Appliances and Working-Class Women: The Black Country, 1945-1970', (University of Wolverhampton, MA thesis, 1997); Watkiss 'Strategies of Poverty'.

extent that class has been described as the “most contested category.”<sup>29</sup> As Marwick claimed: “Class is real...It is messy and not amenable to the sort of precision to which many social scientists aspire”.<sup>30</sup>

From Marx in the 1840s to Cannadine over 150 years later, interminable attempts have been made to define class.<sup>31</sup> After 1945, the “elusive concept of class”<sup>32</sup> is more problematic to define,<sup>33</sup> as it is complicated by embourgeoisement theories claiming that class divisions diminished through affluence, social relocation and changing aspirations,<sup>34</sup> resulting in a reduction in the “distinctiveness of the working class as a cultural and social entity”.<sup>35</sup> Although few historians are entirely persuaded by this thesis, there is general agreement that the post-war period saw a reduction in class differences.<sup>36</sup>

The distinction between lower-middle class and working class is especially unclear, particularly the inter-class demarcation line. Working-class aspirations to middle-

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<sup>29</sup> White, J., *The Worst Street in North London: Campbell Bunk, Islington, Between the Wars*, London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1986, p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> Marwick, A., *Class: Image and Reality in Britain, France and the U.S.A. Since 1930*, London: Fontana, 1980, p. 14.

<sup>31</sup> See Marx, K., *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Progress, 1852; Cannadine, D., *Class in Britain*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998; McLelland, D., *The Thought of Karl Marx*, London: Papermac, 1980, p. 177-8. The work of volume III (Capital) was interrupted by his death in March 1883. Marx proposed a three-class model of “wage-labourers, capitalists and landowners”, which he subsequently qualified because in the capitalist society of England the “middle and intermediate strata...obliterate lines of demarcation”. Although twentieth-century historians argue that this theory fails to allow for the growth of a tertiary sector, wherein managers and professionals, who are not possessed of capital, control production, even his critics agree that Marx “was on to something...in his insistence that the material circumstances of people’s existence do matter in influencing their life chances, their sense of identity and the historical part which...they play”.

<sup>32</sup> Bernstein, *The Myth*, p. 338.

<sup>33</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 237. Roberts agrees with this, arguing that that it has become increasingly difficult to define the post-war working class, in particular. Blackwell, T., and J. Seabrook, *A World Still To Win: The Reconstruction of the Post-War Working Class*, London: Faber and Faber, 1985, p.30. Also concur with this perspective.

<sup>34</sup> Royle, E., *Modern Britain: A Social History, 1750-1985*, London: Edward Arnold, 1987, p. 151.

<sup>35</sup> Goldthorpe, et al., *The Affluent Worker*, p.12; Hopkins, E., *A Social History of the English Working Classes, 1815-1914*, Edward Arnold, 1979, p. 272. Hopkins argues that the prosperity of the 1960s and 70s further weakened inter-class divisions. Wilson, E., *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Post-War Britain, 1945-1968*, London: Tavistock Publications, 1980, p. 6. Wilson records that the “old ways of the classes began to crumble” leading to the reassessment of personal and social conventions. Goldthorpe, et. al., p. 12. Their survey of the working-class community of Luton argued that the empirical test of the theory depended upon three elements: 1. change in economic circumstances. 2. Changes in technology management. 3. Changes in the ecology of cities. Clarke, J., C. Crichton and R. Johnson, *Working-Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory*, London: Hutchinson, 1979. See pages 28-34 for detailed observations and a critique of methodology.

<sup>36</sup> See Marwick, *Class*, p.215; Obelkevich, J. and P. Catterall, *Understanding Post-War British Society*, London: Routledge, 1994, p.141; Smith, H. (ed.), *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986, p. 179.

class status have been well documented,<sup>37</sup> but interminable effort was required to improve status, a precarious venture, as many of the middle class lived in ‘frighteningly close’ proximity to the ‘abyss’ of the working class “from which they had emerged and into which they could easily descend.”<sup>38</sup>

Economic circumstances and occupation played a crucial role in determining class,<sup>39</sup> but definitions based primarily on occupation are problematic. This is especially pertinent for the classification of women, whose fluctuating roles and responsibilities may not readily conform to orthodox stratification.<sup>40</sup> However, despite the undeniable complexity of class definitions, in her oral history of working-class families in Preston, Barrow and Lancaster, Roberts believed that her respondents’ views and attitudes were a determining factor, as they employed a process of self-determination with regards to social class.<sup>41</sup> Bourke concurred that “adopting the labels individuals give to themselves... [should be] the final word on that individual’s class position.”<sup>42</sup> This approach addresses some of the problems of social stratification, allowing “a woman married to a manual labourer to classify herself in terms of her middle-class father’s position, should she consider this appropriate”.<sup>43</sup> Self-description plays a vital role in perceptions of class and the status of individuals within society. For many, including the respondents from Pensnett, Tipton and Sedgley, class is most accurately characterised by a consciousness of “sharing the same predicament, of being in a particular position within the social framework”.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Roberts, R., *The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971; Todd, S., ‘Poverty and Aspiration: Young Women’s Entry to Employment in Inter-war England’, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 15, No. 4, 2004, pp. 119-142; Todd, S., *Young Women, Work and Family in England 1918-1950*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005; Benson, J., *The Working Class in Britain, 1859-1939*, Harlow: Longman, 1989, pp. 155-6.

<sup>38</sup> James, L., *The Middle Class: A History*, London: Little Brown, 2006, p. 405.

<sup>39</sup> Benson, *Working Class in Britain*, p. 3; Obelkevich and Catterall, *Understanding*, p. 141.

<sup>40</sup> Smith Wilson, D., ‘A New Look at the Affluent Worker: The Good Working Mother in Post-War Britain’, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2006, pp. 206-229; Haggett, A., ‘Desperate Housewives and the Domestic Environment in Post-War Britain: Individual Perspectives’ *Oral History*, Vol. 37, No. 1, Spring 2009, pp. 53-59. Haggett utilises oral interviews to address feminist claims that the repetitive nature and isolation of the domestic role led to anxiety, depression and mental health issues, but indicated that many women found contentment in the domestic role. Women’s employment opportunities were determined by their material circumstances, marital status, childcare, and other familial responsibilities. Consequently they may have worked full-time, or part-time, leaving the labour market and subsequently returning, in a variety of occupations, as dictated by necessity.

<sup>41</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 6.

<sup>42</sup> Bourke, *Working-Class*, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Bourke, *Working-Class*, p. 5. For a detailed examination of class, young women, aspirations and social mobility see Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family*.

<sup>44</sup> White, *The Worst Street*, p. 28.

In light of the ambiguity and confusion surrounding this contentious issue<sup>45</sup> and the difficulties of discerning the “subtle shades of [both inter and intra] class distinction”,<sup>46</sup> it would be presumptuous to claim to have arrived at a satisfactory definition. For the purpose of this study, the definition of class will draw on Roberts’s schema: occupation, housing, methods of receiving pay and the self-description of the respondents.<sup>47</sup> It is hoped that by utilising a combination of these categories, with emphasis placed on the subjective views of the respondents, the study will provide a convincing case for the resilience of class identities in post-war Britain.

### **Poverty**

The characterisation and measurement of poverty has been a contentious and emotive area of research, often underpinned by political rhetoric. Socialists believe that poverty is a combination of material deprivation and lack of power, yet its definition remains elusive as subjectivity is inevitable. Booth attempted, in 1899, to draw a line below which a family could be determined as ‘poor’.<sup>48</sup> In 1901 Rowntree developed Booth’s definition, identifying primary and secondary poverty,<sup>49</sup> calculating that a family<sup>50</sup> needed 21s. 8d. to keep them free from primary poverty.<sup>51</sup>

By 1951 Rowntree adjusted the poverty line, arguing that earnings not wages were the critical issue<sup>52</sup> and estimating that a family required an income of £5. 0s. 2d., disregarding rent and rates, to avoid poverty.<sup>53</sup> His more generous definition of

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<sup>45</sup> White, *The Worst Street*, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> Roberts, *Classic Slum* p. 21.

<sup>47</sup> For additional details concerning the respondents see the section entitled the Oral Sample.

<sup>48</sup> Jones, *Social Policy*, p. 63. Booth, C., *Life and Labour of the People in London*, London: MacMillan. Published in seventeen volumes between 1899 and 1901. Booth’s poverty line was drawn at 21 shillings per week for a ‘moderate’ sized family and was inevitably criticised for its imprecision as to the size and age of the family.

<sup>49</sup> Vincent, D., *Poor Citizens: The State and the Poor in the Twentieth Century*, Harlow: Longman, 1991, p. 2. In Rowntree’s estimation, a family experienced primary poverty when they were unable to afford the essentials to sustain life and secondary poverty if their income was sufficient for necessities but was ‘diverted’ elsewhere.

<sup>50</sup> A family consisted of a husband, wife and three children.

<sup>51</sup> Rowntree, B.S., *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, London: Macmillan, 1901, p.115. He concluded that the wages paid to an unskilled labourer who lived in York would not ‘maintain a family ... in a state of bare physical efficiency’.

<sup>52</sup> Rowntree, B.S., and G. R. Lavers, *Poverty and the Welfare State: A Third Social Survey of York dealing only with economic questions*, Harlow: Longmans, 1951, p. 7. This would take into account overtime, piecework and short time.

<sup>53</sup> Rowntree, *Poverty*, p. 28. He identified the causes of poverty as: old age, sickness, death of the chief wage earner, low wages and many children.

subsistence was deemed “more appropriate to the more prosperous post-war world.”<sup>54</sup> Subsequent critics, such as Coates and Silburn, have denied that there is “some easily discovered, absolute and apparently universal, line below which there is poverty and above which there is not.”<sup>55</sup> Poverty is a relative concept, which defies objective definition and, whilst it refers to a number of conditions which are theoretically measurable,<sup>56</sup> it is impossible to reach a definition that is totally free from value judgements.<sup>57</sup>

Despite state benefits, according to Vincent, a ‘significant minority’ of the population remained poor, as “poverty means the exclusion from the living standards, the lifestyles...of one’s fellow citizens.”<sup>58</sup> Thus, although the concept of a poverty line has been somewhat discredited, it could be argued that those lacking access to the goods and amenities of their peers could justifiably define themselves as poor. The introduction of subjective elements into the poverty debate led to a situation where “necessities were, to a large extent, socially conditioned; they were what real people felt they needed to participate fully in the life of their... community.” Therefore, by the 1960s, to be unable to afford a television “when television became a conventional social bond” resulted in social marginalisation through poverty.<sup>59</sup>

Changing perceptions concerning poverty and its definition have implications for this study, as it is no longer a conceivable option to categorically determine a material poverty line. The poverty line, as indicated by Abel-Smith and Townsend, was denoted by the poverty levels of applicants for National Assistance - the “‘official’

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<sup>54</sup> Abel-Smith, B., and P. Townsend, *The Poor and the Poorest: A New Analysis of the Ministry of Labour’s Family Expenditure Surveys, 1953-4 and 1960*, Andover: River Chapel Press, 1965, p. 16.

<sup>55</sup> Coates, K., and R. Silburn, *Poverty: The Forgotten Englishmen*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970, p. 22.

<sup>56</sup> According to Abel-Smith and Townsend these include ‘differences in home environment, material possessions, and educational and occupational resources as well as financial resources’, p. 63.

<sup>57</sup> George and Howards, *Poverty*, p. 1.

<sup>58</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 205.

<sup>59</sup> Clarke, *Hope*, p. 303. Clarke believed that ‘in effect the poverty line itself had become index linked – to average living standards – pushing up expectations to levels which were simultaneously difficult to satisfy and difficult to afford’.

See also Coates and Silburn, *Poverty*, p. 24. They argue that “what is deemed ‘necessary’ once physical survival is answered, is a matter of convention” and therefore socially constructed. p. 27. They also cite Galbraith who believed that “People are poverty stricken when their income, even if adequate for survival, falls markedly below that of the community.”

Operational definition of the minimum level of living at any particular time.’<sup>60</sup> By the beginning of the 1970s, the majority of claimants for state assistance had no other income. Consequently the government had responsibility for determining their level of income and was, almost by default, responsible for public perceptions of the current poverty line.<sup>61</sup>

However, for the purpose of this thesis, and in the light of current sociological theories and accepted social mores, it will be argued that the concept of poverty is relative and depends to an extent on personal perceptions. Therefore, those members of the post-war population who believed that they lacked the material and social benefits of their contemporaries may well have *considered* themselves as poor, regardless of income or status. Indeed, in the oral testimony that follows a number of respondents with a higher than average income recalled, or implied, a fear of poverty. Subsequent chapters will explore the complexity of the collective and individual memory of poverty and how it impacted on financial, social and cultural behaviour in the post-war period.

### **Methodology and Sources**

Attempts to ascertain the effectiveness of state welfare upon poverty levels have been largely reliant upon statistical evidence, utilising tabulated numerical facts to support theories and furnish state of the nation surveys. However, this study seeks to investigate *perceptions* of poverty, affluence and financial stability in post-war Britain. Consequently, it will utilise oral interviews as the principal source, in an attempt to establish the extent of the continuation of traditional behaviour patterns in a period of government provision of ‘income security’. Vigorous debate has surrounded the use of oral testimony as a historical source and the need to undertake procedures of triangulation, in order to ascertain the veracity of such testimony with other sources, has been reiterated. Thus, the benefits and pitfalls of oral history will be discussed in some detail below.

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<sup>60</sup> Abel-Smith and Townsend, *The Poor*, p. 17. They believed, for example, that about 6% of the population were living below the poverty line in 1960. In their estimation this was due to the fact that wages, even when supplemented by family allowances, were insufficient.

<sup>61</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 174.



## *Oral Evidence*

Given the nature of this study, it is intended that oral testimony will be a counterbalance to the social surveys and official reports of the post-war era, utilised to reveal the nature and scope of perceptions of poverty and the efficacy of the welfare state. Experiences of life under the auspices of social benefits have been generally scrutinised 'from above', through scientific surveys and government data, and subsequently synthesised by the media in newspapers, news-reels and documentary films.<sup>62</sup> Thus, inevitably, the opinions and observations of the intended recipients of the welfare system have been marginalised or obscured by the pronouncements of outsider voices. This study will attempt to redress the balance.

In 1966, Elton stated that "what matters are the sources, that is to say the physical survivals from the events to be studied".<sup>63</sup> He emphasised the importance of studying *all* the relevant material, gaining knowledge of the range and types of sources,<sup>64</sup> and advocated rigorous critical assessment.<sup>65</sup> Oral testimony undoubtedly consists of relevant material - the 'physical survival' of former events. Yet the use of oral testimony remains contentious.<sup>66</sup> One of its most important contributions is that it supplements and challenges the statistical information gleaned from official investigations, facilitating a fuller understanding of the lives of 'ordinary' people, counteracting the scarcity of the "ephemera of working-class men and women"<sup>67</sup> and augmenting the "gaps and weaknesses in the [existing] documents".<sup>68</sup> This study of post-war Britain, through the medium of oral interviews, will aid a "more realistic and fair construction of the past, *a challenge to the established account*" (my italics).<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> For example, the 1965 report of the Chairman of Stepney Housing Committee which was produced by the charity Shelter can be viewed at the end of the DVD of the film *Cathy Come Home* written by Jeremy Sandford and directed by Ken Loache (1966).

<sup>63</sup> Elton, G. R., *The Study and Practice of History*, Hammersmith: Fontana, 1987, p. 88.

<sup>64</sup> Elton, *The Study*, pp. 87-89.

<sup>65</sup> Elton, *The Study*, pp. 96-108. In his opinion "criticising the evidence means two things: establishing its genuineness, and assessing its proper significance". p. 97.

<sup>66</sup> See for example Thompson, P., 'Problems of Method in Oral History' *Oral History*, 1971, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 1-47. Paul Thompson was one of the pioneers of oral history. Dunaway, D., 'Method and Theory in the Oral Biography', *Oral History*, Vol. 20, No. 2, Autumn 1992, pp. 40-45.

<sup>67</sup> Thompson, P., *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 4

<sup>68</sup> Thompson, *Voice*, pp. 3-6. Tosh justified the utility of a research project on the history of mining communities, explaining that a narrative of the life of one specific miner offered a "vivid insight into a way of life which now survives in Britain only in the memories of the ...old". Tosh, J. *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*, Harlow: Longman, 1991 (Second Edition), p. 216.

<sup>69</sup> Thompson, *Voice*, p. 7.

The fundamental issues of reliability and memory, raised by the use of oral testimony, have been addressed by Thompson's view that there is minimal qualitative difference between disparate types of historical source.<sup>70</sup> He indicated the necessity to cross-check the consistency of sources and weigh evidence as "all are fallible and subject to bias".<sup>71</sup> Given the numerous debates and discussions concerning the merits and hazards of historical sources, it would be considered superfluous to discuss them in detail; instead this section will address the methodological criticisms of oral history.

Critics of oral history have focused upon the fallibility of memory, factual reliability and subjectivity. However, "all information is retrospective and the only extra problem that we have in historical interviews is that the time span is longer".<sup>72</sup> Whilst the truth of this is undeniable, it raises questions about lapses of memory and selectivity. The problems surrounding the functions and deterioration of the memory process have caused concern. Memory is "the raw material of oral biography",<sup>73</sup> and it is therefore vital that concerns over its fallibility are addressed. However, there are indications that some individuals recall past events with a great deal of clarity and that the elderly can retain long-term memory function even when their short-term memory is impaired.<sup>74</sup> It may be that when the older respondents are reviewing past experiences they are less self-conscious and more inclined to candour, as "time and distance from a situation weaken the power to dissemble".<sup>75</sup> The immediacy of oral interviews prevents undue introspection and, to a large extent, prohibits attempts to sustain an enhanced or fabricated account of an individual's life. But it is important to note that past events are inevitably reviewed in the light of subsequent experiences<sup>76</sup> and may be subject to the cultural interpretations placed upon them by the respondent.

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<sup>70</sup> Thompson, *Voice*. Chapter 4 provides a detailed discussion of the pitfalls and benefits of a variety of historical sources. Thompson, 'Problems of Method' compares the use of interviews with other types of evidence and the potential for historical accuracy. For example, he indicated many of the problems associated with utilising oral evidence are not dissimilar to those connected with other sources.

<sup>71</sup> Thompson, *Voice*, p. 152.

<sup>72</sup> Thompson, 'Problems of Method', p. 4.

<sup>73</sup> Dunaway, 'Method and Theory' p. 42.

<sup>74</sup> Lummis, T., *Listening to History*, London: Hutchinson, 1987, p. 117.

<sup>75</sup> Lummis, *Listening*.

<sup>76</sup> Summerfield, P. 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews' *Cultural and Social History*, vol. 1, No. 1, 2004, p. 66.

Summerfield indicated that memory cannot be independent of cultural influence because:

“Discursive constructions of the past ‘contaminate’ memory, in the sense that they overlay it with later accounts and interpretations of the period...to such an extent that it is impossible for anyone to remember what they did and what they thought at the time independently of this ‘patina of historical postscripts and rewritings’.”<sup>77</sup>

However, this problem is surmountable as individuals do not merely recall incidents from their past, but automatically make sense of them by interpreting them according to the dominant culture.<sup>78</sup> Consequently, the problems of using oral narratives are not dissimilar to written accounts of the lives of individuals, in the sense that “autobiography in the end is an interrogation of the past by the present”.<sup>79</sup> Given the inherent bias in *any* source, the historian utilising oral testimony needs to be vigilant with regards to internal consistency and to confirm factual reliability by consulting documentary accounts.<sup>80</sup> The consistency and accuracy of memory may be verified in a similar way to other sources - “The same criteria should be used to assess any source, written or oral: how does it ‘fit’ in with what we know about the subject?”<sup>81</sup> Accommodating the vagaries of memory, particularly concerning the assignment of dates and events, may be problematic during interviews. However, clarification may be obtained by questioning a respondent about their status or stage of life at the time of the event (i.e. were they at work or school, where were they living at the time, were they single or married, did they have children?).

“Validity refers to the degree of conformity between the reports of ... [an] event and the event itself as recorded by other primary source material...validity...must be measured against other testimony and documents.”<sup>82</sup> In this study verification of the

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<sup>77</sup> Summerfield, ‘Culture’.

<sup>78</sup> Summerfield, ‘Culture’, p. 67.

<sup>79</sup> Schlesinger, A. M. (Jnr.), *A Life in the Twentieth Century: Innocent Beginnings, 1917-1950*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000, p. xiii.

<sup>80</sup> Thompson, *Voice*, p. 119; Todd, *Young Women*, p. 16. Todd utilised a combination of 81 oral testimonies and autobiographies along with social surveys and census returns.

<sup>81</sup> Gluck, S., ‘What’s So Special About Women? : Women’s Oral History’ in Dunaway, D. K., and W. Baum (eds.), in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, London: Sage Publications, 1996, p. 218.

<sup>82</sup> Hoffman, A., ‘Reliability and Validity in Oral History’ in Dunaway and Baum, *Oral History*, p. 89.

oral testimony has been supplemented by alternative documentary sources. Both local and national newspapers covering the period under investigation have been consulted. Although it is important to contextualise local events in the light of national experiences, emphasis has been placed upon newspapers pertaining to the localities. They provided an insight into national events and experiences which were synthesised through local perceptions, reflecting the unique cultural and social codes of the Black Country. Three publications, *Dudley Herald*, *Tipton Herald*, and *Express and Star*, have been considered in some detail to provide some documentary corroboration for the oral evidence, placing local events into a wider context.<sup>83</sup>

Autobiographies and memoirs of working-class residents of Birmingham and the Black Country have also been utilised to supplement the oral testimony, given that time constraints precluded further interviews. Efforts were made to obtain volumes produced by people who had lived and/or worked in the three areas – with limited success. A small number of accounts written by residents of Sedgley and Tipton were located,<sup>84</sup> but none by people from Pensnett; although there were a few pieces in the *Blackcountryman* and the *Black Country Bugle* from all three areas.<sup>85</sup> The motives for producing individual autobiographies are complex: often financial, sometimes in response to requests to ‘tell their story’, to set records straight, or to redress the balance of previous histories. Kathleen Hann wrote in response to revelations that “historians reduced working-class women to statistics”, arguing that working-class history should be written by “real people” as historians are “cold”.<sup>86</sup> Despite the claims of Savage and Miles, none of the local autobiographies are the product of academics from “working class backgrounds who possibly romanticised working class life and solidarity”.<sup>87</sup> Autobiographies from the wider Black Country, and indeed beyond, have been included in order to explore the similarities and differences in the lives of ‘ordinary’ people between 1945 and c1970. The use of autobiographies as evidence is subject to similar criticisms – of motivation, selection

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<sup>83</sup> *Dudley Herald*, *Express and Star* and *Tipton Herald*.

<sup>84</sup> Work by Carol Hathorne; Edith Cotterill; John Beck; John Parker; Ron Baker; Mary Tatem.

<sup>85</sup> Nicholls, A. B., ‘End of the Earth’ in *The Blackcountryman*, 2004, pp. 77-82; Power, P., ‘Memories of a Lamplighter’s Lad’ (Sedgley) in *The Blackcountryman*, 1998; J. J. Wood, ‘Osses, ‘Ossroads and ‘Oss Muck’ (Pensnett) in *The Blackcountryman*, 1973.

<sup>86</sup> Hann, K., *Tell It As It Was*, New York: Writers Press Club, 2002, p. 3.

<sup>87</sup> Savage, M., and A. Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working Class, 1840-1940*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 14.

and intended readership, however, they too can be verified by triangulation with other sources.<sup>88</sup>

### *The Oral Sample*

A total of sixty respondents, twenty from each of the three areas, were interviewed for varying lengths of time – usually during a single session, although follow-up interviews and phone calls were sometimes necessary.<sup>89</sup> On occasions the author was subsequently contacted by interviewees who had recalled answers to specific questions, or additional relevant information. Approximately equal numbers of male and female respondents, born between 1921 and 1960, living or working in the areas between 1945 and the early 1970s, were located in order to encompass generational differences in opinions and experiences. Despite the display of advertisements and posters in churches and social clubs patronised by groups of mixed ethnicity, all those interviewed described their background as white British. However, this is not entirely surprising as, unlike nearby Wolverhampton and Birmingham, immigrants were slow to move into the three areas under discussion.<sup>90</sup>

Initial contact was established through a number of channels: over 50s clubs, community centres, church groups and word-of-mouth. Interviews were predominantly conducted in the homes of the interviewees or in community centres. Ideally the groups would have comprised equal numbers of working and lower middle-class respondents, but, given the difficulties of definition discussed above, this was problematic to ascertain. Respondents were unwilling to directly categorise themselves in terms of class, usually implying that they were ‘ordinary’ or ‘much the

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<sup>88</sup> Lummis, *Listening*, p. 83.

<sup>89</sup> The follow-up interviews and phone calls were predominantly to the earlier respondents and were to clarify specific points or to ask additional questions on topics which were raised by subsequent respondents. The words and opinions of a further ten men and women have also, on occasions, been utilised. They were residents of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton, and were interviewed in 1999 following the completion of my MA, and the recommendations of my external examiner, in order to ascertain the possibility of a wider future study. They are referred to in the footnotes by their full names plus date of their interview, and their basic biographical details in appendix II. Mr and Mrs Tolley were re-interviewed for this thesis but the others were either unobtainable or too infirm.

<sup>90</sup> See Chapter 14, Cheetham, J., ‘Immigration’ pp. 451 – 508 in Halsey, A. H. (ed.), *Trends in British Society Since 1900: A Guide to the Changing Social Structure of Britain*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1972. Cheetham examines immigration patterns throughout Britain, utilising national and regional statistics. She indicates that, in 1966, the West Midlands towns with “the highest percentages of immigrants were Wolverhampton (4.8), Leamington Spa (4.5) and Birmingham (4.2)”. p. 460. See, also, Chapter 6 - ‘The Black Country’ in Moorhouse, G., *Britain in the Sixties: The Other England*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1964.

same as everyone else' in their locality. Suffice it to say that 90% of those interviewed began life in rented private or council-owned accommodation with parents whose employment fell into classes C, D, and E, according to the 1955 survey of social classes.<sup>91</sup> These classes and incomes were defined as follows:

Class C. (lower middle-class, incomes between £450 and £800 p.a.)

Typical occupations = teachers, commercial travellers, clerks, owners/managers of small businesses and shops

Class D. (working class, incomes between £250 and £450 p.a.)

Typical occupations = skilled craftsmen, machine operatives, shop workers, delivery men, postmen, miners

Class E. (the poor, incomes under £250 p.a.)

Typical occupations/status = widows, labourers, old age pensioners, the unemployed.

Most interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis, although on occasions respondents were interviewed in the presence of a relative or friend, at their request.<sup>92</sup> This logistical change may have affected the character of the interview, as it is possible that observation inhibited the narration of certain incidents. Conversely, however, the attendance of a third party sometimes facilitated memories through shared experiences. The presence of another "sometimes stimulates ...the memory, or corrects a mistake, or offers a different interpretation."<sup>93</sup> An additional presence may have resulted in exaggeration to eclipse the experiences of others, either in memories of poverty or affluence.<sup>94</sup> However, the possibility of receiving misleading or embellished information is applicable to alternative historical sources.

A rigid set of questions was rejected in favour of a semi-structured interview agenda, which was established prior to the commencement of the interviews. Inevitably this was amended as the interviews progressed, in the light of initial responses.

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<sup>91</sup> Burnett, J., *A History of the Cost of Living*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969, p. 295. The survey was produced by the British Market Research Bureau designed to provide a readership survey for the Hutton Press.

<sup>92</sup> 'Party' interviews are indicated within the biographical details of the respondents.

<sup>93</sup> Thompson, *Voice*, p. 140.

<sup>94</sup> This was more likely when friends were interviewed together, as family members appeared more inclined to correct statements or remonstrate over perceived factual inaccuracies.

Individuals displayed a variety of reactions to specific topics and frequently engendered additional issues that required exploration. This approach sometimes resulted in free-flowing conversation in which previously undisclosed information was revealed and prefixed with the words “I shouldn’t really be telling you this” or “I’ve not mentioned this before”.<sup>95</sup> These individuals were reassured that their anonymity would be preserved at all times concerning sensitive information.

Throughout the thesis, respondents who divulged sensitive information are referred to by their initials only, as are individuals who preferred to remain anonymous; otherwise, with their permission, respondents are indicated by their full names.<sup>96</sup> At other times information was recalled, when the recorder was off, at the conclusion of the interview. It is impossible to ascertain whether this was an unconscious or deliberate act; some information was proffered in concluding conversations on doorsteps.

Editing and selection of the interviews has taken place, but this is the case with any source. Responses have been included at length where appropriate, but have been condensed where the interviewees’ narration veered into territory irrelevant to the study. Transcription inevitably loses some of the nuances of speech and manner present in the recordings, and hesitations, changes in tone, humour or expression are almost impossible to convey adequately in the printed word. However, where possible responses have been included at length and remain intact.<sup>97</sup> In transcription the dialect of the respondents has been replicated as accurately as possible in order to avoid imprecision in translation, and to conserve the integrity embodied in the spoken word.<sup>98</sup> This is essential, as “faithful reproduction takes us one step closer to actual data, any deviation becomes an error”.<sup>99</sup>

The oral evidence presented in the context of this study is both complementary and supplementary to the existing sources, particularly recent work by Sandbrook,

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<sup>95</sup> For example: Pensnett Mr SG; Tipton Mr DN and others. This information was usually concerned with personal relationships or criminal activities.

<sup>96</sup> Most respondents were more than happy to give permission for their names to be used.

<sup>97</sup> Thompson, *Voice*, p. 126.

<sup>98</sup> Abrams, L., ‘Revisiting Akenfield: Forty Years of an Iconic Text’, *Oral History*, Vol.37, No. 1, Spring 2009, p. 37.

<sup>99</sup> Joyce, cited in Yow cited in Abrams, *Teenage Consumer*, p. 37.

Hennessy, and Kynaston.<sup>100</sup> As such it provides an insight into otherwise inaccessible observations of the economic and financial experiences of ‘ordinary’ people in post-war Britain. Statistical evidence of employment figures and data relating to wages, consumption and saving provide an overarching impression of a specific era. However, when supplemented by individual accounts and experiences, it is possible to obtain a clearer representation of the effects of affluence and the welfare state upon behaviour patterns and perceptions of poverty.

## **Content**

The first chapter of this thesis examines the relevant literature, questioning views that post-war affluence resulted in the relinquishment of pre-war neighbourhood cohesion and family conventions. Chapter two presents demographic, economic and environmental profiles of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton, located in the geographical context of the Black Country, and considers the relationship between location and status. Chapter three focuses upon change and continuity in the mores and social values of local communities. Chapters four and five explore the multiplicity of ways in which respondents derived incomes, examining formal and informal employment, illegal activities and attitudes to welfare payments. Chapter six considers consumption, the allocation of household finances, and budgeting in the post-war period, investigating the extent of change in methods and means of food shopping before considering the financing of purchases. Chapter seven considers the relationship between leisure, consumption and class, including the distinct area of teenage consumption. Chapter eight investigates the concepts of short and long-term saving as a means of future purchasing, as insurance against future financial difficulties, and examines parental influence upon economic matters, assessing the extent of continuity and change over the twenty-five year period. The thesis will conclude that in a period of undoubted affluence and environmental change, despite full employment, high wages and improving living standards, the inhabitants of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton were reluctant to relinquish traditional behavioural patterns. Despite relocation in new housing estates, they adhered to customary social

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<sup>100</sup> Sandbrook, D., *Never Had It So Good: A History Of Britain from Suez to the Beatles*, London: Little Brown, 2005; Sandbrook, *White Heat*; Hennessy, P., *Having It So Good: Britain in the Fifties*, London: Virago Press, 2006; Kynaston, *Family Britain, 1951-1957*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009; Kynaston, *Austerity*.



mores, traditional perceptions of respectable conduct and communal principles, confirming Hoggart's assertion that "old habits persist".<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, p. 40.

## **CHAPTER ONE: CHARACTERISATIONS OF COMMUNITY, CLASS AND POVERTY**

According to Todd's recent analysis, the historiography of post-war Britain has been characterised by themes such as 'austerity,' 'affluence' and the 'rediscovery of poverty'.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will critically review the historiography. Firstly, it will examine nineteenth and early twentieth century beliefs concerning the relationship between poverty and respectability. Although this may seem superfluous to a study of the post-war period, the concept of self-reliance promulgated by Samuel Smiles, was unconsciously reflected in the oral testimony and the respondents' attitudes to state welfare.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, follows an examination of pessimistic sociological views, focusing on post-war poverty and the deficiencies of state welfare. Thirdly, consideration will be given to the work of historians, the majority of whom have regarded welfare optimistically as a harbinger of social change. This will be followed by a review of the literature concerning the pre-war working-class and characterisations of the notion of 'community' in the post-war period.

### ***Poverty***

A brief examination of the perceptions of and attitudes to poverty is necessary to contextualise respondents' attitudes and beliefs about the inception of the Welfare State and the effects of subsequent legislation. Poverty was a particular concern during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as social elites expressed dismay at the conduct of the 'lower orders'. Their intense preoccupation with this problem had been incited by the effect of industrialisation on social conditions and customs. Middle-class observers and philanthropists collated information about working-class lives in attempts to comprehend the problems engendered by poverty. From Mayhew's 1850s London interviews to Orwell's observations of life in the 1930s, the economic and social conditions of the 'respectable' and 'less respectable' poor have

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<sup>1</sup> Todd, S., 'Affluence, Class and Crown Street: Reinvestigating the Post-War Working Class', *Contemporary British History*, vol. 22, no. 4, December 2008, p. 502.

<sup>2</sup> Smiles, S., *Self Help*, The IEA Health and Welfare Unit, 1977, p. 178, [First published in 1866]. Smiles was of the opinion that helplessness and impotence are the result of fecklessness, weakness and self-indulgence. He advocated "industry, frugality and honesty" as the natural counterbalance to poverty in working-class life". p. 179.

been investigated, with varying degrees of sympathy and perception.<sup>3</sup> Early theorists, such as Samuel Smiles, insisted that inherent character defects were the predominant cause of poverty and recommended discipline, sobriety and thrifts as the solutions.<sup>4</sup>

Responding to demands from an increasing electorate,<sup>5</sup> the Liberal Government of 1906 introduced a package of social reforms designed to address the problems revealed in the surveys.<sup>6</sup> However, the advent of the Second World War provided the catalyst for the Welfare State, which was designed to eliminate poverty and create a “new and more egalitarian social order”.<sup>7</sup> Mindful of the resentment surrounding the economic and social problems incurred at the end of World War I, which resulted in industrial unrest on an unprecedented scale,<sup>8</sup> politicians were planning for peace and the reconstruction of society.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Sociology, Poverty and the Welfare State***

A vast amount of research into the consequences of poverty and the effectiveness, or otherwise, of state welfare has been undertaken by sociologists, yielding an expansive body of literature. The consensual opinion was one of continuing poverty for substantial numbers of people. However, although conscientious in recording findings, rigorous in the collation of statistics and in the reproduction of interviews, their works are frequently without index and often under-referenced. The work of Kerr, Coates and Silburn, and Seabrook typifies this problem.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Humphreys, A., *Travels into the Poor Man's Country: The Work of Henry Mayhew*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977. Mayhew's sympathetic approach distinguished him, in some ways, from other investigators of his era. He observed conditions in London, Lancashire and Yorkshire. His book *London Labour and the London Poor* was published serially in 3 volumes in 1851; Orwell, G., *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1989, [First published in 1937 by Victor Gollancz]; Orwell, G., *Down and Out in Paris and London*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989, [First published in 1933 by Victor Gollancz].

<sup>4</sup> Smiles, *Self Help*.

<sup>5</sup> As the electorate increased, after the Third Reform Act of 1884, and following the Redistribution Act of 1895 it became increasingly inevitable that 'labouring class' interests were defended. The embryonic Labour Party was perceived as a great threat to the government who acted, in part at least, to prevent defection to the new party.

<sup>6</sup> The surveys of Booth and Rowntree in particular.

<sup>7</sup> Jones, *Social Policy*, pp. 127-33.

<sup>8</sup> Clarke, *Hope*, pp. 103-110.

<sup>9</sup> Jones, *Social Policy*, p. 122; Calder, A., *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945*, London: Pimlico, 1992.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example: Coates and Silburn, *Poverty*; Kerr, M., *The People of Ship Street*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1958; Seabrook, J., *Working -Class Childhood: An Oral History*, London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1982.

Optimistic social scientists supported the view that poverty in the Welfare State had been virtually abolished. In 1950, Rowntree and Lavers' third study of York re-examined the levels of post-war poverty.<sup>11</sup> Their findings demonstrated a dramatic fall of over 16% in poverty levels since Rowntree's 1936 survey.<sup>12</sup> In 1959, the Labour M.P. Barbara Castle claimed that "the poverty and unemployment which we came into existence to fight have been largely conquered".<sup>13</sup>

By the mid-1960s poverty was 'rediscovered' and its relationship to the deficiencies of state welfare emphasised.<sup>14</sup> This 'rediscovery' coincided with escalating disillusionment with current policies, a shift to the left within the Labour Party and an increasing intellectual Marxist presence in the humanities and social sciences. Coates and Silburn explained the unquestioning acceptance of Rowntree and Lavers' misleading, but "compelling" evidence.<sup>15</sup> Full employment, improving living standards, rising wage-levels and the availability of consumer goods, facilitated by the twin auspices of post-war economic policies and the Welfare State, temporarily beguiled commentators into an acceptance of a mythical affluent society and the abolition of 'Want'.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, predominantly pessimistic sociological theorists dominated later studies of post-war society. Regardless of their political ideology, social scientists concur that despite legislation, or sometimes because of it, poverty remained a reality within certain sectors of British society.<sup>17</sup>

The New-Right, associated with Conservative Governments between 1979 and 1997,<sup>18</sup> upheld the 'culture of poverty thesis', arguing that poverty resulted from values, attitudes and beliefs perpetuated through the generations.<sup>19</sup> In Marsland's

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<sup>11</sup> Rowntree and Lavers, *Poverty*.

<sup>12</sup> Rowntree and Lavers, *Poverty*, p. 34. One of their most striking findings was that "not a single family is in poverty due to the unemployment of an able-bodied wage earner" but sickness and old age still induced poverty.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Timmins, N., *The Five Giants: A Biography of the Welfare State*, Hammersmith: Harper Collins, 2001, p. 254. Castle was Chairman of the Labour Party Conference at that time.

<sup>14</sup> George and Howards, *Poverty*, p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> Coates and Silburn, *Poverty*, pp. 14-16.

<sup>16</sup> Coates and Silburn, *Poverty*, p. 15. Those on the right emphasised the benefits of a free market economy, which would eventually remove the necessity for welfare provision, whilst the radicals felt that the Welfare State had 'civilised' the capitalist system.

<sup>17</sup> William Ryan, *Blaming the Victim*, New York: Vintage Books, 1971.

<sup>18</sup> Governments led by Margaret Thatcher and John Major were in power between 1979 and 1997 and were of the belief that the welfare state was leading to a culture of dependency.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph, K., and J. Sumption, *Equality*, London: John Murray, 1979. See chapters 1 and 6.

estimation, the Welfare State created a culture of dependency.<sup>20</sup> He argued that benefits should be confined to the relief of ‘genuine’ need, reserved exclusively for the sick, elderly and disabled.<sup>21</sup> This view was clearly endorsed by the oral testimony. However, critics argued that his thesis is fundamentally flawed as no individual can ever be classed as truly independent.<sup>22</sup>

On the left, sociologists, such as Titmuss, Abel-Smith and Townsend, focused upon ‘relative deprivation’ and disparities between rich and poor,<sup>23</sup> challenging studies utilising subsistence measurements for the establishment of a poverty line.<sup>24</sup> Townsend later called for the ‘mobilisation’ of scientists to redefine and explain poverty.<sup>25</sup> His 1970s research reinforced the importance of relating poverty to the accepted standards of a specific society

at a precise time, as “poverty can only be defined objectively and applied consistently in terms of the concept of relative deprivation”.<sup>26</sup>

His methodology was criticised, in terms of the selection process for the deprivation index and the inclusion of components, which lack an unequivocal relationship to poverty. For example, whilst some are directly linked to poverty - a fixed bath, a cold water tap or a refrigerator - much of the list is prescriptive, disregarding personal preferences or disparate lifestyles.<sup>27</sup> Although deprivation may explain not inviting “a friend or relative home for a meal or snack”, alternative social and cultural explanations

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<sup>20</sup> Marsland, D., and R. Segalman, *Cradle to Grave: Comparative Perspectives on the State of Welfare*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989, p. 47.

<sup>21</sup> Haralambos and Holborn, *Sociology*, p. 263.

<sup>22</sup> Haralambos and Holborn, *Sociology*; Dean, H. and P. Taylor-Goodby, *Dependency Culture: the Explosion of a Myth*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992.

<sup>23</sup> Sked, A., and C. Cook, *Post War Britain: A Political History*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979, pp. 282-3.

<sup>24</sup> Sked and Cook, *Post War Britain*, p. 238.

<sup>25</sup> Townsend, P., *Poverty in the United Kingdom: A Survey of Household Resources and Living Standards*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979, pp. 3-7. During the 1960s and 70s, Townsend highlighted the enduring existence of poverty, ensuring that it remained on the political agenda when his findings revealed further failures in the state provision of welfare.

<sup>26</sup> Haralambos and Holborn, *Sociology*, p. 240. 2,052 households were surveyed, in order to measure the precise numbers of the British population who were living in poverty between 1968 and 1969. His deprivation index, covered 60 specific types of deprivation, including diet, fuel, lighting, household facilities, housing conditions, environment, family life etc. Townsend, *Poverty*, p. 250. This list was refined, selecting 12 items that were pertinent to the entire nation, in order to ascertain current deprivation levels. Households were scored on the basis of their replies, the highest scores denoting the worst deprivation.

<sup>27</sup> The lack of a cooked breakfast on ‘most days of the week’ may indicate a personal preference, diet or time factors, rather than poverty or lack of disposable income.

exist.<sup>28</sup> Piachaud argued that “Townsend’s provisional deprivation index is of no practical value whatsoever as an indicator of deprivation”,<sup>29</sup> as “only when everyone behaved identically would no one be defined as poor.”<sup>30</sup>

Sociologists concluded that the Welfare State failed to alleviate post-war poverty. Successive governments were castigated for encouraging dependence on benefit payments, thus exacerbating problems by over-reliance on the state. Nevertheless, the apparent consensus from both sides of the political spectrum endorsed the view that whilst “the harsher edges of poverty may have been blunted by the welfare state...poverty, at least in relative terms, remained”.<sup>31</sup>

### ***Historians, Poverty and the Welfare State***

Despite incontrovertible statistical evidence from sociologists ‘proving’ that certain sectors of the British population remained in poverty; historians have relegated post-war deprivation to the footnotes of their work. Conekin, Mort and Waters, whose work examined the compartmentalisation of post-war history, provided explanations for this omission.<sup>32</sup> In their estimation, compartmentalisation resulted in the projection of “a series of comfortable and familiar images...which are instantly recognisable” and overtly idealistic; for example the coronation of Elizabeth II or the Festival of Britain.<sup>33</sup> The reluctance of academics to cross interdisciplinary boundaries has exacerbated the difficulties of taking post-war history beyond the optimistic assessments of the 1950s. This contributed to historians’ failures to integrate political and social history to “fit the disparate pieces together”.<sup>34</sup>

This optimistic framing of post-war British history has been complemented by the journalists, commentators and celebrities, born during the ‘baby boom’ years of the 1950s and 60s, who nostalgically reminisce of their hedonistic lives, enumerating the

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<sup>28</sup> See Appendix III.

<sup>29</sup> For a full version of Piachaud’s criticisms see Piachaud, D., ‘Peter Townsend and the Holy Grail’, *New Society*, vol. 57, no. 3, pp. 419-21; Piachaud, D., *Children and Poverty*, Child Poverty Action Group, 1981.

<sup>30</sup> For example, a society may well entirely remove wealth and income inequality, but poverty would exist if people, within that society, chose not to eat ‘a cooked breakfast most days of the week’. Haralambos and Holborn, *Sociology*, p. 243; Sen, A.K., *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981, p. 153.

<sup>31</sup> Haralambos and Holborn, *Sociology*, p. 285. For debates concerning affluence and poverty into the twenty-first century see Majima, S., ‘Affluence and the Dynamics of Spending in Britain, 1961-2004’, *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 22, No. 4, December 2008.

<sup>32</sup> Conekin, B., F. Mort and C. Waters (eds.) *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain, 1945-1964*, London: Rivers Orem Press, 1999, p. 20.

<sup>33</sup> Conekin, et al., *Moments*, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> Conekin, et al., *Moments*, p. 8. “In short, the writings of political historians like David Childs and social historians like Arthur Marwick remain locked in wholly distinct realms, as if ‘politics’ and ‘society’ had very little to do with each other”.

social and cultural changes of lost, or misspent, youth.<sup>35</sup> These publications, written as their authors approach retirement age, endorsed optimistic perceptions of the period. From the Festival of Britain to mini-skirts and television sets, the changes and benefits of living in modern society were extolled within these memoirs. As Hudson has suggested, “underlying [all] these changes, and the whole pattern of post-war British society, was the Welfare State”.<sup>36</sup> It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the optimistic depiction has prevailed, largely unchallenged.

Perceptions of war as a catalyst for social and cultural reform influenced assessments of post-war life and assumptions of the disappearance of poverty. Although, the vicissitudes of the workers, their precarious living and working conditions and the imminent threat of poverty in the inter-war period, *has* been thoroughly assessed by social historians,<sup>37</sup> the later period has generated considerably less interest. The increasing affluence of the majority of British citizens and the consequential effects upon class disparities, consumption and lifestyles has been well-documented.<sup>38</sup> Hopkins argued that the working-class experienced a “levelling up” by 1970 and Green extolled the “an enormous social change...economic boom, near full employment, [and] a wealth of accessible, affordable consumer items”.<sup>39</sup> Recently, Kynaston has accused popular historians of “ignoring the overwhelming extent to which social and cultural life reverted after 1945 to familiar patterns”.<sup>40</sup>

Social historians described a period of austerity, followed by a prolonged period of affluence, culminating in a social and cultural-revolution experienced by the entire

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<sup>35</sup> Hunter Davies, “1966 I was there.. (and I remember it all)”, *Daily Mail Weekend*, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2006; Davies, R., *X-Ray: The Unauthorized Autobiography*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995; Lawson, T., *Twiggy in Black and White*, London: Charnwood Library, 1997; Melly, G., *Owning Up: The Trilogy*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Classic, 2000; Leitch, D., *The Hurdy Gurdy Man: The Autobiography of Donovan*, London: Century, 2005; Titchmarsh, A., *Nobbut a Lad: A Yorkshire Childhood*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2007; Panter, H., *Ska'd for Life*, London: Pan Books, 2008; Hudson, C., “Truly, the Fifties Were Fabulous”, *Daily Mail*, 26<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

<sup>36</sup> Hudson, K., *Pawnbroking: An Aspect of British History*, London: Bodley Head, 1982. p. 26.

<sup>37</sup> See Benson, J., *The Working Class in England, 1875-1914*, London: Croom Helm, 1985; Benson, *The Working Class*; Chinn, C., *They Worked All Their Lives: Women of the Urban Poor in England, 1880-1939*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988; Hopkins, *A Social History*; Meacham, S., *A Life Apart: The English Working Class, 1890-1914*, London: Thams & Hudson, 1977; Purvis, J, ed., *Women's History: Britain, 1850-1945, An Introduction*, London: UCL Press, 1995; Roberts, E., *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women, 1890-1940*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984.

<sup>38</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*; Laurie, P., *The Teenage Revolution*, London: Anthony Blond, 1965; Hopkins, H., *The New Look: A Social History of the Forties and Fifties*, London: Readers Union, 1963; Green, *All Dressed Up*.

<sup>39</sup> Hopkins, *New Look*, pp. 337-9; Green, *All Dressed Up*, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Kynaston, *Family Britain*, p. 138.

population.<sup>41</sup> However, Sandbrook has suggested that prosperity was not universal and questioned the concept of revolution, arguing that the period was one of fundamental continuity, in both politics and culture.<sup>42</sup> Recently, a volume of *Contemporary British History* explored the concept of affluence, cautioning that ‘affluence’ was uncertain and should not be viewed “as a clearly defined entity... [as] its terms were contested, fraught and fragile”.<sup>43</sup>

The transition from war to peace heralded several decades of “golden age”, in Hobsbawm’s perception. In 1994, he claimed that the Second World War was “followed by some twenty five or thirty years of extraordinary economic growth and social transformation, which probably changed human society more profoundly than any other period of comparable brevity”<sup>44</sup> Pollard acknowledged the importance of high employment levels and incomes, maintaining that state welfare virtually abolished primary, or abject, poverty.<sup>45</sup> Between 1940 and 1970, Roberts found an incontrovertible improvement in living conditions and poverty levels, applauding the “security, both financial and psychological, offered by the Welfare State”.<sup>46</sup> Akhtar and Humphries argued that “most people were better housed, better fed and healthier than in the past”, providing the population with greater freedom and wider choices – in essence a ‘lifestyle revolution’.<sup>47</sup>

However, in 1991, Vincent introduced a note of pessimism, contending that, the Welfare State “denied...[the poor] the dignity and status essential to their social citizenship,” ultimately impeding their ability to elude poverty.<sup>48</sup> He claimed that

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<sup>41</sup> Marwick, *The Sixties*.

<sup>42</sup> Sandbrook, *Never Had it*. Despite the accumulation of extensive amounts of information, Sandbrook’s work has elicited criticism for its lack of research and tendency to ‘reiterate what was said by the more perceptive critics at the time’. Lowe, R., ‘Life Begins in the Seventies? Writing and Rewriting the History of Postwar Britain’ *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2007, p. 4; Marwick A., review of Sandbrook in *History Today*, September 2005, pp. 54-5.

<sup>43</sup> *Contemporary British History*, vol. 22, no. 4, December 2008. Majima, S. and M. Savage, ‘Contesting Affluence: An Introduction’.

<sup>44</sup> Hobsbawm, E., *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, London: Abacus, 1994, p. 6

<sup>45</sup> Pollard, S., *The Development of the British Economy, 1914-1990*, London: Edward Arnold, 1992, p. 221; Robbins, K., *The Eclipse of a Great Power: Modern Britain, 1870-1975*, Harlow: Longman, 1983, p. 208.

<sup>46</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Akhtar, M. and S. Humphries, *The Fifties and the Sixties: A Lifestyle Revolution*, London: Boxtree, 2001, p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 206.



although “the welfare state in conjunction with an expanding economy had reduced the troughs in the poverty life-cycle [which] Rowntree had identified half a century earlier...its basic outline was still clearly visible”. He apportioned the blame between the insurmountable financial difficulties of further reform and the residual stigma of state aid.<sup>49</sup> This was endorsed within the oral testimony obtained for this thesis, with respondents recalling the loss of respectability and status engendered by the acceptance of welfare payments.<sup>50</sup>

Calvocaressi endorsed Vincent’s pessimism, suggesting that poverty continued into the 1970s; he intimated that approximately two million people lived in poverty, largely due to the defective, complex and unwieldy welfare system. Ultimately, this system failed to remove the *stigma* of financial aid and set unreasonably low payment levels, resulting in a “shocking number of people who were poor in the sense of being below the official (and by no means generous) poverty level and in need of financial help even after drawing benefits to which they were entitled.”<sup>51</sup>

### ***Class and Community in inter-war Britain***

In order to examine change and continuity in post-war localities, it is necessary to examine the historiography of the inter-war period. Fortunately there has been a substantial body of research in this area. The following discussion will be centred upon various analyses of family life and material conditions.

The dominant view of the inter-war period is one of gradual improvement for working-class families. Both men and women had gained nominal power at the ballot box and experienced the benefits of a five-fold increase in expenditure on social services, including educational provision and welfare clinics.<sup>52</sup> In fact, Roberts indicated an earlier improvement; in his estimation abject poverty was disappearing from Salford by 1916.<sup>53</sup>

However, intra-class stratification resulted in economic disparity between various working-class groups and personal catastrophe easily plunged a relatively affluent

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<sup>49</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 141.

<sup>50</sup> See chapters three and five below.

<sup>51</sup> Calvocaressi, P., *The British Experience, 1945-75*, London: Bodley Head, 1978, p. 122.

<sup>52</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 70.

<sup>53</sup> Roberts, *Classic Slum*, p. 164. In his estimation life improved as children were better fed, neglected less and petty crime decreased.

family into destitution.<sup>54</sup> Lewis endorsed this, highlighting the difficulties of differentiation within working-class communities, precisely because of the ever-present possibility of misfortune.<sup>55</sup> This is corroborated within the autobiographies of this period when short-time or unemployment - particularly of the main breadwinner - had a catastrophic effect on the family economy and loss of respectability.<sup>56</sup>

Much interest has been generated concerning the stratification of the pre-war working class, drawing distinctions between skilled and unskilled, 'rough' and 'respectable', resulting in comparative studies of attitudes, morals, lifestyles and living conditions.<sup>57</sup> These have provided insights into the ordering of working-class communities, neighbourhood life and social structures, challenging sociological tendencies to exaggerate the "cosy gregariousness" of the people residing in slum conditions.<sup>58</sup> Roberts criticized the inter-war "proletarian authors" with a tendency towards sentimentality.<sup>59</sup> However, he acknowledged emotional involvement in his work, viewing it as a necessary antidote to the statistical approach of sociologists.<sup>60</sup> Consequently, Meacham recommended that Hoggart's analysis, of the causes and effects of rapid social transition, was used in conjunction with Roberts' more astringent assessments of working-class life.<sup>61</sup> Chinn's study into the lives of the pre-war urban poor displays a deep admiration for the capabilities of working-class women, reflecting his working-class upbringing and antecedents. He has acknowledged that various loyalties and social background, influences the historian's opinions and perceptions.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Rowntree, *Poverty*, p. 77. Rowntree's cycle of poverty has demonstrated that the viability of the family economy could be indisputably jeopardised by unemployment, illness, or death.

<sup>55</sup> Lewis, J., *Women in England 1870-1950: Sexual Division and Social Change*, London: Wheatsheaf, 1984, p. 10.

<sup>56</sup> Dayus, K. *Her People*, London: Virago, 1982, p. 25; Dayus, K. *Where There's Life*, London: Virago, 1985, p. 78; Foley, W., *A Child in the Forest*, Cheltenham: Thornhill Press, 1991.

<sup>57</sup> See Chinn, *They Worked*; Roberts, *Classic Slum*; Meacham, *Life Apart*.

<sup>58</sup> Roberts, *Classic Slum*, p. 30.

<sup>59</sup> Roberts, *Classic Slum*, p. 32. Hoggart, for example, has received criticism for painting an exaggerated and over-romanticised portrait of working-class family life in the inter-war years.

<sup>60</sup> Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, p. 18. Hoggart was born in 1918 into an impoverished family; in this partly autobiographical work he laments the loss of 'authentic' popular culture in working-class communities. His justification for his approach is that although a writer from a working class background has "his own temptations to error, [which are] somewhat different from but no less than those from another class".

<sup>61</sup> Meacham, *Life Apart*, p. 9.

<sup>62</sup> Chinn, *They Worked*, p. 13.

Generalisations regarding working-class people and communities can be foolhardy; it is vital not to categorise any class as a “homogeneous mass”.<sup>63</sup> Yet the majority of historians indicate a gradual improvement in working-class circumstances during the first half of the century, dependent on a number of variables, including age, gender, occupation and income.<sup>64</sup> In Hopkins’ estimation, despite unemployment, overall living standards and consumer expenditure rose, consequently, the “working classes *as a whole* appear to have been better fed, better clothed, and better housed than was the case a generation earlier.”<sup>65</sup>

The extended family and the community have been traditionally perceived as vital to the well-being and security of working-class life - necessary for the close proximity of kinship support and the reciprocity of goods and services.<sup>66</sup> Klein claimed that the close-knit environment was a major component of survival, enabling families to retain independence and autonomy, by eluding the stigma of reliance on external agencies and formal aid - a view endorsed by other historians.<sup>67</sup> Mutual self-help was the cornerstone to inter-war working-class survival, part of the “inherited cultural equipment” of traditional life.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, Benson cautioned that neighbourhood solidarities were declining on council estates after 1918, as the designs of new estates were not conducive to neighbourliness and families lacked the customary networks to “ease their integration into the neighbourhood”.<sup>69</sup> However, the author’s preliminary work in Tipton tentatively suggests otherwise.<sup>70</sup>

Inter-war working-class economic survival was dependent upon a number of variables; of particular importance was the total *family* income. Individual earnings were habitually contributed to the collective economy and expended for the benefit of the family.<sup>71</sup> Benson demonstrated that families obtained additional income from casual, part-time self-employment or ‘penny capitalist’ activities, supplementing

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<sup>63</sup> Benson, *The Working Class*, p. 207.

<sup>64</sup> Benson, *The Working Class*.

<sup>65</sup> Hopkins, *Social History*, p. 229.

<sup>66</sup> Meacham, *Life Apart*, p. 46.

<sup>67</sup> Klein, J., *Samples from English Cultures, Volume I*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965, p.205; Chinn, *They Worked*, p. 37; Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 16.

<sup>68</sup> Johnson, P., *Spending and Saving: The Working-Class Economy in Britain, 1870-1939*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985, p. 9.

<sup>69</sup> Benson, *Working Class*, p. 123.

<sup>70</sup> Watkiss, ‘Strategies’.

<sup>71</sup> Roberts *Women and Families*, pp. 89-90.

waged labour on an ad hoc basis.<sup>72</sup> “Relatively few families were dependent solely upon the one or two types of wage labour that they described...to the census enumerator”, relying on a range of money-making activities from entrepreneurial ventures to petty crime.<sup>73</sup> Vincent concurred that “the household was the principal unit for devising and implementing strategies for survival”.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, throughout this period, the nature of working-class life remained precarious; illness or accident subsequently plunged a ‘respectable’ family into penury and failure to balance income with expenditure resulted in poverty.<sup>75</sup>

As the main breadwinner and controlling force, the husband was “master in his own home”.<sup>76</sup> This was particularly true of unskilled working-class men, who sometimes compensated for their inferiority in the hierarchy of the workplace by “playing the king at home”.<sup>77</sup> McKibbin contended that they “inhabited the public sphere”, disassociated from domestic issues until the 1950s.<sup>78</sup> Consequently, the majority of husbands distanced themselves from budgeting, providing a set amount of housekeeping. A ‘good’ husband handed his wage-packet to his wife, receiving pocket money in return.<sup>79</sup> In Benson’s estimation, the husband’s duties ended with the provision of “as high and steady an income as possible,” as responsibility for managing these finances lay with his wife.<sup>80</sup> Lewis highlighted the masculine role of economic support,<sup>81</sup> which is corroborated in Cookson’s recollections of Tyne Dock, where men “just went out to work”, as fulfilling a wider role within the home damaged a man’s “prestige” in the community.<sup>82</sup>

Consequently, wives and mothers were of paramount importance, as controllers of family finances and arbiters of moral standards. The mother was the “pivot of the

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<sup>72</sup> Benson, *Working Class*, p. 26; Benson, *The Penny Capitalists*.

<sup>73</sup> Benson, *The Working Class*, p. 26; Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 5.

<sup>74</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 5.

<sup>75</sup> Johnson, *Spending*, p. 3.

<sup>76</sup> Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 48.

<sup>77</sup> Roberts, *Classic Slum*, p. 33.

<sup>78</sup> McKibbin, R., *Classes and Cultures: England, 1891-1951*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 518.

<sup>79</sup> Haynes, G. L., *A New Home in a Model Village: Memories of a Bournville Childhood, 1920-40*, Bournville: BCS, 1995, p. 35. Hoggart agreed that many husbands handed over wages packets, but indicated that some maintained secrecy keeping the precise amount from their wives. p. 49.

<sup>80</sup> Benson, J., *The Rise Of Consumer Society, 1880-1980*, Harlow: Longman, 1994, p. 182.

<sup>81</sup> Lewis, *Women in England*, pp. 10-12.

<sup>82</sup> Cookson, C., *Our Kate*, London: Corgi, 1974, p. 26. Her grandfather described men who undertook to help with domestic duties as “nappy washers”

home”;<sup>83</sup> her economic role a crucial determinant in family survival, particularly her skills as “chancellor of the family exchequer”.<sup>84</sup> Her judgment influenced all financial decisions, from applying for tick at the corner shop to deciding what to pawn.<sup>85</sup> She was decisive in the maintenance of a façade of respectability – a buffer against the shameful descent into poverty. In addition to the role of household manager, working-class women enforced moral codes within the neighbourhood, functioning as a group conscience to observe, censure or punish.<sup>86</sup> They undertook paid employment due to financial necessity, usually temporarily in times of need.<sup>87</sup> Although their wages were a vital supplement to the family income, the propriety of married women’s employment remained questionable.<sup>88</sup> Areas of employment were likely to be restricted to domestic or factory-based work, with women undertaking low paid, semi-skilled or unskilled jobs,<sup>89</sup> in order to balance the family budget.<sup>90</sup>

The mother and daughter bond was a crucial aspect of inter-war family life. They were close “both spatially and emotionally”,<sup>91</sup> with young couples relying on the mother’s proximity for advice and practical assistance.<sup>92</sup> McKibbin described this inter-generational relationship as the “axis” of the family;<sup>93</sup> with mother making vital decisions concerning finances, housing, education and employment. Her strength and resourcefulness elicited the enduring gratitude of her offspring.<sup>94</sup>

Children’s financial contributions were a necessary augmentation of the family economy.<sup>95</sup> Working-class adolescents in full-time employment retained a small portion of their earnings, whilst the majority was, necessarily, part of a communal

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<sup>83</sup> Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 38

<sup>84</sup> Lewis, *Women in England*, p. 45; Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 1; Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 39. Hoggart argued that it was accepted that upon marriage women would assume this critical role.

<sup>85</sup> Tebbutt, M., *Making Ends Meet: Pawnbroking and Working-Class Credit*, Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1983, p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> Roberts, *Classic Slum*, p. 26.

<sup>87</sup> D’Cruze, S., “Women and the Family” in Purvis, J., (ed.), *Women’s History: Britain, 1850-1945*, London: UCL Press, 1995, p. 61; Lewis, *Women in England*, p. 52.

<sup>88</sup> Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures*.

<sup>89</sup> Chinn, *They Worked*, p. 99.

<sup>90</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 115.

<sup>91</sup> Chinn, *They Worked*, p. 25. Chinn provided detailed information concerning the specialist skills of the matriarchs and their crucial contribution to family and community life. p. 37.

<sup>92</sup> Roberts, *Classic Slum*, p.27.

<sup>93</sup> McKibbin, *Classes*, p.170.

<sup>94</sup> Heren, L., *Growing Up Poor In London*, London: Indigo, 1973, p. 34.

<sup>95</sup> Benson, *Working Class*, p. 28; Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 19.

fund.<sup>96</sup> However, consensus regarding children's financial contributions and filial devotion was refuted in Forrester's autobiography. She recalled an antagonistic mother/daughter relationship. "In those days, many mothers believed that they owned not only their daughters, but also everything that their children earned". Her wages from full-time employment were appropriated by her mother, so financial autonomy was obtained by teaching evening classes.<sup>97</sup> Historians generally emphasised the close, loving bonds in working-class families, with children as the central feature of women's lives, their compensation for monotony, hardship and drudgery.<sup>98</sup>

The struggle to 'make ends meet' and to supplement wages remained crucial. Vincent's assertion that the survival techniques utilised during the inter-war years "belonged largely to the nineteenth century" has been endorsed.<sup>99</sup> Although Benson demonstrated caution; whilst acknowledging Roberts' evidence concerning survival strategies, he warned that "it cannot be shown that penny capitalism survived intact into the twentieth century".<sup>100</sup>

The inter-war slum clearance programme and re-housing clearly impacted upon working-class families. The new housing was more spacious and, consequently, less crowded, but rents were much higher and combined with the cost of travel an expensive proposition. Removal severed some familial ties and, as Benson argued, broke down the "old solidarities of the neighbourhood",<sup>101</sup> leading to isolation and the dislocation of the family. However, in some areas neighbourhood ties retained their importance in the inter-war years, providing support in times of economic hardship.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Benson, *Working Class*, p. 18. In the pre-war Benson states that 'long before they left school' children contributed to the family economy. p. 31.

<sup>97</sup> Forrester, H., *Lime Street at Two*, Hammersmith: Harper Collins, 1994, p. 12.

<sup>98</sup> Lewis, *Women in England*, p. 2.

<sup>99</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 83. Roberts, *Women and Families*; Chinn, *They Worked*; Roberts, *Classic Slum*. Roberts stresses the fact that most of the poor "still retained the outlook and thought patterns" of the Victorian era. p. 16.

<sup>100</sup> Benson, *Penny Capitalists*, p. 129.

<sup>101</sup> Benson, *The Working Class*, p. 123; Lewis, *Women in England*, p. 10.

<sup>102</sup> Chinn, *They Worked*, p. 37.

### *Working-Class Communities in post-war Britain*

Historians of the post-war working class produced essentially optimistic accounts of prosperity and social change. The optimism is encapsulated in sociological assertions that welfare payments, rising incomes, increased mobility and wider horizons meant that “for the working class in general it was a very good time indeed”.<sup>103</sup> This period has elicited a sizeable quantity of research into communities, living conditions and cultural change - much of which holds relevance for this study. Again, the social scientists are responsible for the majority of social surveys, with historians utilising this research within their analyses.

The changing physical environment and its impact on family life generated attention from sociologists and historians. From slum clearance to new housing, debate focused on the changes within communities and cultures. Although pre-war improvements were made, working-class housing was transformed between 1940 and 1970.<sup>104</sup> The demolition programme continued, rendered urgent by the devastation of wartime bombing, resulting in the construction of over 200,000 council houses per year between 1952 and 1954.<sup>105</sup> Owner-occupation escalated, from 31% in 1951 to 52% by 1971,<sup>106</sup> with increasing numbers of the affluent working-class aspiring to home-ownership, contributing to the blurring of class lines.<sup>107</sup> McKibbin claimed that the socially-mixed inhabitants of the new estates had higher expectations of standards and respectability, which clearly breached class distinctions.<sup>108</sup>

These environmental changes impacted upon families in a number of crucial areas. The new homes were undoubtedly more spacious possessing additional amenities, including bathrooms and running water, which was beneficial to family health and well-being.<sup>109</sup> Nevertheless, there were problems and the difficulties of settling in to new estates in Huddersfield,<sup>110</sup> Luton<sup>111</sup> or Birmingham<sup>112</sup> have been well

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<sup>103</sup> Blackwell and Seabrook, *A World*, p. 84.

<sup>104</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 22.

<sup>105</sup> Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures*, p. 156.

<sup>106</sup> Benson, J., *Affluence and Authority: A Social History of Twentieth Century Britain*, Harlow: Longman, 1994, p. 4.

<sup>107</sup> Royle, E., *Modern Britain: A Social History, 1750-1985*, London: Edward Arnold, 1987, p. 147.

<sup>108</sup> McKibbin, *Classes*, p. 200-201.

<sup>109</sup> Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 260.

<sup>110</sup> Jackson, B., *Working-Class Community: some general notions raised by a series of studies in northern England*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968.

documented.<sup>113</sup> Goldthorpe argued that the estates were located at inconvenient distance from shops and town centres, necessitating travelling expenditure.<sup>114</sup> Arguably, the isolation and the impersonality of the estates were problematic as they removed families from their familiar communities and loosened kinship ties.<sup>115</sup>

From the early 1950s sociological surveys have compared the behavioural patterns of new communities with those of inner-city slums.<sup>116</sup> The consensus was that, despite working-class affluence and the accessibility of previously middle-class consumer durables, families adhered to accepted patterns of behaviour and morals. In fact, writing in 1958, Kerr found that transferral to new estates impacted minimally upon conduct and habits; the “rituals and traditions of the past” were preserved and continued in the new environment.<sup>117</sup>

The examination of working-class Luton, in 1971, analysed the effects of increased earnings, re-location and employment upon working-class culture and lifestyles.<sup>118</sup> The authors challenged theories that post-war progress led to the demise of the working class by facilitating their absorption into middle-class behavioural patterns and aspirations. They concluded that, despite changes in lifestyle and living standards resulting in the rejection of some traditional norms, working-class embourgeoisement is “not proven”.<sup>119</sup> However, despite the undeniable contribution of this work, Critchler warns against unquestioning use of social surveys without consideration of

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<sup>111</sup> Goldthorpe, et al., *Affluent Worker*.

<sup>112</sup> Hanley, L., *Estates: An Intimate History*, London: Granta Books, 2007; Chinn, C., *Homes for the People: 100 years of Council Housing in Birmingham*, Birmingham: Birmingham Books, 1981; Haynes, *A New Home*.

<sup>113</sup> Clapson, M., ‘Working-class Women’s Experiences of Moving to New Housing Estates in England since 1919’, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 1999, pp. 345-365. Clapson discusses twentieth century women’s experiences of the transition from older housing to living in the suburbs and new towns.

<sup>114</sup> Goldthorpe, et al., *Affluent Worker*, p. 59; Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures*, p. 155

<sup>115</sup> Schaffer, F., *The New Town Story*, Paladin, 1992, p. 92; Seabrook, *Landscapes*, p. 110; McKibbin, *Classes*, p. 519; Jackson, *Working-Class*, p. 150.

<sup>116</sup> Young, M. and P. Wilmott, *Family and Kinship in East London*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962; Mays, J. B., *Growing Up in the City: A Study of Juvenile Delinquency in an Urban Neighbourhood*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1954; Coates and Silburn, *Poverty*.

<sup>117</sup> Kerr, *People*, p. 3.

<sup>118</sup> Goldthorpe, et al., *Affluent Worker*.

<sup>119</sup> Goldthorpe et al., *Affluent Worker*, p. 26.



the *context* of the studies and the agenda of “social-democratic intellectuals [who] are faced with the contention that capitalism works”.<sup>120</sup>

The historiography of this period considered the modification of working-class families, focusing attention on the *changing roles* and interaction of family members, in the light of post-war economic and social freedoms. Conekin criticised the compartmentalisation of post-war history into the ubiquitous accounts of modernisation, political consensus, social stability and affluence. He described these “overly discrete accounts”, with their “comfortable and familiar images” of the decline of Empire, economic growth or political consensus, as a reaction against the “grand explanatory ...narratives” of social scientists.<sup>121</sup>

It is generally accepted that Britain underwent radical changes after 1945, which were particularly beneficial to the working class. Burnett claimed that “higher living standards, better housing, clothing and diet, more leisure and more material possessions” were enjoyed by all, but “these improvements in living standards were most marked in the working classes”.<sup>122</sup> This optimism is reinforced by Roberts’ recognition of fundamental social and economic change for working-class families.<sup>123</sup> Laing cited increased prosperity and the “tangible improvements” evidenced in the material possessions to be found within the new estates<sup>124</sup> and Donnelly indicated “unprecedented” improvement in material conditions for the majority of the population.<sup>125</sup> However, Sandbrook underlined the tensions between the immediate material prosperity and the predictions of national decline,<sup>126</sup> believing that “hardship and equality clearly persisted,” regardless of the ways in which poverty was defined.<sup>127</sup> Todd’s recent reassessment of post-war Liverpool concluded that

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<sup>120</sup> Critcher, C., “Sociology, Cultural Studies and the Post-War Working Class”, in Clarke et al., *Working-Class*, p. 16.

<sup>121</sup> Conekin, et al. *Moments*, pp. 4-8.

<sup>122</sup> Burnett, J., *A Social History of Housing, 1815-1970*, London: Methuen and Co., 1978, p. 273; Rosen, A., *The Transformation of British Life, 1950-2000: A Social History*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003.

<sup>123</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 1.

<sup>124</sup> Laing, S., *Representations of Working-Class Life, 1957-1964*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986, pp. 13-24.

<sup>125</sup> Donnelly, M., *Sixties Britain: Culture, Society and Politics*, Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd., 2005, p. 3.

<sup>126</sup> Sandbrook, *Never Had It*, p. xxii.

<sup>127</sup> Sandbrook, *Never Had It*, p. 169.

“assumptions about post-war ‘affluence’...overlook the fact that vulnerability to poverty continued to shape working-class life”,<sup>128</sup> which is endorsed by this study.

Emphasis was given to the disintegration of traditional ties, beginning in the inter-war period, when old communities were transformed by council house provision.<sup>129</sup> Nevertheless, Meacham believed that the continuing economic and physical support of the neighbourhood remained invaluable in times of adversity,<sup>130</sup> as confirmed within this thesis. Increasing incomes and employment opportunities, combined with improved living conditions and the security of the welfare state affected family life. The historiography has traced aspects of continuity and change, particularly regarding shifts in status and power.

Roberts established that between 1940 and 1970, as a result of material changes, husbands were no longer remote patriarchs, providing weekly incomes and enjoying social lives in the public sphere, but participated increasingly in family life. Masculine social activities became domestically-orientated as new homes were costly to maintain and their upkeep time-consuming. Consequently, gardening and D.I.Y. provided hobbies and consumed masculine leisure time.<sup>131</sup> Bourke endorsed this, as life on new estates removed men from the proximity of the public house, focusing attention upon home and family.<sup>132</sup>

The husband’s role of provider remained important, despite state benefits. Mays depicted the man as “economic master”, apportioning his income as he deemed appropriate.<sup>133</sup> This was endorsed in 1962, in Bethnal Green, where the wife’s ignorance of a husband’s wage packet was clearly acknowledged.<sup>134</sup> It would, however, be foolhardy to assume that the behaviour in particularly impoverished areas is necessarily replicated in more affluent regions. Bailey intimated that the

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<sup>128</sup> Todd, ‘Affluence, Class and Crown Street’, p. 514.

<sup>129</sup> Lewis, *Women*; Klein, *Samples*; Benson, *The Working Class*.

<sup>130</sup> Meacham, *Life Apart*, pp. 47-52.

<sup>131</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 15; Sandbrook, *Never Had It*, p. 191.

<sup>132</sup> Bourke, *Working-Class Culture*, p. 85.

<sup>133</sup> Mays, *Growing Up*, p. 86.

<sup>134</sup> Young and Wilmott, *Family*, p. 27.

disadvantage of increased earning capacity was the necessity of continued absence from home, as excessive hours of overtime were crucial to economic progress.<sup>135</sup>

It has been suggested that the role and status of women was eroded as a result of the post-war changes. McKibbin claimed that housing improvements impacted on women's behavioural patterns and power, as slum clearance and re-housing weakened matrilocality.<sup>136</sup> This was endorsed by Chinn's belief that the Second World War heralded the "death knell" of the traditional mores of the urban poor.<sup>137</sup> However, this argument is not clear-cut and will be challenged within this thesis. As Klein and others have indicated, in many instances mothers and daughters remained both emotionally and geographically close and the physical proximity of the family was of continuing importance.<sup>138</sup>

However, several studies have endorsed the erosion of women's power during post-war prosperity. Roberts described the "undermining" of the woman's role, as the new-found affluence of skilled manual-workers no longer required women's budgeting ability as a buffer against penury.<sup>139</sup> Benson stated that as affluence increased women "relinquished some of... [their previous] autonomy" over family finances;<sup>140</sup> but he exhorted caution, warning against simplistic assumptions concerning changes in women's power,<sup>141</sup> as do Clarke, Critcher and Johnson.<sup>142</sup>

There is no doubt that the numbers of women in paid employment escalated during this time,<sup>143</sup> but their reasons for doing so became increasingly complex. Financial necessity was no longer the sole explanation, as married women working outside the home became socially acceptable and the labour shortage of the 1950s encouraged their return to work.<sup>144</sup> Official messages were contradictory, simultaneously

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<sup>135</sup> Bailey, P., 'Jazz at the Spirella: Coming of Age in Coventry in the 1950s' in Conekin, et al., *Moments of Modernity*, p. 24.

<sup>136</sup> McKibbin, *Classes*, p. 519.

<sup>137</sup> Chinn, *They Worked*, p. 11.

<sup>138</sup> Klein, *Samples*, p. 55; Mays, *Growing Up*, p. 93; Coates and Silburn, *Poverty*, p. 104; Kerr, *The People*, pp. 13-15; Young and Wilmott, *Family*, p. 35.

<sup>139</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 11.

<sup>140</sup> Benson, *Rise of Consumer Society*, p. 183.

<sup>141</sup> Benson, *Affluence and Authority*, p. 17.

<sup>142</sup> Clarke, et al., *Working-Class Cultures*, p. 197.

<sup>143</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 118.

<sup>144</sup> Bourke, *Working-Class*, p. 128.

exhorting women to engage in paid work, whilst promoting their domestic role.<sup>145</sup> Vincent believed that poverty remained a factor, with increasing numbers of women preferring employment to the humiliation of state aid.<sup>146</sup> However, in Bruley's opinion many women *chose* to work, to buy 'extras' for the family, luxury items as opposed to necessities.<sup>147</sup>

The literature is in broad agreement that the adolescents' role changed, as children had more freedom, access to education and less financial responsibility towards the family. Much research centred upon the advent of a specific youth culture, examining the new-found affluence of teenagers and the influence of music and clothing upon juvenile behaviour.<sup>148</sup> Laurie's investigation revealed that, since the 1950s "teenagers have formed a society of their own". He highlighted their increasing disposable income and a decrease in contributions to the family economy.<sup>149</sup> Benson, attributed this to full employment and high wages<sup>150</sup> and Hoggart declared the earnings of working-class children as their "little bit extra".<sup>151</sup> Sandbrook, remained ambivalent, charting the increased affluence of teenagers but indicating the continuing existence of economic disparity between disparate groups of the young.<sup>152</sup>

Overall, at a national level, the literature denoted the post-war period in principally optimistic terms, portraying an era in which the affluence of the majority, characterised by the auspices of state welfare, improved living standards and increased disposable incomes, must be juxtaposed against changes to, or perhaps even the loss of, traditional cultural references and social mores.

Undeniably, the period between 1945 and 1970 was a time of escalating affluence and improved living standards within Britain. However, this study will suggest that any

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<sup>145</sup> Bruley, S., *Women in Britain Since 1900*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999, p. 121.

<sup>146</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 147.

<sup>147</sup> Bruley, *Women*, p. 124.

<sup>148</sup> See Green, *All Dressed Up*; Hall, S., and T. Jefferson, *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, London: Hutchison and Co., 1976; Heron, L., (ed.), *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing Up in the Fifties*, Virago, 1985; Rowbotham, S., *Promise of a Dream: remembering the Sixties*, London: Allen Lane, 2000. Chapter 6 of Sandbrook's *White Heat*, deals with the relationship between teenage affluence, youth culture and modern music.

<sup>149</sup> Laurie, *The Teenage Revolution*, p. 21.

<sup>150</sup> Benson, *Consumer Society*, p. 18.

<sup>151</sup> Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 116; Akhtar and Humphries, *The Fifties*, p. 18; Green, *All Dressed Up*, p. 3.

<sup>152</sup> Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, p. 413.

changes were slow to affect the inhabitants of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton and that pre-war behavioural patterns continued within these communities. Despite suggestions to the contrary,<sup>153</sup> post-war affluence impacted minimally upon traditional mores of neighbourliness and community cohesion; kinship networks and matrilocality remained central tenets of life. Although prosperity was a consequence of increased employment opportunities and higher wages, the Welfare State made scant impression upon the psyche of its potential recipients, or their customary habits. The study will challenge prevailing views that teenagers' contributions were no longer part of the family economy. Through the oral testimony, it will demonstrate that the majority of people utilised spending and saving conventions of former generations. Despite increased access to consumer durables, the advent of supermarkets and newer forms of credit, the respondents continued to employ established methods of consumption, which were financed in the traditional manner of earlier eras. Parental opinion retained a significant impact upon attitudes to purchasing, as well as methods of saving, and perceptions of respectability were a critical factor in conduct and beliefs. Between 1945 and the early 1970s, affluence failed to dissipate the habitual behaviour of the inhabitants of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton.

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<sup>153</sup> Benson, *The Working Class*; Lewis, *Women In England*; Hanley, *Estates*.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### LOCALITIES: PENSNETT, SEDGLEY AND TIPTON

Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton lie in the heart of the Black Country situated predominantly in south-west Staffordshire. This chapter will provide demographic, economic and environmental profiles of the localities. Firstly, it focuses upon defining the region and outlining the historical development of the three areas. It will then outline post-war changes in demographic and economic trends and the infra-structural modification of each area after 1945. Finally, in order to provide a clearer understanding of the changes and continuities in cultural and social mores, the respondents' recollections of living within the communities of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton will be considered. The oral testimony provides an insight into the complex relationship between class, location, status and respectability.

Defining the precise boundaries of the Black Country remains a controversial issue,<sup>1</sup> generating much debate. Local critics have described it as beginning, and ending, at a neighbouring locality, *not* their own.<sup>2</sup> As Solomon asserted “the Black Country was never where one lived oneself but began at the next town!”<sup>3</sup> Broad definitions may be generally agreed but precision is more problematic. Writing in the 1960s, Gale described the area as “ill-defined...Definitions exist, but all are different and none is really satisfactory.”<sup>4</sup> It is a “quadrilateral of towns” with Wolverhampton, Walsall,

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<sup>1</sup> Raybould, T.J., *The Economic Emergence of the Black Country: A Study of the Dudley Estate*, Newton Abbott: David and Charles, 1973, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Chitham, E., *The Black Country*, Harlow: Longman, 1972, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Solomon, P., *Black Country Ways in Bygone Days*, Willenhall: PKP Publications, 1992, p. 6. He believed that this perception of the area began to change by the 1970s and that people became proud of their Black Country heritage. Bibby, B., *Grey Peas and Bacon: A Journey to the Heart of the Black Country*, London: TravellersEye Ltd., 2001, p. 17. Bibby stated that he came from the Black Country but had for many years been “slightly embarrassed to say that”. However, over the past twenty years his perceptions of, and attitude to, the area had changed.

<sup>4</sup> Gale, W.K.V., *The Black Country Iron Industry: A Technical History*, London: The Metals Society, 1979 [first published in 1966], p. 1.

He continued stating that it has neither physical nor political boundaries and utilised the whereabouts of the iron trade to define boundaries. Chitham, *Black Country*, used the location of the coal deposits to provide a working definition of the area. Bibby, *Grey Peas*, p. 24. In his opinion it is now defined as the area of the West Midlands to the west of Birmingham encompassing the present-day boroughs of Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton.

Smethwick and Stourbridge at the right-angles.<sup>5</sup> Despite difficulties of definition, it retained “coherent and persistent character” due a lack of economic or social upheavals, unlike other more turbulent areas,<sup>6</sup> such as Durham and the south Wales coalfields, which were declining in the 1960s. Initially a series of industrial towns and villages close to the geographical centre of the country, by the 1960s the Black Country was so heavily industrialised that it was a virtually unbroken urban sprawl extending to Birmingham.

In 1948 a survey for post-war reconstruction defined the Black Country as an area of the West Midlands circumscribed by the administrative boundaries of Birmingham, Sutton Coldfield, Aldridge, Walsall, Willenhall, Wednesfield, Wolverhampton, Tettenhall, Sedgley, Brierley Hill, Stourbridge and Halesowen.<sup>7</sup> Within this ring were 24 local authorities, containing an estimated population of 2,240,000, over one million residing under the auspices of Black Country local authorities.<sup>8</sup>

Accepting that the Black Country has “never been tidily in one county”,<sup>9</sup> and regardless of precise boundaries and borders, the concentration of coal, ironstone, fireclay and limestone resulted in massive industrial growth, during the nineteenth century. The instigation and expansion of iron and steel production, and their supporting industries, transformed the rural landscape and the lives of its inhabitants. The resultant employment in the mines, quarries, brickyards and nail-shops was precarious, dangerous *and* poorly paid; its impact upon the people and its subsequent demise has been extensively documented.<sup>10</sup> However, by the 1920s traditional

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<sup>5</sup> Moorhouse, G., *Britain in the Sixties: The Other England*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964, p. 91.

He stated that the villages and towns were in such close proximity, and so similar, that the names of consecutive post offices are the only indication of change when travelling into a new area.

<sup>6</sup> Wood, P.A., *Industrial Britain: The West Midlands*, USA: David Charles Inc., 1976, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> *Conurbation: A Survey of Birmingham and the Black Country by the West Midland Group*, 1948, p. 47.

<sup>8</sup> Wise, M.J., *Birmingham and its Regional Setting: A Scientific Survey*, S.R.Publishers, 1950, p. 251. Republished in 1970, the survey was originally published for the British Association by the Local Executive Committee of Birmingham.

<sup>9</sup> Chitham, *Black Country*, p. 10. Chitham ‘takes coal as the major factor’ in creating a ‘working definition’ of the area. In page 13 he traces the boundaries via major coalfields. However, Gale, *Black Country*, p. 2 stated that the iron trade was “a logical basis for considering in detail the limits of the Black Country, for it made the area what it was”. In his estimation the Black Country is that “part of South Staffordshire and North Worcestershire in which the iron trade was carried on between the years 1750-1900.” p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> See for example: Rowlands, M., *The West Midlands from AD 1000*, Harlow: Longmans, 1987; Gale, *The Black Country*; Dunphy, A., *The Pensnett Railway, 1829-1974*, Ellowes Hall Secondary School and Dudley Teacher’s Centre, undated; Allen, J.S., *A History of Horsley, Tipton: Two Centuries of*

industries declined, and were replaced by engineering and manufacturing works, causing Priestley, in 1934, to describe a “metallic Midlands...a relief map of heavy industry”.<sup>11</sup> Inevitably these changes impacted enormously upon the economics and demographics of the three areas under consideration, although not necessarily detrimentally.

Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton, selected as the geographical foci for this study, form a triangle to the south of the city of Wolverhampton. It is intended to provide a profile of these areas in order to explain their suitability for comparative study. Originally, all three were established as industrial villages within the embryonic Black Country, their expanding industrial sites surrounded by agricultural land. Effective systems of road, rail and canals facilitated the transport of raw materials and manufactured goods, causing contemporary observations upon the environmental devastation.<sup>12</sup> The 1889 Select Committee of the Midland Mining Commission recorded the social and moral debasement of employees in the metal trades, claiming that “a tidy home is exceptional” and that “semi-dressed” female workers caused immorality.<sup>13</sup>

According to Gale, the iron industry was already declining,<sup>14</sup> due to shortages of iron-ore and exacerbated by flooded pits, rendering coal increasingly inaccessible.<sup>15</sup> In 1934, Priestley described a “notorious region” viewed from Castle Hill in Dudley, resembling a “smouldering carpet” with a “sombre beauty ... [which] you could appreciate chiefly because you were not condemned to live there”.<sup>16</sup> The industrial landscape of the Black Country changed as primary sector industries declined, causing traumatic adjustments for the labour market and the workers. Consequently, by the mid-twentieth century much of the established industry had disappeared.

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*Engineering Progress*, Ashbourne: Landmark, 1993; Raybould, *Economic Emergence*; Davies, V.L., and H. Hyde, *Dudley and the Black Country: 1760-1860*, Dudley Library, 1970.

<sup>11</sup> Priestley, J. B. *English Journey*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987, p.109 [first published by Penguin in 1934].

<sup>12</sup> Dickens referred to it as a “black region ‘where not a blade of grass was seen to grow...where nothing green could live.’” Dickens, C., *The Old Curiosity Shop*, 1841, cited in Chitham, *Black Country*, p. 123.

White, W., *All Around the Wrekin*, 1860, (publisher not known) wrote of the furnaces, ironworks and slagheaps that “make you fancy that the old globe itself is here smouldering away”.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Davies and Hyde, *Dudley*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>14</sup> Gale, *Black Country*, Chapter 7 contains a comprehensive, but readable, explanation of the decline of the Black Country Iron Industry between 1860 and 1900. pp. 102- 118.

<sup>15</sup> In fact by 1900 Raybould claims that some 40,000,000 tons of coal were waterlogged. Raybould, *Economic*, p. 56.

<sup>16</sup> Priestley, *English Journey*, p. 109.



Mining was virtually non-existent, as Baggeridge Colliery, the last Black Country “pit of any consequence”,<sup>17</sup> closed in 1968. Despite the closing of railways and the filling of canals, alternative industries and the local economy thrived. The region’s increasing affluence was demonstrated when it became “one of the most car-conscious areas of England.”<sup>18</sup> The first era of mass motoring began in the interwar years<sup>19</sup> and car manufacture mitigated the worst of the economic problems of the 1930s, within the region.

During the 1960s, the detrimental effect of the Black Country’s previous industrial success was evident in a landscape of urban desolation, which obscured its economic regeneration and successes. Wood argued that “as a place to live, the old Black Country today has an air of abandonment about it”, a potential industrial slum.<sup>20</sup> Writing in 1964, Moorhouse disparagingly described the Black Country as “England’s unloveliest and most completely spoiled parcel of land.”<sup>21</sup> He challenged his readers to “take a bus from West Bromwich (sic) to Wolverhampton by way of Wednesbury and Bilston...[as]there is *nothing to be seen which would induce anyone to go and live there unless he had to.*”<sup>22</sup> (my italics) However, he was writing to endorse the recommendations of the 1962 Local Government Commission, which advocated the dismantling of existing Black Country boundaries and the conjoining of smaller towns with the “big places” such as Wolverhampton and Walsall.<sup>23</sup>

Commenting, in 1973, on a proposed ‘Development Plan’ for the Black Country, a contributor to the *Blackcountryman* viewed the area optimistically, drawing attention to the “significant” improvements attained through increased prosperity, education, car ownership, slum clearance and new housing.<sup>24</sup> Despite his dismay at the desolate landscape, Moorhouse acknowledged the region’s affluence, stating that “It may be as

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<sup>17</sup> Parsons, H., *Portrait of the Black Country*, Suffolk: Bury St Edmunds Press, 1986, p. 157.

<sup>18</sup> Chitham, *Black Country*, p. 160.

<sup>19</sup> O’Connell, S., *The Car in British Society: Class, Gender and Motoring, 1896-1939*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998, p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> Wood, *Industrial*, p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> Moorhouse, *Britain*, p. 91.

<sup>22</sup> Moorhouse, *Britain*, p. 99.

<sup>23</sup> Moorhouse, *Britain*, p. 100.

<sup>24</sup> Anon., ‘What sort of Black Country?’ *The Blackcountryman*, Spring, 1973, p. 52. Nevertheless, concern was expressed that ‘young parents’ were moving further from established centres to new housing estates on the periphery.

ugly as sin but...there is man for man no wealthier area in England, no place economically more stable.”<sup>25</sup>

Given perceptions of this nature, it is an ideal region in which to assess the changes wrought by post-war affluence and to challenge assumptions that they generated modified behavioural patterns within lower-middle and working-class communities. Particularly in view of the condescending remarks, regarding the region and its inhabitants contained in the 1950 Scientific Survey of Birmingham and its Regional setting. The report discussed the “peculiarities” of manner, “acid humour” and “distinctiveness” among the *men* (my italics) of the Black Country, due to their deep-rooted mining and manufacturing traditions.<sup>26</sup> This endorsed Wood’s belief that the area had been neglected by research *and* misunderstood, as the region’s landscape was a “physical embodiment of the intricacies and amorphousness of its own history, on which no single person or group, no single urban centre or industry has ever imposed its influence.” He concluded that the “landscape is complex because the people and their history are complex.”<sup>27</sup> Ideal subjects, then, for both traditional research methods and oral history.<sup>28</sup>

The body of academic literature pertaining to the area is sparse, focusing predominantly on the pre-war years. The social history of the Black Country and its surrounding environs has attracted relatively little interest from researchers. In 1977, Fletcher claimed that Britain’s “most important industrial region” is, paradoxically, its least studied, ascribing the neglect of academic historians to the “difficulties of its source materials”.<sup>29</sup> Chinn examined the culture and lifestyles of working-class Birmingham and its surroundings, particularly those experiencing pre-war poverty. His use of autobiography, memoirs, personal and familial reminiscences is from the

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<sup>25</sup> Moorhouse, *Britain*, p. 106.

<sup>26</sup> Wise, *Birmingham*, p. 246. The full text is more explicit, citing W.M. Smith “It is little to be wondered at ‘if the inhabitants...consistently employed in mining and blackening manufactures, united by little with society beyond their own narrow circuits should acquire or preserve a peculiarity of manner, habit and language’”.

<sup>27</sup> Wood, *Industrial*, p. 20.

<sup>28</sup> Rich, D., ‘Social Relationships in Leisure Time: A Study of Adult Behaviour in a Black Country Community’, (University of Birmingham, PhD thesis, 1951). In her study of Coseley, Rich remarked upon the strong personalities of the inhabitants. p. 156.

<sup>29</sup> Raven, J., *The Urban and Industrial Songs of the Black Country and Birmingham*, Wolverhampton: Broadside, 1977, p. xvii.

school of ‘history from below’, dealing with the specific and the local.<sup>30</sup> Chinn “rescued” the history of the poor, through the “spoken and written memories of working-class people.”<sup>31</sup> However, his emphasis on working-class ‘heroism’ and ‘dignity’ in times of adversity resulted in an overtly romanticised and sentimental version of local history. Nevertheless, his work on the urban poor provided insight into living conditions and community networks in pre-war Birmingham and the dynamics of a matriarchal society. In mitigation to criticism, Chinn acknowledged the influence of upbringing and socio-economic background and the effects of “personal, ideological and gender based loyalties” on the work of the historian.<sup>32</sup> He contended that the poor became less recognisable when the demolition of slums dispersed the inhabitants and disintegrated traditional support networks.<sup>33</sup> However, this thesis challenges the view that relocation destroyed community cohesion and support between 1945 and c1970.

Barnsby’s studies of the Black Country focused predominantly upon working-class movements and labour relations, therefore, are of limited relevance to this study.<sup>34</sup> However, his inquiries in Wolverhampton examined the post-war slum clearance programme and the complexities of housing provision. He highlighted the disparity

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<sup>30</sup> Much of his research focuses on specific Birmingham landmarks, local companies or specific ‘individuals’. For example, the history of the West Bromwich Building Society, Lucas and British Leyland.

<sup>31</sup> Chinn, *Homes*, back cover.

Chinn’s utilisation of the local media has facilitated the ‘recovery’ of much oral and written evidence which may otherwise have disappeared with the pre-war generation. He is responsible for an extensive and fascinating oral history archive which is housed on-line – The Carl Chinn People’s History Archive. For example, [www.bgfl.org/carlchinn](http://www.bgfl.org/carlchinn) or [www.bgfl.org/briminghamlives](http://www.bgfl.org/briminghamlives).

<sup>32</sup> Chinn, *They Worked*, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> Chinn, *They Worked*, p. 11. Chinn’s research into slums and housing provision has provided a graphic documentation of the squalid living conditions, which continued well into the 1960s and a comprehensive illustrated record of the state’s efforts to address the problem. Although the progress of Birmingham Council housing is the focus of his investigation, the collection of photographs of mid twentieth century working-class housing and communities provide useful insights into the continuing problems of housing and poverty, which is particularly pertinent and relevant for this study of the adjacent Black Country.

<sup>34</sup> For example Barnsby, G., *The Working Class Movement in the Black Country, 1750-1867*, Wolverhampton: Integrated Publishing Services 1993; *The Dudley Working Class Movement, 1750-1860*, Dudley Leisure Services, 1986; *Social Conditions in the Black Country, 1800-1900*, Wolverhampton: Integrated Publishing Services, 1980; *Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country, 1850-1939*, Wolverhampton: Integrated Publishing Services, 1977.

between rising rents and working-class wages, which resulted in financial difficulties for tenants and excluded others from relocation.<sup>35</sup>

In the light of an article in *The Guardian*, in 1964, journalist Geoffrey Moorhouse re-examined the traditional North-South divide.<sup>36</sup> He contended that the division separated London from the rest of England, embarking upon an investigation of “The Other England”<sup>37</sup> - of social and economic deprivation, disparity and disadvantage. The resultant book scathingly described the Black Country as a “completely bedraggled piece of England”.<sup>38</sup> However, Moorhouse produced this assessment whilst London, and its “Golden Circle”,<sup>39</sup> ostensibly resided in the after-glow of post-war affluence and sociological surveys exposed the uneven distribution of affluence and rediscovered poverty. The piece reflects the prevalent political and social issues, optimistically contrasting southern “health and wealth” with deprived provincial areas.<sup>40</sup>

Published works pertaining to the Black Country are predominantly concerned with its changing economic fortunes and the fluctuations of Midlands’ industries, with scant reference to their impact on social conditions.<sup>41</sup> These publications are frequently in pamphlet form, histories of specific companies or leading industrialists.<sup>42</sup> Some are anecdotal and descriptive, regurgitating previous work rather than new research, produced by prolific and enthusiastic members of local history societies, with limited relevance for this study. Despite this, such publications are extremely popular, provide useful nuggets of background information and indicate the location of relevant sources.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Barnsby, G., *A History of Housing in Wolverhampton, 1750-1975*, Wolverhampton: Integrated Publishing Services Ltd., 1976, pp. 54-65. In the ten years from 1956-66, Barnsby argues that the average net rent rise was 137% whilst weekly wages rose by a mere 57%.

<sup>36</sup> Moorhouse wrote in response to an article by the chief education officer for Leeds, George Taylor which was published on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1962. It sparked extensive debate concerning the social and economic inequality between the North and South of England.

<sup>37</sup> Moorhouse, *Britain*.

<sup>38</sup> Moorhouse, *Britain*, p. 92.

<sup>39</sup> Moorhouse designates any area within “one hour’s travel by fast peak-hour train from the main London terminal” as part of the ‘Golden Circle’ and areas outside the circle as the ‘other England’.

<sup>40</sup> Moorhouse, *Britain*, p. 16.

<sup>41</sup> Rowlands, *West Midlands*.

<sup>42</sup> Wood, J., *The Bean*, Risborough: Shire Publications, 2001.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, works by the former editor of *The Blackcountryman*, Harold Parsons who has written a number of such books and pamphlets. *Portrait of the Black Country*, Robert Hale Ltd., 1986;

Reaction against borough changes in the mid-1960s led to the formation of The Black Country Society, as it was feared that change endangered the area's industrial heritage. Members claimed that the "Black Country did not receive its fair share of recognition for its contribution to the industrial development of Britain and the world".<sup>44</sup> The society, a voluntary agency affiliated to the Civic Trust, encourages "historians, teachers, researchers, students...and ordinary folk" to publish Black Country histories, particularly memoirs and autobiographies.<sup>45</sup> Based in Tipton,<sup>46</sup> it generated massive public interest, producing numerous local history books containing photographic evidence of Black Country towns.<sup>47</sup> All three areas have well-supported history societies, but Tipton is at the forefront of several schemes. The Tipton Heritage Project, based in Tipton Library, encourages the community to record, collate and preserve information concerning the area.<sup>48</sup>

Unpublished works dealing with the areas under investigation are sparse. Given the industrial and cultural heritage of the Black Country it is understandable that the bulk of these concentrate on Methodism or mining.<sup>49</sup> Academic research has predominantly focused on the nineteenth century, with two or three notable

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*Around the Black Country*, The Black Country Society, 1973; *Black Country Stories*, The Black Country Society, 1968. Local historian Trevor Genge has produced similar items.

<sup>44</sup> [www.blackcountryociety.co.uk/bcmlist.htm](http://www.blackcountryociety.co.uk/bcmlist.htm) accessed on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

<sup>45</sup> Parker, J., *A Black Country Boy*, Studley: History into Print, 2005, p. x. The Black Country Society was formed in 1967 and is affiliated to the Civic Trust. Its aim is to create interest in the "past, present and future of the Black Country. It publishes a quarterly magazine *The Blackcountryman* and has over 2,500 members. Its internet site at [www.blackcountryociety.co.uk](http://www.blackcountryociety.co.uk) contains a comprehensive index to each volume. The society campaigned for an industrial museum in the area and was instrumental in the establishment of the Black Country Living Museum in 1975 and continues to promote issues of historical interest within the area.

<sup>46</sup> Parsons, *Portrait*, p. 164.

<sup>47</sup> Many of these have been published by Allen Sutton of Stroud under the 'Britain in Old Photographs Series'. Those relating to the Black Country have been produced by members of the Black Country Society. Ned Williams has produced a series of books on Black Country Chapels. Others, for example Genge, T., *Sedgley in Old Photographs*, 2008, focus on specific towns and villages in the area.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Gale, *Black Country*, for a review of the Black Country iron industry; Allen, J., *History of Tipton*, has produced a comprehensive examination of the Horsley Engineering of Tipton. This book is extensively researched and well referenced and makes good use of the company records to provide an overview of 200 years of engineering.

<sup>49</sup> They contain relevant background information, but are often concerned with an earlier period of Black Country history. For example, Leese, R., "The Impact of Methodism on Black Country Society, 1743-1860", (University of Wolverhampton, PhD, 1973); Ridgway, J. "Structures, Relationships and Attitudes: Coalmining, Family Life in the Black Country during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century", (University of Wolverhampton, PhD, 1996); Latham, D., "Religion, Isolation and Occupation: A Study of Mid-Nineteenth Century Lower Gornal and Gornal Wood", (University of Wolverhampton, MA dissertation, 1989).

exceptions, which hold relevance for this study.<sup>50</sup> Sykes' investigation into popular religion in Dudley and the Gornals<sup>51</sup> utilised oral evidence to investigate changes in religious practice between 1914 and 1965. He analysed popular religion in the Black Country revealing post-war communities of increasing prosperity, full employment and affluence, with diminishing interest in Church attendance.<sup>52</sup>

Badger's research into change and continuity of working-class consumption practices, between 1930 and 1970, endorsed perceptions of post-war economic improvements within the area. Her oral interviews raised issues which are pertinent to this thesis, particularly revelations concerning methods of supplementing working-class incomes, and the social and cultural changes which impacted directly upon working-class consumption.<sup>53</sup>

It is evident that the literature, both national and local, endorsed claims of increasing affluence amongst working-class families. Despite some anomalies, there is consensus that, following a brief period of post-war austerity, the vast majority of British families benefited from economic and social improvements. Optimists and pessimists agreed that housing provision improved, overall living standards increased and poverty declined. Nevertheless, throughout this thesis some of the broader assumptions of the existing literature on post-war localities will be challenged.

The following section examines in detail the three locations which form the basis of the study, revealing that the problem of defining the Black Country is, to some extent, replicated within the individual areas.

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<sup>50</sup> Tolley, B., 'Let's Talk about Girls: Young Women and Consumption in the 1960s and early 1970s', (University of Wolverhampton, MA dissertation, 2001). This dissertation challenges the marginalisation of girls' consumption and address issues of gender balance. The work is relevant to this thesis as it utilised oral interviews with women who were growing up in the Black Country during the 1960s and early 1970s.

<sup>51</sup> Sykes, R., 'Popular Religion in Dudley and the Gornals c. 1914-65', (University of Wolverhampton, PhD thesis, 1999).

Note: Pensnett is one of the outlying neighbourhoods of Dudley and the Gornals were under the jurisdiction of Sedgley Urban District Council.

<sup>52</sup> Sykes, 'Popular Religion', pp. 77-78. In his estimation changes occurred more quickly in Dudley as slum clearance altered physical characteristics of the traditional working-class neighbourhood and accelerated the pace of social and cultural change.

<sup>53</sup> Badger, S., 'Household Consumption, Food and the Working Class: The Black Country and Coventry, 1930-1970', (University of Wolverhampton, PhD thesis, 2004) This work demonstrated that women formed an integral part of the formal work force in the Black Country economy and indicates the ways in which 'income circumscribes the activities of consumers'.

### a) Pensnett

Pensnett lies two miles to the south of Dudley, sited in the hills of erstwhile Pensnett Chase, which extended across the south-west Black Country. Situated in the south western sector of the South Staffordshire coalfield, the area was rich in coal and other minerals. By 1784 the gorse, briar and brambles of the chase were replaced by coal mines, furnaces and nail shops,<sup>54</sup> as the Pensnett Chase Act enclosed 1,300 acres, depriving tenants of “traditional rights to pasture their cattle...to dig turf or use dead wood as fuel”.<sup>55</sup> The nineteenth century saw an increase in large-scale enterprise, mining of coal and iron ore and quarrying of clay for bricks and tiles.<sup>56</sup> The industry generated so much smoke and dirt that in 1869, than ten years since its completion, the Parish Church required extensive restoration.<sup>57</sup> By 1898, although the ‘town’ had expanded to accommodate a population of 7,000, mining in Pensnett was increasingly problematic and the “coal-getting there... [virtually] stopped.”<sup>58</sup>

By 1898, Pensnett’s boundaries were difficult to ascertain, as the original plans had been “lost or stolen”, causing immense difficulties for planners and historians.<sup>59</sup> Pensnett resided under the auspices of Brierley Hill Urban District Council in 1934, until its incorporation into Dudley County Borough in 1966.<sup>60</sup> Inevitably, the extrapolation of the relevant statistics for this study is problematic and will be explored below.

In the early 1920s, mining ceased,<sup>61</sup> but brickworks and small manufactories flourished. Local government records, of 1939, described the population as

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<sup>54</sup> Chitham, *Black Country*, p. 98. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century Pensnett was described as an industrial village.

<sup>55</sup> Davies and Hyde, *Dudley*, p.5. Smallholders may have owned the surface of the land but Viscount Dudley possessed the mineral rights. Hackwood, F. W., *Sedgley Researches*, Dudley, 1898, p. 38; Raven, M., *Black Country Towns and Villages*, Wolverhampton: Broadside, 1991, p. 52.

<sup>56</sup> For example, collieries and blast furnaces were sited at Corbyns Hall; collieries, furnaces, forges, clay pits and brickworks at Shut End and Fosters Field. The first recorded forges in Pensnett were those belonging to Dud Dudley in 1619. Parsons, *Portrait*, p. 37. It was on Lord Dudley’s land that one of the world’s first industrial steam railways was constructed, in 1829, in order to link Pensnett’s mines with the Staffordshire and Worcestershire canal at Ashwoods.

<sup>57</sup> Anderton, R., *A History of the Parish Church of St. Mark the Evangelist*, 1969, p.12.

<sup>58</sup> Hackwood, F.W., *Sedgley Researches*, 1898, p. 38.

<sup>59</sup> Hackwood, *Sedgley*, p. 38.

<sup>60</sup> *Brierley Hill Handbook*, 1956-7, p. 27. Originally categorised as part of Kingswinford Urban District Council, Pensnett, along with Kingswinford, Brock (sic) and Wordsley, became under the auspices of Dudley UDC under the 1934 Staffordshire Review Order.

<sup>61</sup> Shut End Colliery closed in 1913 and in 1914 only 31 blast furnaces were still in operation.

“essentially industrial in character”; iron and steel, building, brick-making and engineering were the main forms of employment.<sup>62</sup> However, the area was not totally industrialised - Hickman’s farm, stretching from the High Street towards Sedgley, remained a working farm until the late 1960s.<sup>63</sup> William Knott also worked a farm in Bromley Lane Pensnett which, although reduced in size over 100 years, remained a tenable financial proposition. The *County Express* described the farm as surrounded by municipal building and “much diminished”.<sup>64</sup>

Pensnett’s focal point was the houses and shops “straggling” along High Oak on the Kingswinford to Dudley road;<sup>65</sup> a trading estate with over 300 units replaced the pits and the brickworks provided employment.<sup>66</sup> Pre-1939 government initiatives were already impacting upon the physical landscape of the area as new housing estates were built and slum dwellings were cleared.<sup>67</sup> In 1944, the Public Health Report for Brierley Hill Urban District Council described the region as having “little unemployment” and “fairly high” wage levels. It commented that rationing ensured an adequate supply of essential foods, resulting in “astonishingly good health despite the drawbacks of overcrowded and dilapidated housing.”<sup>68</sup>

The population of Pensnett was “principally working-class and ...engaged mainly in the numerous and varied Black Country industries”,<sup>69</sup> residing in a landscape disfigured by centuries of industrial development. In 1943, proposals were formulated to improve derelict sites, level tips and provide open spaces. The planning

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<sup>62</sup> *Brierley Hill UDC Report for the Public Health Department*, 1939, 1940, p. 7.

<sup>63</sup> Wood, J.J., ‘Osses, ‘Ossroads and ‘Oss muk’, *The Blackcountryman*, 1973, vol. 6, no. 3, p. 44; Mr BT, Mr BJ, Miss YB.

<sup>64</sup> *County Express*, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1962. Mr Knott’s farm and lifestyle were, in 1962, somewhat anachronistic. He had never travelled more than 20 miles from his birth-place, had “never seen the sea, and had never travelled on a Midland ‘Red’ bys”. He visited the cinema only once when on holiday in 1925, but had “never heard a talkie”.

<sup>65</sup> Parsons, *Portrait*, p. 174.

<sup>66</sup> Parsons, *Portrait*, p. 173; *Dudley Herald*, 7<sup>th</sup> May 1950, p. 6. Erected in 1950 Pensnett trading estate was part of post-war regeneration. It covered 40 acres of Pensnett Chase with 125,000 feet of single story buildings.

<sup>67</sup> See section on housing.

<sup>68</sup> *Brierley Hill UDC Report for the Public Health Department*, 1944, p. 6. Subsequent reports do not make specific comments under the heading of social conditions.

<sup>69</sup> *Brierley Hill Urban District Local Government (Boundary Commission) Act*, 1945, p. 6.



authority was confident that this would transform the area and the lives of the inhabitants, once war-time restrictions were ended.<sup>70</sup>

### **b) Sedgley**

The ancient manor of Sedgley lay on the limestone ridge cutting through the Black Country,<sup>71</sup> in the north-east sector of the South Staffordshire coalfield. Three miles south of Wolverhampton and three miles from Dudley, Sedgley originally consisted of nine separate villages, where “pit-Cole” was mined as early as 1272.<sup>72</sup> Mining and nail-making provided its inhabitants with a livelihood and cottage industries were prevalent, with small farmers becoming nail-makers during the winter.<sup>73</sup>

The 1841 report on Child Labour recorded that with the exception of an iron foundry and a screw manufactory – almost the “whole population” was employed in nail-making, “that is...forge-work, not casting.” The commissioner described the villages as “colonies” for the production and supply of nails,<sup>74</sup> commenting on the “squalid wretchedness” of dwellings where the “immense majority [of the population inhabited houses]...of the most wretched and sty-like appearance”.<sup>75</sup> During this period, Engels remarked upon the “herding together” of Sedgley nailers in “filthy stable-like huts”, where they were paid five pence three farthings for twelve hundred nails.<sup>76</sup>

In 1898 Hackwood commented on Sedgley’s isolation, as the terrain precluded the construction of canals or railways. Like nearby Pensnett, it “suffered” the effects of extensive mining as buildings began to crack and subside, causing problems for the local authority and residents alike.<sup>77</sup> The Ordnance Survey of 1901 depicted a predominantly agricultural landscape, its open ground interspersed with disused coal

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<sup>70</sup> *Brierley Hill Urban District, Town Planning and Post-War Reconstruction, Official Brochure*, 1943, no page numbers.

<sup>71</sup> Wise, *Birmingham*, p. 229.

<sup>72</sup> Chitham, *Black Country*, p. 54.

<sup>73</sup> Barnett, F.A., *Barnett’s History of Sedgley*, Lanesfield Primary School, 1992, p. 39; Genge, T., *Sedgley and District*, Allen Sutton Publishing, 1995, p. 5. Sedgley nails were transported around the country and were used by Archbishop Cranmer in the construction of Hampton Court.

<sup>74</sup> Report to His Majesty’s Commissioners by R.H. Horne, Esq., 1841.

<sup>75</sup> Report to His Majesty’s Commissioners by R.H. Horne, Esq., 1841.

<sup>76</sup> Engels, F., *Conditions of the Working Class in England*, 1844, cited in *Sedgley Official Guide*, 1953, p. 10.

<sup>77</sup> Hackwood, F., *Sedgley Researches*, Private publication, 1898 (80 copies only) Accessed at Dudley Library, pp. 38/39. Hackwood’s histories of Tipton, West Bromwich, Oldbury, Smethwick Wednesbury and Handsworth have recently been republished in limited editions by Brewin Books Ltd., Studley.

shafts, clay pits, limestone quarries and brickworks. However, even into the twentieth century, the villages of Sedgley retained much of their original character, surrounded by agricultural land.<sup>78</sup> In 1933 Priestley's journey through England followed the "higgledy-piggledy" line of villages from Dudley to Wolverhampton, and upon reaching Gornal, one Sedgley's villages, he arrived "at the very end of the earth, where the land appeared to have been uprooted by a giant pig and where the cottages were so small and odd they must have been built for gnomes, and this end of the earth was called Gornal, and there the women returning from the brickworks wore caps and shawls...and looked as outlandish as the place they lived in".<sup>79</sup>

Traditional industries declined and light engineering units opened, but some mining and brick-making continued throughout the period under consideration. During the post-war era Sedgley's location, between Dudley and Wolverhampton on the old coaching route, increased its attraction as a commuter village for middle-class residents,<sup>80</sup> although the working-class inhabitants continued to reside in their terraced homes or on the inter-war estates constructed to replace the slums.

### c) Tipton

Tipton is situated in the north-eastern sector of the South Staffordshire coalfield, five miles south-east of Wolverhampton and, according to Raven, possessing all the attributes of an archetypal Black Country town, founded on resources of coal and iron.<sup>81</sup> Originally a collection of hamlets surrounded by farmland, the discovery of ironstone and coal deposits led to a rapid transformation as houses "sprung up in all directions in close proximity to mines and factories".<sup>82</sup> Due to the flatness of its terrain, Tipton's collieries and ironworks were serviced by both canals and rail. By 1800, almost any metal object necessary to equip the home of an English gentleman could be acquired from Tipton.<sup>83</sup> In 1840, transportation of these goods was

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<sup>78</sup> Genge, *Sedgley*, p. 5; *The Sedgley Sentinel*, Issue 1, Winter 1988, p. 27.

<sup>79</sup> Priestley, *English*, p. 110. He described the Black Country as a "notorious region" with "peculiar qualities" where "grimy rows of houses, pubs and picture theatres...and great patches of waste ground" were "the battlefield of industry". pp. 107-111.

<sup>80</sup> Raybould, *Economic*, p. 125.

<sup>81</sup> Raven, *Black Country*, p. 64.

<sup>82</sup> *Tipton Handbook*, 1966, p. 13.

<sup>83</sup> Chitham, *Black Country*, p. 106.

relatively cheap and simple, with the town encircled by 13 miles of canals, resulting in the sobriquet the ‘Venice of the Midlands’.<sup>84</sup>

As minerals deposits declined and mines flooded,<sup>85</sup> secondary industries, attracted by the excellent communication networks and raw materials, proliferated. Materials for heavy forgings were imported and existing engineering works adapted into machine tooling and related activities. In 1907, Hackwood described the “great havoc” which industry wreaked upon the landscape. “Tipton to the visitor is not an inviting spot: it is certainly bewildering if not exactly depressing”.<sup>86</sup> But he acknowledged its economic success: “The Vulcan is everywhere supreme: and from the thousands of hearths that constitute his altars, never cease to arise columns of incense...the smoke-laden sky is always regarded as a sign of prosperity”.<sup>87</sup> The 1904 Ordnance survey map depicted a lone farm amidst a tangle of canals, railway lines and disused collieries. By 1920 coalmining had virtually ceased, with the remnants of former industry disfiguring the landscape. The inter-war years saw the establishment of heavy and light engineering industries, which were “formerly hindered by mining operations in the area”<sup>88</sup> and attempts to address the housing problems created by extensive mining activities and flooding of the pits. The population remained predominantly working class, as defined by occupation and housing, with managers and white collar workers largely living outside the area, due to a lack of suitable homes for the more affluent members of society.<sup>89</sup>

In the immediate post-war period, heavy industries, engineering and metalwork predominated<sup>90</sup> and Tipton considered itself one of the foremost towns in the industrial area of Staffordshire.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Cadman, A., *A History of Tipton*, 1990, Unpublished pamphlet, p. 2; Raven, *Urban*, p. 64.

<sup>85</sup> The problem with flooding pits was so bad that the world’s first Newcomen engine was installed in Tipton in 1712.

<sup>86</sup> Hackwood, F., *Tipton and District Illustrated Annual*, 1907, cited in Hodgkins, K., and J. Brimble., *Tipton: A Third Selection*, Britain in Old Photographs Series, Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2001, p. 5.

<sup>87</sup> Hackwood, cited in Hodgkins and Brimble, *Tipton*, p. 6.

<sup>88</sup> *Tipton Official Handbook*, 1956, p. 21.

<sup>89</sup> Housing and occupation will be discussed in detail below.

<sup>90</sup> Brennan, T., *Wolverhampton: Social and Industrial Survey, 1945/6*, London: Dennis Dobson, 1948, p. 74.

<sup>91</sup> *Tipton Official Handbook*, 1960, foreword.

## **Post-war Change and Continuity**

Statistical changes for Britain are comparatively simple to document, although more problematic to analyse. As Halsey demonstrated, although trends and shifts in social structure are easily identified, “the very concept of a trend may generate unintended distortion”. He indicated the pitfalls and complexities surrounding data collection and classification, and their interpretation.<sup>92</sup> For the purpose of this thesis the myriad of general difficulties have been exacerbated by a series of boundary changes, rendering statistical comparisons almost impossible. Comparison of pre and post-war statistics for the Black Country has been impeded both by boundary and local government changes, resulting in the division and sub-division of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton.

At the end of the war, Pensnett was under the auspices of Brierley Hill Urban District Council, whilst Sedgley retained its own District Council and Tipton was a Municipal Borough.<sup>93</sup> Following the recommendations of the 1962 Local Government Commission, Pensnett and Sedgley were absorbed into Dudley County Borough, whilst Tipton, amidst much controversy and protestation, was incorporated into West Bromwich, until becoming part of Sandwell in 1974.<sup>94</sup> These alterations have ensured the impossibility of extricating the relevant statistics for population, employment and housing. Nevertheless, despite the omissions, sufficient data remains to reach some tentative conclusions. However, it is politic for the historian to remember the inherent conflict between the desire to establish patterns or trends and the “uniqueness of each individual and each family”.<sup>95</sup>

### ***Demographic Trends***

Statistical evidence, although notoriously problematic, holds relevance for this study; the inclusion of data will provide a basis to consider post-war trends, which inevitably

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<sup>92</sup> Halsey, A.H. (ed.) *British Social Trends Since 1900: A Guide to the Changing Social Structure of Britain*, Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., p. 1. See Chapter 1, an introduction to statistics and social trends.

<sup>93</sup> Sedgley UDC was established in 1895 and Tipton became a Municipal Borough in 1938.

<sup>94</sup> Wise, *Birmingham*, p. 100. The hearing of objections to the plan lasted five weeks and was, according to Wise, the costliest in the history of British local government.

<sup>95</sup> Abbott, M., *Family Affairs: A History of the Family in Twentieth Century England*, London: Routledge, 2003, p. 2. Abbott has produced a comprehensive and fascinating exploration of the twentieth century family in England. It is, however, lacking in references and, as the author admits, without statistics.

affected the financing of welfare payments, housing provision, and employment opportunities.

Declining national birth-rates generated concern in the pre-war period, due to the “deliberate restriction” of birth within marriage.<sup>96</sup> However, after 1936 a slight increase in birth-rate was detected, which accelerated during the war years.<sup>97</sup> Between 1945 and 1970, despite the trend for smaller families, the number of births for every hundred women of child-bearing age continued to rise, as more women were getting married at a younger age.<sup>98</sup> General fertility levels were higher in the West Midlands and annual population growth remained at 0.8%.<sup>99</sup> In 1946 Tipton families were above-average size, the area containing an “abnormally high proportion of large families, even in an area where the general character ... [was] one of larger than normal families”.<sup>100</sup>

Between 1951 and 1971 the population in England and Wales rose by five million, to 48.7 million. The increase impacted upon housing, educational provision, family allowances and other welfare payments.<sup>101</sup> West Midlands’ population growth had “hardly faltered” since the early nineteenth century,<sup>102</sup> growing by approximately 7.5% between 1951 and 1971.<sup>103</sup> These above-average rises resulted from a high proportion of women of child-bearing age and migration into the region, from Britain and the Commonwealth, facilitated by high employment levels and job opportunities.<sup>104</sup> There were also marked population shifts *within* the area after 1945, when inhabitants of larger industrial centres (such as Brierley Hill and Dudley) moved to the “rural fringes of dormitory areas [like Sedgley]...whilst retaining their employment within the traditional Black Country towns”.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Clarke, *Hope*, p. 219.

<sup>97</sup> Brennan, *Wolverhampton*, p. 32.

<sup>98</sup> Clarke, *Hope*, p. 221. In the pre-war period it was 6 births annually for every 100 women of child bearing age, rising to 7 per 100 in the 1950s and 9 per 100 in the 1960s.

<sup>99</sup> Halsey, *British Social Trends*, p. 108.

<sup>100</sup> Brennan, *Wolverhampton*, p. 39.

<sup>101</sup> Hopkins, *Rise and Decline*, p. 151. The total British population continued to rise, by 2.3 million in 1951 and by 2.5 in the 1960s. p. 139.

<sup>102</sup> Wood, *Industrial* p. 42. Wood stated that the region’s share of the national population increased from 8.2% in 1951 to 9.4% by the mid 1960s.

<sup>103</sup> Wood, *Industrial*, p. 42.

<sup>104</sup> Wood, *Industrial*, p. 44. In addition to the high proportion of women of child bearing age, fertility rates were higher and the age at marriage was lower. In 1911 less than 25% of women between the ages of 20-24 were married; by 1951 50% were married and by 1971 60%.

<sup>105</sup> Raybould, *Economic*, p. 126.

Specific population statistics for the three localities are difficult to extract from official sources, due to problems mentioned above, but handbook figures, which were generally estimated, confirmed a steady increase. Boundary changes produced a confusing impression of Black Country demographics. For example, estimated local government data for Brierley Hill, including Pensnett, increased from 48,000 in 1946 to 61,070 by 1961,<sup>106</sup> a discrepancy with the 1961 census figure of 56,075. The only individual figures for Pensnett were 7,000 in 1946 and 9,372 in 1971.<sup>107</sup>

Similar data for Sedgley is inaccurate, as boundary changes of the 1960s excluded many former areas. Consequently, in 1953 its population was listed as 23,104; the Annual Report of the Minister of Health recorded the total population as 31,600 by 1964.<sup>108</sup> Confusingly, following boundary reorganisation in 1966, the population figures decreased to a mere 14,552 in 1971.<sup>109</sup>

The same is true of Tipton, where the census reports listed a population of 39,382 in 1951<sup>110</sup> and 38,100 in 1961.<sup>111</sup> Unfortunately, boundary changes have negated any possibility of a comparative study, which would monitor change in Tipton between 1945 and 1970. In the 1950s Tipton had the dubious honour of a higher population density to the acre than any other town in south Staffordshire, with an overspill potential of 10,500.<sup>112</sup> It is interesting to note discrepancies in such statistics, as Raybould's figures for both Sedgley and Tipton demonstrate significant differences.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Brierley Hill U.D.C. *Local Government (Boundary Commission) Act*, 1945; Brierley Hill U.D.C. *Report of Public Health Department*, 1961.

<sup>107</sup> Brierley Hill U.D.C. *Local Government (Boundary Commission) Act*, 1945, p. 7. Information extracted by Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council and placed in *Research and Information Team Folder*, 1975, Coseley Archives ref LD312. This folder contains similar information for all the areas inside D.M.B. which has been extracted from the 1971 census returns, including local area plans, housing and migration figures. Information for Pensnett, Sedgley and other parts of the region have been included.

<sup>108</sup> *Sedgley Official Guide*, 1953, Sedgley U.D.C. *Annual Report of the Minister of Health*, 1964. However, Census Reports of 1961 listed the population as 27,912.

<sup>109</sup> *Dudley M.B.C. Research and Information Team Folder*, 1975.

<sup>110</sup> General Register Office *Census Report for Staffordshire, 1951*, H.M.S.O. 1954. Table 2.

<sup>111</sup> General Register Office, *Census Report for Staffordshire, 1961*, H.M.S.O. 1963, p. 17

<sup>112</sup> *Express and Star* 4<sup>th</sup> May 1956.

<sup>113</sup> Raybould, *Economic*, p. 126.

### *Economic Trends*

Britain's economic difficulties of the immediate post-war period have been extensively investigated and debated.<sup>114</sup> The problems affected the entire country, as the government sought to reconcile debt repayment, the demands of politicians and the populace and environmental reconstruction. However, by the mid-1950s, the economic situation demonstrably improved.<sup>115</sup> From 1948 to 1973 Britain "enjoyed a sustained period of economic growth," averaging at around 2.8% per year, thus indicating a period of affluence and improvement.<sup>116</sup>

Assessments of the British economy between 1945 and 1970 are optimistic until the late 1960s.<sup>117</sup> According to Bogdanor and Skidelsky, the economy improved more quickly "than at any time since the peak of the Victorian Era".<sup>118</sup> In Hopkins' opinion, it was continued economic growth, rather than government legislation, which generated the affluence and "well-being" of the population and maintained living standards, until the early 1970s.<sup>119</sup> During this time, the prosperity of the Black Country "reached its zenith"<sup>120</sup> - one of the most "striking" success stories of the post-war years.<sup>121</sup>

Black Country economic growth was endorsed in post-war memoirs and autobiographies. Gary Smith explained that falling unemployment and prosperity engendered a spirit of optimism in 1950s Winson Green<sup>122</sup> and contributors to the Wolverhampton Heritage Project concurred.<sup>123</sup> Although John Petty suffered financial problems, he was aware that his family, "so ill and poor...[were] surrounded by so much prosperity" within their neighbourhood.<sup>124</sup> During the interviews, all

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<sup>114</sup> Hill, C.P., *British Economic and Social History, 1700-1975*, London: Edward Arnold, 1975; Bernstein, *Myth*; May, *Economic*; Pollard, *Development*.

<sup>115</sup> Rowlands, *West Midlands*, p. 359.

<sup>116</sup> Timmins, *Five Giants*, p. 178.

<sup>117</sup> Sandbrook, *White Heat*, p. 78.

<sup>118</sup> Bogdanor and Skidelsky, *Age*, p. 58.

<sup>119</sup> Hopkins, *Rise and Decline*, p. 122. He indicated a pattern of economic success until the early 1970s, attributable to the management of the economy along Keynesian lines.

<sup>120</sup> Wood, *Industrial*, p. 50. Wood was reviewing the situation in 1976.

<sup>121</sup> Marwick, A., *British Society since 1945*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003, pp. 10/11.

<sup>122</sup> Smith, G., *Winson Green: My World*, Studley: Brewin Books, 1997, p. 37.

<sup>123</sup> Price, T. (ed.) *In My Life*, Wolverhampton Heritage Project, undated, p. 5, p. 27, p. 34, p. 40.

<sup>124</sup> Petty, J., *Five Fags a Day: The Last Years of a Scrap Picker*, London: Martin Secker and Warburg Ltd., 1956, p. 63. John Petty produced an autobiographical account of his life between winter 1949 and 1950. Mental and physical ill-health prevented him from sustaining formal employment, but he rejected state benefit for a life of scavenging waste metal from a dump near Walsall.

sixty respondents admitted that the years between 1945 and 1970 were a period of increasing affluence and material progress for themselves, their families and their localities. Yet a cautionary voice was raised when church leaders expressed dire warnings that rising incomes and welfare payments impacted adversely upon behaviour, contributing to declining church attendances.<sup>125</sup> It was this “long [post-war] era of economic expansion” which provided “ample” resources to fund state welfare and eradicate poverty.<sup>126</sup> A number of commentators noted that the Midlands was one of the areas of Britain where the new-found affluence of the post-war period was most in evidence,<sup>127</sup> thus it provides an ideal case study in which to test characterisations of social change that have been posited by a range of historians, sociologists and social scientists.

### ***Environment and Housing***

The post-war period saw dramatic changes in the landscape of Britain as environmental legislation increased. Existing housing stock was in disrepair;<sup>128</sup> approximately 500,000 houses had been rendered unfit for habitation by bomb damage and house construction had virtually halted for the six preceding years. Decimated factories and industrial sites required urgent reconstruction, as did the long-abandoned sites of industrial developments, ironworks and mines. The physical changes to the environment and improvements in housing conditions inevitably impacted upon the lives, attitudes and cultural mores of the entire population. “Possibly more lasting in its effect than the bombing was the social change accompanied by political changes after the war”.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Sykes, *Popular*, pp. 339-341. Clergymen of the area, of all denominations, expressed concern that improvements in material circumstances, particularly after 1945, resulted in spiritual neglect and lack of charity. This may have been partially due to their concern over falling congregations and, in particular, financial contributions to church funds.

<sup>126</sup> Clarke, *Hope*, p. 442.

<sup>127</sup> Coates and Silburn, *Poverty*, p. 15. Coates and Silburn indicated that it was the Midlands and the South-East where the new-found post-war affluence was most obvious.

<sup>128</sup> For an assessment of the problems associated with the condition of working-class housing up to 1918 see Gauldie, E. L., *Cruel Habitations: A History of Working-Class Housing, 1789-1918*, London: George Allen Unwin Ltd., 1974. Utilising Parliamentary Papers, Royal Commissions and a variety of other documentary sources, Gauldie examines housing, living conditions, governments legislation and class-based attitudes to housing provision for the working class.

<sup>129</sup> Nuttgens, P., *The Home Front: Housing the People, 1840-1990*, London: B.B.C. Books, 1989, p. 12.



Whilst the war was in progress, plans were formulated for the regeneration of cities and rebuilding of houses throughout Britain. The necessity of replacing slums had been previously recognised and many people re-housed on new purpose-built estates. However, during the 1930s, the major difficulty was the building of *affordable* houses for the working class “whose rent limit was around 9 shillings per week”, when the rent for existing council houses was already 13 shillings or more.<sup>130</sup>

In preparation for rebuilding, the 1944 Dudley Report highlighted defective pre-war housing, identifying the necessity for larger rooms and higher standards for kitchens and bathrooms,<sup>131</sup> as 1920s council houses had un-plastered walls and outside WCs.<sup>132</sup> The White Paper recommended the construction of 758,000 houses, as millions of dilapidated homes were unfit for habitation, warning that demobilisation, post-war marriages and rising birth rates would exacerbate problems.<sup>133</sup> Under the 1947 Town and Country Planning (Blitz and Blight) Act councils were given powers to purchase redevelopment areas<sup>134</sup> and the 1949 Housing Act promised separate dwellings for every family; it also no longer specified that housing provision was solely for the working classes.<sup>135</sup>

Successive governments engaged with temporary solutions - repairing damaged houses, the use of abandoned army huts and pre-fabricated homes. Although between 1945 and 1948 a total of 15,428 new houses were built in the West Midlands, they were woefully inadequate for expanding needs.<sup>136</sup> There was a pressing need for the construction of private and council houses, but it was the unprecedented expansion of

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<sup>130</sup> Burnett, J., *A Social History of Housing, 1815-1970*, London: Methuen and Co., 1978, p. 238. An estimated 4 million homes were built between 1918 and 1945, ¼ of these replaced slums. Bourke, *Working-Class*, p. 15.

<sup>131</sup> Burnett, *Social*, pp. 281-2.

<sup>132</sup> See Aitcheson, A., *Working Class Housing in Sedgley, 1900-1923*, (undated, no publisher) for a detailed analysis of inter-war council house provision. In September 2009 the *Dudley News* reported that residents of Woodside, which is adjacent to Pensnett, were still waiting for the renovation of their inter-war homes. Residents in 44 council homes had houses where “their toilet is at one end of the kitchen and the bathroom at the other. Some of the houses, which were built in the 1920s, do not even have sinks in the toilet areas”. *Dudley News*, 23rd September 2009, p. 1.

<sup>133</sup> Hopkins, *New Look*, p. 46; Nuttgens, *The Home*, p. 67.

<sup>134</sup> Chinn, *Homes*, p. v.

<sup>135</sup> Nuttgens, *The Home*, p. 67. Local authority housing was to be allocated on a complex system of points, considering both social and economic indicators which could encompass family size, health and age as well as homelessness. The act also promised slum clearance and a long-term improvement in housing standards.

<sup>136</sup> *Express and Star*, 5<sup>th</sup> November 1948, (newspaper cuttings folder Coseley Archives) 396 houses in Sedgley and 521 in Tipton.

council housing that was the “distinctive post-war development”.<sup>137</sup> In 1951 Staffordshire County Council Development Plan stipulated the housing needs of the county, including Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton.<sup>138</sup>

The pace of reconstruction and new building varied according to the plans and finances of individual local authorities. For example, large-scale slum clearance took place in 1950s Wolverhampton, but their replacement by prefabricated bungalows and flats, in preference to houses, was criticised.<sup>139</sup> Generally, the rate of progress was disappointing; thousands of people remained in sub-standard accommodation,<sup>140</sup> lacking basic facilities – electricity, hot water and bathrooms.<sup>141</sup>

The adverse effects of poor living conditions were noted in 1954 by Dr. John Lester:

“Patients lived in dreadful houses which were perpetually damp and impossible to heat. A roaring fire simply created a howling draught so that when people huddled round the hearth their backs remained cold. In women the intense heat caused a brownish purple mottling of shins and knees...At the other end of the scale I have known a baby die from hypothermia because its cot was situated in a bay-window remote from the fireplace. Tragedies occurred due to the unsafe use of coal-gas appliances...rigged up” in an attempt to keep warm.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Clarke, *Hope*, p. 242; Nuttgens, *The Home*, p. 67; Jones, *Making*, p. 157. In 1953, the government target of 300,000 new houses was attained but despite rhetoric and promises many continued to live in overcrowded and unsuitable homes.

<sup>138</sup> *Staffordshire County Council Development Plan, 1951*, pp. 73-79. The housing needs assessment for the county was to provide:

- i ) provide separate accommodation for each family unit which requires it.
- ii ) to meet additional needs arising from natural population increase.
- iii ) to replace unfit housing.
- iv ) to house population overspill.

<sup>139</sup> Barnsby, *Housing*, p. 57. Many of the flats and temporary pre-fabricated houses are still inhabited.

<sup>140</sup> Chinn, *They Worked*, p. 126.

<sup>141</sup> Thompson, A., *A Century of Childhood Memories in Great Bridge*, The Great Bridge Library User Group and Oldbury Local History Group, 2000, p. 53.

<sup>142</sup> Lester, J., ‘In a Black Country Practice’, *The Blackcountryman*, Autumn 2003, pp. 15-17. Lester moved from a rural medical practice to a Black Country surgery. Almost all elderly women recalled in the author’s childhood suffered from the mottling ‘known in the Latin which the medical profession used at the time as *erythema ab igne* – redness from fire’. p. 16. The lack of facilities in many houses is demonstrated in the doctor’s experiences. For example, one house which Dr Lester attended contained ‘a couple and their baby (who) had died of carbon monoxide poisoning because they had rigged up a free-standing gas fire in the bedroom and connected it by flimsy rubber tubing to a gas bracket high on the wall’. p. 16.

By 1971, the Black Country Society's review of the 1948 Conurbation Report concluded that the reclamation of several thousand acres of derelict land, clearance of 30,000 slums and construction of new estates fulfilled the needs of an increasing population.<sup>143</sup> This optimism was endorsed in 1973 when it was calculated that there had been significant changes since 1948, which were directly attributable to a "general increase in affluence..., slum clearance, redevelopment and the development of new housing, industrial and shopping areas."<sup>144</sup>

The local authorities in Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton attempted to adhere to government guidelines, making strenuous efforts to improve their housing stock. But the progress was slow, impeded both by the condition of existing stock and lack of basic materials.

#### **a) Pensnett**

Brierley Hill Council had a clear concept of future planning. In his foreword to the council's *Post-war Reconstruction Brochure*, the chairman admitted that planning was a priority:

"at no time ... since the birth of our Lord, has any real serious attempt been made to properly and comprehensively plan for the people of the world. But at long last it would seem that the governments of Great Britain ... are now to tackle this very important item." Homes would be the priority when the "blessed word [peace] rings out anew and the world returns to sanity."<sup>145</sup>

The 1944 report from the Medical Officer of Health recorded that houses in the designated Clearance Area remained inhabited and were deteriorating. The Housing Department was "faced with a good deal of work... as soon as conditions permit", as there was "great danger" to health from unsanitary and overcrowded conditions.<sup>146</sup> A

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<sup>143</sup> Member of the Black Country Society, 'A Review of Missed Opportunities and Needs', *The Blackcountryman*, Summer 1971, p. 38. The Black Country Society reviewed the report in the light of a recent membership survey. However, they expressed concern that further building projects would endanger the surrounding areas of green-belt land.

<sup>144</sup> Anonymous, 'What Sort of Black Country?' *The Blackcountryman*, Spring 1973, p. 52.

<sup>145</sup> Brierley Hill Urban District Council, *Town Planning and Post-War Reconstruction- Official Brochure, 1943*, pages not numbered.

<sup>146</sup> Brierley Hill Urban District Council, *Public Health Report, December 1944*, p. 16.

ten-year housing plan was to be implemented.<sup>147</sup> Approximately ten demolition orders per year were placed on Pensnett homes between 1939 and 1945;<sup>148</sup> the slow progress caused concern as “it cannot be expected that improvements in the health and sociology of the inhabitants will be noticeable until houses in sufficient numbers...[were] available”.<sup>149</sup>

In 1945 the Boundary Commissioners noted the adverse affected of previous mining in Pensnett, resulting in a “considerable area of undermined and derelict land”. It advocated reclamation to regenerate the area, providing recreational land and encouraging building projects for housing and industrial use.<sup>150</sup> The Medical Office of Health commented that a “large number of individually unfit houses and houses in the Clearance Area were still occupied”.<sup>151</sup> Nevertheless, as late as 1965 demolition orders remained on twelve houses, three on the High Street - the main thoroughfare of the village.<sup>152</sup>

Respondents described living in overcrowded and dilapidated homes until the mid-1960s; in Pensnett most of these families resided in the High Street. For example, when they married in 1959 Mr and Mrs Greenaway lived in a rented terraced house, with gas, but “no water...you know just like the houses in the Black Country Museum”.<sup>153</sup> Bill Jones, who was born in 1938, lived nearby in a “condemned farm cottage” with no facilities – until the family was re-housed in 1954.<sup>154</sup> The terraced house rented by the Cartwright family, necessitated brother and sister sharing a room, until they moved in 1960 when Val was 21. She recalled “a curtain down the side [between their beds] and I had to have the side with the winder ‘cos I wouldn’t sleep with ner a winder (sic)”. She recalled spending so long in her first proper bath that the family worried that she’d drowned.<sup>155</sup> In total, seven respondents lacked bathrooms until the 1960s and Mrs Woolley didn’t have a ‘proper’ bath until her

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<sup>147</sup> Brierley Hill Urban District Council, *Local Government (Boundary Commission) Act, 1945*, p.24. Pensnett’s inclusion into the statistics for Brierley Hill precludes the provision of accurate and precise housing figures.

<sup>148</sup> Brierley Hill Urban District Council, *Reports of the Medical Officer of Health, 1939-1965*.

<sup>149</sup> Brierley Hill Urban District Council, *Report of the Medical Officer of Health, 1954*, p. 6.

<sup>150</sup> Brierley Hill U.D.C. *Local Government (Boundary Commission) Act, 1945*, p. 5.

<sup>151</sup> Brierley Hill U.D.C. *Public Health Report, December 1944*, p. 16.

<sup>152</sup> Brierley Hill U.D.C. *Public Health Report, 1965*, p.30.

<sup>153</sup> Pensnett Mr SG.

<sup>154</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ.

<sup>155</sup> Pensnett Miss VC.

marriage in 1965.<sup>156</sup> Many of the homes constructed in the inter-war years only had electric sockets on the ground floor; electric irons were usually plugged into available light sockets.<sup>157</sup>

Shortages and restrictions delayed building; Mrs HW moved from Tipton to Pensnett in 1948. Her father was employed by the local water authority and “[then] we moved and lived in one of the water board houses. It was a house that was built for the job and we moved there in 1948...it was a detached house and it had to have a permit to be built because of the shortages after the war”.<sup>158</sup>

## **b) Sedgley**

Sedgley Urban District Council built 1,362 houses in the pre-war years,<sup>159</sup> constructing houses on three different sites, with bathrooms, gas boilers and outside toilets, designed and built specifically for the working class.<sup>160</sup> This was in response to the dilapidated state of low-grade poorly maintained houses and serious overcrowding that was deemed prejudicial to health.<sup>161</sup> However, despite the tree-lined streets of the new estates, designed to “preserve and improve” existing amenities,<sup>162</sup> many dwellings had un-plastered walls, lacked electricity, hot water, bathrooms and toilet facilities.<sup>163</sup> Inevitably, the war exacerbated existing problems.<sup>164</sup>

In 1941 the Medical Officer of Health indicated that the hostilities retarded slum clearance.<sup>165</sup> No demolition orders were issued and “many houses ... [were] quickly dropping to a standard that can hardly be called ‘fit for habitation’”. Notices for

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<sup>156</sup> Pensnett Mrs BW.

<sup>157</sup> Informal conversation with YB of Pensnett 21<sup>st</sup> January 2007; Badger, ‘Consumption’, p. 33.

<sup>158</sup> Pensnett Mrs HW.

<sup>159</sup> *Sedgley Official Guide, 1953*, p.11.

<sup>160</sup> Aitcheson, *Working Class*, p. 3.

<sup>161</sup> Aitcheson, *Working Class*, chapter two, chapter four, p. 46. Aitcheson cites *The Herald*, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1923, p. 8. Councillor Mills (Chairman of the Housing Committee) addressed the completion ceremony of the Beacon Hill Estate and spoke of the scale and nature of overcrowding where “There were fourteen persons living in two small bedrooms. A married son and a married daughter, each with their children, living with their parents and sharing bedrooms with other grown up members of the family. Kitchen tables were turned upside-down at night in order to find sleeping accommodation”.

<sup>162</sup> *Sedgley Official Guide 1963*, p. 13.

<sup>163</sup> Sedgley Mr NS. The kitchen walls in the family’s Sedgley home were unplastered in 1967 when the family took tenancy.

<sup>164</sup> Power, P., ‘Memories of a Lamplighter’s Lad’ *The Blackcountryman*, Summer, 1998, p. 65.

<sup>165</sup> *Interim Annual Report, Medical Officer of Health, 1941*, p. 15.

repairs under the Housing Act were not served, as it was “hopeless” to expect work to be done. The anticipated amount of remedial work was reputedly “colossal”.<sup>166</sup>

Despite an extensive inter-war building programme, Sedgley still contained slums.<sup>167</sup> Between 1946 and 1957, 285 houses were deemed beyond repair, but it was 1966 before they were demolished and their inhabitants re-housed.<sup>168</sup> These figures may well be underestimated - in 1964 the Chief Inspector for Public Health in Sedgley admitted that staffing shortages rendered house inspection “impossible”. Consequently, defects were discovered only when householders reported them; undoubtedly some tenants lacked the time, energy, or confidence to complain to the ‘authorities’. However, he claimed that “on the whole the houses of this district are in a good state of repair”.<sup>169</sup>

The construction of housing, re-building and repairs was impeded by financial constraints and shortages of building materials. In 1951, Ron Baker was frustrated in attempts to relocate from his terraced house, as new homes rarely “came on the market, materials were scarce, and special licences were required for new property”.<sup>170</sup> Mary Tatem and her husband waited almost a year until 1948 for Sedgley local authority to grant their building permit.<sup>171</sup> Despite Sedgley Council “handing over” 203 new housing units in 1964, “one of its best years”, extensive housing problems remained. Sedgley’s Medical Officer of Health expressed concern over newly-weds compelled to live with in-laws. He believed that beginning married life in shared accommodation was a major barrier to health and welfare. It exacerbated “family disharmony” and resulted in conditions which were injurious to

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<sup>166</sup> *Interim Annual Report, Medical officer of Health, 1941*, p. 15.

<sup>167</sup> See Aitchison, *Working Class*, This work, produced during the early 2000s, examines housing conditions in Sedgley Village between 1900 and 1924. In addition to examining the attitude of Sedgley Urban District Council to the 1909 Housing and Town Planning Act it traces the development of the Beacon Hill Council Estate, which was under construction during the early 1920s. Sedgley was one of only two local authorities in the outer districts of the conurbation with such a high proportion of slums. *Conurbation*, p. 93.

<sup>168</sup> Sedgley Urban District Council, *Register of Unfit Housing (not in clearance areas and not capable of repair), 1937-1957*.

<sup>169</sup> Sedgley Urban District Council, *Annual Report of the Medical Officer for Health, 1964*, pages not numbered.

<sup>170</sup> Gallo, A., *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Artist: The Story of Ron Baker – A Child of the Black Country*, Halesowen: No Publisher, 2001, p. 165.

<sup>171</sup> Tatem, M., *Just Me!: The Story of Mary Tatem*, Wolverhampton: Clark and Howard Books, 1987, p. 34.

health and well-being, particularly the physical and mental health of young mothers.<sup>172</sup>

The report indicated a “considerable number” of well-built inter-war houses lacking basic modern amenities of hot water, bathrooms and internal water closets *and* highlighted the flaws and failures of existing initiatives. For example, the government’s Improvement Grant Scheme was unsuccessful, as Sedgley landlords displayed little interest in altruistic expenditure to improve the facilities for their tenants. However, the scheme was more popular with owner-occupiers. Although, many were unable to participate as they “just cannot afford the other 50% cost of the work”; a mere six applications had been approved during the whole of 1964.<sup>173</sup> Sedgley contained a similar number of dilapidated houses to the other areas, but only two respondents recalled residing in poor conditions. Muriel Brown lived in a council house without electricity; it contained a bath, which was not connected to a water supply.<sup>174</sup> Mrs Bennett’s council house was without electricity until 1952, when her father paid to “have it put in”.<sup>175</sup>

Notwithstanding problems, the Sedgley housing situation demonstratively improved. Between 1946 and 1964, 946 condemned houses were replaced by 1,500 council houses constructed on similar lines to the pre-war estates.<sup>176</sup> Nevertheless, despite the re-housing of 344 families during 1964, a further 720 names remained on the waiting list.<sup>177</sup> The *Sedgley Guide* contained photographs of new homes, fulsomely proclaiming that the estates were spacious and built with a view to the preservation of the “natural charm of the splendid sites.”<sup>178</sup> Although the purpose of these guides and handbooks was to promote the attractions of specific areas and their claims may not

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<sup>172</sup> Sedgley Urban District Council, *Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health, 1964*, pages not numbered. The population of Sedgley was listed as 31,600 and there were 9,901 inhabited houses. During that year 301 houses had been completed and 189 were under construction. The difficulties of young mothers were, in his opinion, aggravated by the necessity of shared washing and cooking facilities.

<sup>173</sup> Sedgley Urban District Council, *Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health, 1964*. The Government Improvement Grant Scheme involved 50% of the cost paid by the local authority and the remainder by the owner.

<sup>174</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB. Although a number of respondents recalled the existence of crumbling Victorian terraced housing along the High Street and Bull Ring areas.

<sup>175</sup> Sedgley Mrs CB.

<sup>176</sup> *Sedgley Official Guide, 1964*, p. 17.

<sup>177</sup> Sedgley Urban District Council, *Annual Report, 1964*, p. 19.

<sup>178</sup> *Sedgley Official Guide, 1964*, p. 17.

be entirely objective, newspaper coverage and local government papers verified these assertions.

Public housing developments were supplemented by the granting of Civil Building Licences for private building schemes.<sup>179</sup> In excess of 2,500 private houses were built between 1945 and 1963, with planning permission granted for a further 900 in close proximity to the village centre.<sup>180</sup> The council acquired parcels of land for further developments, offering advances under the Small Dwellings Acquisition Acts to aid individuals in the purchase, or building, of homes.<sup>181</sup> Local newspapers disclosed landowners' reluctance to comply; lengthy battles ensued before land was relinquished under compulsory purchase orders.<sup>182</sup> The new estates were constructed on the periphery of the villages, resulting in the loss of farmland and culminating in alterations to the pre-war landscape.<sup>183</sup>

In 1962 Sedgley, described as maintaining a "peaceful and semi-rural aspect", was praised by the Ministry of Housing for the reclamation of over 700 acres of derelict land, almost a quarter of the district's total area.<sup>184</sup> As late as 1963, the Official Guide admitted that, regardless of previous efforts, no-one would deny that redevelopment was necessary in the 'older parts' of the district.<sup>185</sup> However, although the environment of the surrounding Black Country was disfigured by "ugly" factories and the remnants of past industrial activity, Sedgley had fortunately retained its "beautiful" landscape.<sup>186</sup>

### c) Tipton

The Tipton housing situation followed similar patterns, with the clearing of slums and erection of new council estates during the 1900s. In 1915 Parkes claimed that the houses were of a better "class" than in the previous century and in a less "ruinous"

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<sup>179</sup> *Bilston and Willenhall Times*, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1947 (CoN File - Coseley Archives).

<sup>180</sup> *Sedgley Official Guide*, 1963, p. 15. New private housing estates were built at Brownswall, Sandyfields, Hickmereland Farm and Sedgley Hall.

<sup>181</sup> *Sedgley Official Guide*, p. 12.

<sup>182</sup> For example the owner of the Jockey Works on the Dudley Road fought and lost a lengthy battle to prevent the compulsory purchase of land intended for the construction of 96 houses and flats. *Express and Star*, 1957 (CoN File - Coseley Archives).

<sup>183</sup> Sykes, *Popular*, p. 47.

<sup>184</sup> 'A Ten Year Record of Brighter Homes and Cleaner Air' *Birmingham Post*, 30<sup>th</sup> January 1962.

<sup>185</sup> *Sedgley Official Guide* 1963, p. 14.

<sup>186</sup> *Sedgley Official Guide* 1963, p. 31.



state.<sup>187</sup> Demolition and re-housing continued during the inter-war years.<sup>188</sup> The Summerhill Estate, locally known as Abyssinia, was built between 1935 and 1936.<sup>189</sup> Reconstruction of the Tibbington Estate, the “Lost City”,<sup>190</sup> commenced simultaneously, although it was over 30 years before slum clearance was completed.

The Lost City of the 1960s was an “isolated estate [with] only one road onto the estate, completely surrounded by canals, flooded pit banks, marl holes and natural springs, so that the area was very boggy and wet”.<sup>191</sup> By 1969 this estate, and others in the vicinity, were censured as they expanded “like a grey culture over the derelict pit shafts and slag heaps... [and] had satisfied the desperate need for new homes but little else”. Their deterioration and depressing facades were criticised, along with architects and builders: “age has crept into the bricks but no maturity...their only concession to the good life being provided by a brewery and a row of shops...*This is the remains of the middle class concept of what working class houses and life should be like*” (my italics).<sup>192</sup>

In 1939, despite the erection of nearly 4,000 houses, officials acknowledged that Tipton’s slum clearance problem was “one of the most difficult in the country”.<sup>193</sup> The acute housing shortage rendered the town “unable to house all the vast army of workers” employed within Tipton.<sup>194</sup> Housing plans caused friction amongst councillors, between advocates of land retention and the Housing and Planning Committee’s demands to sell land for industrial use. Upper Church Lane was intended for the construction of 800 houses; Alderman Welsh believed its disposal would be “tragical” and short-sighted when “people that worked in Tipton wanted to live in the town”. Councillor Naylor endorsed this, voicing concern over houses so

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<sup>187</sup> Parkes, J., *A History of Tipton*, (privately published) 1915, p. 134. However, his assessment of housing conditions is subjective, as Parkes belonged to Tipton’s upper-middle class.

<sup>188</sup> *Tipton Official Handbook*, 1956, p. 19. A total of 1,800 slums were demolished between 1930 and 1938.

<sup>189</sup> *Black Country Bugle*, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1998, p. 3.

<sup>190</sup> So called because only one road had direct access to the ‘outside world’ and the inhabitants expressed feelings of isolation from the rest of Tipton. There appears to be confusion concerning the various sobriquets for these estates. Hodgkins and Brimble, *Tipton*, for example, have included a photograph of the Tibbington Estate which is captioned the ‘Lost City.’ *Dudley Herald*, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1946, p. 8. According to the newspaper the Gospel Oak Estate was also called the ‘Lost, City’ for the same reason.

<sup>191</sup> Tipton Mrs BT.

<sup>192</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 25<sup>th</sup> July 1969, p. 5.

<sup>193</sup> *Tipton Official Handbook*, 1939, p. 2. This referred to the expectations of the 1930 Housing Act.

<sup>194</sup> *Tipton Official Handbook*, p. 22.

dilapidated that if the area was bombed “they would go altogether, because they would blow down.”<sup>195</sup> However, class-bias was revealed by Alderman Slater’s view that it was “economically unsound for years after the war to *build houses for the working classes*” (my italics).<sup>196</sup> Nevertheless, by 1944 tenders were invited for housing construction on numerous sites and an architect was engaged for the “preparation of alternative designs for parlour type houses”.<sup>197</sup>

The *Express and Star* revealed housing shortages, substandard housing and insensitive council officials. In 1945, a resident of Bloomfield Road for over 30 years, complained that his roof was collapsing. The building was consequently certified as uninhabitable and the council served notice to “quit”. Mr Hill and his family of nine, who were sleeping in one room, were unsympathetically advised to live in the “bru ‘us” (brew house) until they could be re-housed by the council.<sup>198</sup> In the following January the newspaper expressed concern at the “great number” of demobilised soldiers who lacked adequate, affordable housing.<sup>199</sup> In 1946 the *Tipton Herald* ran the headline “Tipton Houses Rationed”, as a Points System for the allocation of houses on the Denbigh Estate was introduced.<sup>200</sup> In the same year, five families were “squatting” in unoccupied huts erected to accommodate “bombed out” families. The huts lacked water, gas and electricity, but the families claimed they were “three times better” than their homes in Bloomfield Road.<sup>201</sup> Although the council accepted responsibility, the acute shortage of building materials hampered

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<sup>195</sup> *Tipton Herald*, 8<sup>th</sup> March 1941. Tipton suffered the effects of “severe” bombing raids between 1940 and 1942 with the destruction of approximately 150 houses and damage to nearly 2,000. *Tipton Herald*, June 1945 (Newspaper Cutting Folder, Owen Street Library).

<sup>196</sup> *Tipton Herald*, 8<sup>th</sup> March 1941 (Newspaper Cuttings Folder, Owen Street Library).

The full debate is well worth reading. The council finally decided not to sell the land but to retain it for post-war housing. The intention was to acquire additional land so that “they might make Tipton a better place”. Councillor Naylor said that he knew of 10 people sharing 2 rooms and even in council owned houses there were 100s of people living in overcrowded conditions. Adjoining Coseley had already experienced bombing raids and so had Tipton but knowledge of this was outside the public domain until reporting restrictions were lifted in October 1944. *Tipton Herald* (undated - late 1940s, Newspaper Cutting Folder, Owen Street Library)

<sup>197</sup> *Birmingham Post*, 14<sup>th</sup> June 1944; *Tipton Herald*, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1945; *Birmingham Post*, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1945.

<sup>198</sup> *Express and Star*, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1945 (no page number, newspaper cutting folder at Coseley Archives).

<sup>199</sup> *Express and Star*, 9<sup>th</sup> September 1946 (no page number, newspaper cutting folder at Coseley Archives).

<sup>200</sup> *Tipton Herald*, June 1944. There were 62 houses available and 1/3 of the houses let to each of the following categories:- 1) Ex-servicemen or their widows. 2) Lodgers (excluding category 1). 3) All other applicants.

<sup>201</sup> *Tipton Herald*, 17<sup>th</sup> August 1946.

their efforts.<sup>202</sup> An open-air meeting was informed in 1947 that 3,000 families required homes and “at the present rate of progress... [re-housing] would take 100 years”.<sup>203</sup> Yet by 1948 Tipton was one of three areas of the West Midlands to exceed estimated building targets.<sup>204</sup> A year later, however, amidst allegations of sabotage and council dismissals, it was reported that, despite a target of 300 houses, only 60 had been completed in six months.<sup>205</sup>

The Staffordshire County Council Development Plan, of 1951, approximated the number of dwellings in Tipton as 10,200. It noted that a further 5,600 dwellings were needed to relieve “sharing”, replace those in clearance areas and accommodate the expanding population (see table 1.1).<sup>206</sup>

**TABLE 1.1 New Housing Requirements in Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton, 1951**

Name of local Authority	Estimated no. of dwellings	Number of new dwellings required in development plan			Total new houses for local authority needs
		Relieve ‘sharing’	Replace clearance houses	House growing pop.	
Tipton MBC	10,200	1,350	2,500	1,750	5,600
Brierley Hill UDC	13,650	3,000	2,250	1,560	6,810
Sedgley UDC	6,450	920	1,200	230	2,350

**Source: Staffordshire County Council Development Plan, 1951: Survey Report and Analysis, p. 78.**

<sup>202</sup> *Tipton Herald*, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1947.

<sup>203</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1947, p. 3.

<sup>204</sup> *Express and Star*, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1948.

<sup>205</sup> *Tipton Herald*, 31<sup>st</sup> August 1948, (Newspaper Cuttings Folder, Owen Street Library).

<sup>206</sup> *Staffordshire County Council Development Plan, 1951*, p. 78. This table provides details of slum clearance for the individual areas of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton, and predicts housing requirements for the future.

By 1956, 4,653 houses were erected, with several other sites under development, but increasing numbers of migrating workers still required accommodation.<sup>207</sup>

Moorhouse, looking out from Birmingham across “the most completely bedraggled piece of England”,<sup>208</sup> was irked by the failure of Tipton’s council to utilise funds, “swilling around” from its industrial prosperity, to provide for “community...needs”. He claimed that Tipton was “so bereft of normal facilities” that civic entertaining took place in the local pub and the Mayor’s “at-homes... [were] conducted in the territorial drill hall.” One alderman complained that “this kind of thing was reducing the borough to a laughing stock,” but Moorhouse opined that “[this] turn of phrase was inept because if it stirs any emotion Tipton...is rather a place to make you weep”.<sup>209</sup> The *Tipton Handbook* conceded that, despite the strenuous efforts, environmental improvements were incomplete.<sup>210</sup> In October 1960, the *Tipton Mercury* claimed that “to the undiscerning eye, Tipton is a dismal, perhaps depressing monument to the ugliness of industry”.<sup>211</sup> Although five years later, whilst acknowledging that further work was necessary,<sup>212</sup> “great strides” housing provision were claimed.<sup>213</sup> One in two was council-owned, which indicative of their “magnificent” housing record.<sup>214</sup>

Despite redevelopment, the “sweeping away” of slums and the building of “fine” new ones, dilapidated houses remained.<sup>215</sup> Interestingly, not all slum landlords were of middle-class backgrounds. Mr Whitehouse’s father, a roll turner, purchased six ‘two up and two down’ houses in Tipton during the 1940s. Although the family moved into a brand new council house with “all mod cons” in 1952, his father continued to

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<sup>207</sup> *Tipton Official Handbook*, 1956, p. 19.

<sup>208</sup> Moorhouse, *Britain*, p. 92. Moorhouse was one of the most acerbic critics of the Black Country in the 1960s.

<sup>209</sup> Moorhouse, *Britain*, p. 100.

<sup>210</sup> *Tipton Official Handbook* 1956, p. 21.

<sup>211</sup> ‘A Ten Year Record of Brighter Homes and Cleaner Air’, *Sunday Mercury*, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1960.

<sup>212</sup> *Tipton Official Handbook* 1965, p.11. There were 12,000 dwellings in Tipton, of which 6,000 were owned by the corporation.

<sup>213</sup> *Tipton Official Handbook* 1965, p. 21 By this time 3,000 houses had been demolished, 13,000 people re-housed and a further 1,250 dwellings were planned.

<sup>214</sup> *Tipton Official Handbook* 1965, p. 21. Their latest triumph was the Bolton Court Estate, which had “risen out of dereliction to contain some of the tallest flats in the borough” and was designed to accommodate 234 families in 13 storey flats, although within a few years the Black Country Society was questioning the wisdom of building housing of this design. The Bolton Court Estate was built on 5 ½ acres of land owned by Birmingham Navigation, which consisted of disused canal basins, workshops and pumping stations. Built at a cost of £787,000, they were opened in 1965 and contained “all the up to date amenities” – garages, play area and landscaping.

<sup>215</sup> *Tipton Official Handbook* 1956, p. 11.

let the houses until they were compulsorily purchased in 1968.<sup>216</sup> Mrs BA's grandfather, a miner, accumulated over 60 houses in Pensnett<sup>217</sup> and her husband's uncle also owned several.<sup>218</sup>

### *Overcrowding and Shared Facilities*

In all three areas, overcrowding was problematic, with families lacking or sharing amenities into the 1970s. Nationally, the 1961 census revealed that 22% of the population were without running hot water.<sup>219</sup> Hopkins claimed that a "remarkable" number of houses lacked or shared facilities in 1971.<sup>220</sup> Ron Barnes lived in 1960s Hackney, he bitterly questioned the efficacy of housing provision and claims of prosperity, enquiring: "what sort of place is this, when a family lives in damp housing, with restricted space, three or four to a bedroom, people who, even in this day and age of so-called 'affluence', are unable to afford a holiday and many other things beside?"<sup>221</sup>

Similar questions could have been asked within the three localities. Born in 1944, Carol Hathorne grew up in an overcrowded council house in the slum clearance area of Tipton's 'Lost City', where conditions were cramped and 'shared' housing was common.<sup>222</sup> Through the 1950s and 60s District Nurse Edith Cotterill visited patients in accommodation built 100 years earlier, around communal yards with communal amenities, which appeared to "defy" demolition.<sup>223</sup> 55% of Tipton respondents lived in similar accommodation during the study period. Some families moved, or improved existing homes during the 1950s, although it was 1960 before Mr DA's family had a bathroom conversion. His grandmother's situation was worse:

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<sup>216</sup> Tipton Mr BW.

<sup>217</sup> Pensnett Mrs BA. Her grandfather was a winder at the pit-head who retired at the age of 49, due to rheumatism, and managed to buy cheap houses which "kept him until he was 92".

<sup>218</sup> Pensnett Mr RA.

<sup>219</sup> D'Cruze, S., 'Women and Family' in Purvis, J., (ed.), *Women's* p. 67.

<sup>220</sup> Hopkins, *Rise and Decline*, p. 143/4; Obelkevich and Catterall, *Understanding*, p. 145. They argued that it was the first indoor bathroom not the first washing machine which marked the real breakthrough in modern living standards.

<sup>221</sup> Barnes, R., *A Licence to Live: Scenes from a post-war working class life in Hackney*, Hackney: W.E.A. Centre, 1974, p. 51; Sandbrook, *Never Had It*, p. 98.

<sup>222</sup> Hathorne, C., *Slurry and Strawberries: Memories of a Tipton Childhood*, Kingswinford: The Black Country Society, 2002, p. 5. Carol lived with her parents, brother, grandmother and great-aunt next door to her aunt, uncle and five cousins; Mr Davies 1998; Mr HT.

<sup>223</sup> Cotterill, E., *A Black Country Nurse at Large*, Kingswinford: The Black Country Society, 1973, p. 7.

“Although Granny lived over the road from us in the same street she *never* had hot water from a tap. They had gaslight until the 1950s and *never* had a bathroom.”<sup>224</sup>

National data (Table 1.2) indicated that between 1951 and 1971 the percentage of households which lacked a fixed bath fell by 28.3% and those without water closets by 7%.

**TABLE 1.2 Proportion of Households (in England and Wales) Sharing or Lacking Amenities (in percentages)**

Type of amenity	1951		1961		1971	
	Share	Lack	Share	Lack	Share	Lack
Hot water tap	-	-	1.8	21.9	2.0	6.4
Fixed bath	8	37	4.6	22.0	3.4	8.7
Water closet	13	8	5.8	6.9	4.0	1.1

Source: Halsey (ed.), *British Social Trends Since 1900, 1988*.

Hopkins, *The Rise and Decline of the British Working Classes, 1991*.

However, boundary changes in 1966 have made it virtually impossible to replicate this data for Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton as comparative figures for each decade are rendered meaningless. The statistics for Sedgley, supplied by the Medical Officer for Health in 1964, indicated that there were only six multiple occupancy houses in the area and concluded that “sharing does not present a problem” in Sedgley.<sup>225</sup> This was disputed; the Slum Clearance Register indicated that between 1946 and 1965 an average of 5.5 individuals lived in each of the “one up, two down houses”.

<sup>224</sup> Tipton Mr DA. Table 1.2 shows that proportion of houses that shared, or lacked, facilities in England and Wales between 1951 and 1971.

<sup>225</sup> Sedgley Urban District Council, *Annual Report of the Medical Officer for Health, 1964*.

Table 1.3 compares amenities in two of the areas with the national statistics (see Table 1.2), demonstrating that in 1971 the proportion of households in Pensnett and Sedgley lacking hot water taps and fixed baths, was significantly lower than the national average.

**TABLE 1.3 Proportion of Dwellings Lacking in Amenities in 1971**

Type of amenity	England/Wales	Pensnett	Sedgley	Tipton
Hot water tap	6.4	2.0	2.3	N/A
Fixed bath	8.7	2.3	3.0	N/A

**Source: Dudley M.B.C. Research and Information Team Folder, (1975) extracted from the 1971 census.**

Although, when Ron Baker married in 1948, he and his wife used a tin bath as the house and others in the immediate neighbourhood, lacked a bathroom;<sup>226</sup> Jo Stafford's house had neither bathroom nor electricity plugs, although there were electric lights.<sup>227</sup>

Despite continuing deficiencies, by 1970 the majority of people experienced major improvements in housing conditions. Improved amenities, services and fittings were accessible and affordable due to full employment, desirable due to rising expectations and available due to rapid public and private house-construction.<sup>228</sup> In Burnett's estimation the "simple test of persons per room" was the most effective way of measuring and recording change over time.<sup>229</sup> National statistics for house sharing had declined significantly, from 15.7% in 1911 to 7.3% in 1966. The West Midlands demonstrated greater success, with 5.3% of the total population sharing accommodation.<sup>230</sup> The census returns for 1971 indicated that less than 2% of Pensnett householders shared their accommodation and the figure for Sedgley was

<sup>226</sup> Gallo, *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Artist*, p. 162.

<sup>227</sup> Stafford, J. M., *Light in the Dust*, Stourbridge: Trustline Publishing, 1990.

<sup>228</sup> Burnett, *Social*, pp. 302-304.

<sup>229</sup> Burnett, *Social*, p. 305.

<sup>230</sup> Burnett, *Social*, p. 305.

1.2%, indicating that the local authorities demonstrated some efficiency in the area of housing provision.<sup>231</sup>

Nevertheless, oral testimony disputes this, suggesting that shared homes remained common throughout the period, particularly in Tipton. Few Pensnett or Sedgley respondents recalled severe overcrowding. Mrs Tolley lived in a three-bed roomed council house in 1950s Tipton:

“officially, four [people] mom and dad, and my sister and myself. But we’d always got other people staying with us – family. For instance, dad’s brother and his wife and first child...mom’s sister, her husband and first child. And friends over from Ireland - they came and lived with us for a while, and then when my sister got married, my sister, her husband and first child so there was always more than four in the house”.<sup>232</sup>

Rev. CH revealed that, “Great grandmother, great aunt, mother, father, brother and myself” lived together until 1956. Living next door was a family with 13 children.<sup>233</sup>

Mr MJ, born in 1940, described similar over-crowding:

“Basically two until 1947, then father came back from the wars (sic). An aunt and uncle got married and they moved in for a while. Extended families, it happened a lot in Tipton. The gran lived with one or other of the families...would stop there for three or four years and then go on to the next one...aunty and uncle lived with us because they’d got nowhere else to go.”<sup>234</sup>

Mr Tolley lived in a three bed-roomed terraced house, from which his grandmother ran her shop, during the 1950s: “Five kids, mother, dad and me granny and, in the little front bedroom, she’d [granny] got a lodger (laughter)”.<sup>235</sup> He explained their sleeping arrangements: “only three bedrooms, the mom and dad had one, gran slept with my two sisters in a big bed and me and two brothers in a hospital bed in the same room and a lodger in the front room”.<sup>236</sup> Only in rare instances did the size of the nuclear family result in overcrowding. Mr Davies moved to Princes End in 1946, into

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<sup>231</sup> Dudley M.B.C. *Research and Information Team Folder*, 1975.

<sup>232</sup> Tipton Mrs BT.

<sup>233</sup> Tipton Rev. CH.

<sup>234</sup> Tipton Mr MJ.

<sup>235</sup> Tipton Mr HT.

<sup>236</sup> Mr Tolley 1998.



a three bed-roomed house with his parents and five siblings.<sup>237</sup> Regardless of their *personal* circumstances, all Tipton respondents recalled housing inadequacies during this period.

Despite continued overcrowding, there was a gradual overall improvement as new housing estates were constructed in all three areas. However, these improvements, and their effects on the locale, remained controversial; some changes were perceived as ill-conceived, detrimental to the social structure and the environment. Sandbrook described “widespread horror” as housing estates sprawled over agricultural land in Birmingham.<sup>238</sup> In July 1969, the *Dudley Herald* expressed disquiet over Tipton. “It was between the canals and the wars that Tipton began to build, and build, and build. New Estates - new promises”.<sup>239</sup> Written when the final building programme (the Glebefields Estate) was nearing completion, it disparaged the aesthetic quality of the buildings, arguing that planning errors were creating future slums, questioning whether it was possible to build a better life “out of concrete and glass”.<sup>240</sup>

In 1973, the post-war rebuilding programme was queried, due to the loss of open space and the “destruction of many items of historical and architectural interest”.<sup>241</sup> The Black Country Society expressed concern that local authority development had adversely affected Owen Street. The once densely populated area run-down and people moved, leaving derelict land, closed shops and a main street “choked” by traffic.<sup>242</sup> Although it is important to be aware of the agenda of this society – to campaign and to *preserve* its heritage (my italics), and influence its future.

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<sup>237</sup> Mr Davies 1998.

<sup>238</sup> Sandbrook, *White Heat*, p. 593. Although he also admits that the much maligned high-rise flats were an effective way to curtail urban sprawl. The Birmingham *Evening Dispatch* demanded ‘really high’ buildings to stop the city’s expansion.

<sup>239</sup> Brooks, P., and M. Reynolds, ‘Tipton – From fields and farms to gasworks’, *Dudley Herald*, 25<sup>th</sup> July 1969.

<sup>240</sup> Brookes and Reynolds, ‘Tipton’, 1969.

<sup>241</sup> Anon. ‘What Sort of Black Country?’, p. 53.

<sup>242</sup> Anon. ‘What Sort of Black Country?’, p. 54. Owen Street was formerly the central shopping and business area of Tipton servicing the local community.

### **Location, Respectability and Status**

The location in which respondents resided was important in terms of self-respect and status. Despite problems of differentiation between the lower-middle and working class, issues relating to housing, respectability and poverty demonstrated awareness of class distinctions. Few interviewees alluded directly to class, usually referring to 'rough' and 'respectable'. However, they made judgements on the location, housing, behaviour and living standards within their neighbourhoods, schools and families, referring to 'poorer' or 'better' streets within their communities. A 'good' area and a 'nice' house conferred prestige upon families and individuals.

Respondents in all three areas indicated the similarity of people within their neighbourhood,<sup>243</sup> but implied differences of an unsubstantiated nature connected to the nebulous concept of respectability. In Pensnett, Mrs Wise described her maternal grandmother as "always the lady, she'd got that [air] about her, *a step aside*, you know", in comparison with disreputable neighbours. Mother, also, "wanted to keep us apart" (respectable).<sup>244</sup> Mrs IT described Pensnett as working-class, characterising some individuals as "very, very working class – I don't know how to put it. I don't like to say".<sup>245</sup> Bill Jones, also of Pensnett, indicated rather enigmatically that "some [neighbours] were better than others".<sup>246</sup> Mrs Adams, expressing the opinion that "they [people in Pensnett] were all equals", later explained that "rougher people had poor role models – there were some rough areas at the top of Pensnett".<sup>247</sup> Born in 1960, Mr SB described his council estate as "rough but honest", although he subsequently revealed the petty-theft within the community.<sup>248</sup>

Generational differences were evident within the interviews. Those born after 1945 made assumptions based on possessions and income, whilst the older generation adhered to traditional divisions based upon respectability. Mr Tolley pitied the disadvantaged customers who patronised his shop, "Well there were so many in that plight you know, in the rougher areas. Well not the rougher areas, that is to say the

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<sup>243</sup> Pensnett Mrs PG and Mr PG were of the opinion that "we were all exactly the same" and "we were all poor"; Pensnett Miss VC; Miss YB; Mr DM

<sup>244</sup> Pensnett Mrs HW.

<sup>245</sup> Pensnett Mrs IT.

<sup>246</sup> Pensnett telephone conversation with Mr BJ 10<sup>th</sup> November 2008.

<sup>247</sup> Pensnett Mrs BA.

<sup>248</sup> Pensnett Mr SB.

poorer areas”.<sup>249</sup> Nevertheless, respondents believed that income was less important than behaviour when assessing respectability. Mr Nixon described some neighbours in his Tipton estate as “less respectable” with broad accents. He differentiated between his parents and disreputable neighbours - “Extremely bad language and physical fights between husband and wife, whereas my mom and dad were never like that. So that was the major difference. *Income similar*”. He became aware of disparities at grammar school, as his friends in the lower streams were “slightly rougher”, but was conscious that one pupil lived in “a big posh house” and others owned “their own semi-detached house[s]”, or “brand new Cortina[s] in 1965!” He assessed the affluence and status of families through detrimental comparison with his family’s possessions.<sup>250</sup> However, Marion Allen, some twenty years his senior, explained, “you see we didn’t then categorise people on their money it was whether they was (sic) good or bad...it wasn’t how much money they’d got in their purse. They [the less respectable] were ostracised really”.<sup>251</sup>

Certainly, evidence suggests that people were stigmatised by the type and/or location of their homes into the 1960s, with areas categorised as ‘rough’ or ‘respectable’. Mrs HW, living in a newly-built tied house, said her neighbours “thought that we weren’t good enough because they lived in their own properties you see and ... we didn’t own our own house”.<sup>252</sup> Children from Tipton’s Lost City were constantly made aware of their comparative poverty and resultant lack of respectability. These children were stigmatised by the authorities, at school and in the community, because of the location of their homes. Carol Hathorne’s headmaster, at the local Church school, informed the class where the children, whose shaven heads denoted treatment for impetigo, “came from”, implying that they would “end up” sweeping roads or in prison. The class was instructed to: “shun them and their impetigo, best beloved and make sure that you never become dirty and low like them”.<sup>253</sup> She believed the “tell tale stamp” of the ‘Lost City’ was visible to the librarian who treated her application for library

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<sup>249</sup> Tipton Mr BT.

<sup>250</sup> Tipton Mr DN.

<sup>251</sup> Tipton Mrs MA.

<sup>252</sup> Pensnett Mrs HW. Mrs HW constantly alluded to her feelings of inferiority which she believed was the result of her mother’s domination. Several times during the interview she repeated that “I was always downtrodden”.

<sup>253</sup> Hathorne, C., *Five Minutes Love*, Dudley: The Kates Hill Press, 2006, p. 15.

membership with hostility.<sup>254</sup> At another Tipton school, a few years later in 1960, Mrs Tolley described similar humiliation –

“I didn’t think about it until the first day I started secondary school. We all went into our form-rooms and met our teacher. There were 52 in our class and the teacher asked everyone to put up their hand that lived on the Lost City. Now that was about half the class, and he said ‘right I shall be watching all of you because I know what the kids off the Lost City are like’. So that was the first time I really felt that living on the Lost City was perhaps not, you know, viewed upon well by other people”.

She explained that the area “had got such a terrible reputation that people tended to stick together” against outsiders.<sup>255</sup> The isolation may have contributed to the perceptions of the area, but the families in the estate were predominantly unskilled manual workers. Respondents perceiving themselves as poor were treated differently by those in authority. When Mr Davies joined the Boys Brigade, in the mid 1950s, he realised that “the boys who had something” were positioned at the front of the parade whilst those who came from poorer families marched at the rear.<sup>256</sup>

Such views were less apparent in Sedgley, perhaps because of the occupational mix and the inclusive nature of local planning; although class distinctions were discernable. In the 1960s, Mr TB lived in the newly-constructed Brownswall Estate,<sup>257</sup> his neighbours were “a mixture of middle class and upper-working class”. His differentiation demonstrated class based nuances – “I would think probably on occupation ...I’m thinking really of the parents of my friends...and my suspicion is that they were something in the car industry and they might be fairly manual...cos my dad was definitely not”. He reluctantly explained: “My friend Ian who lived right next door and their tastes were certainly different to my parents.” (In what way?) “Um.....put it this way I doubt whether they would have ever listened to Radio 3, sorry Third programme”. In his opinion, “it seemed a very prosperous sort of area

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<sup>254</sup> Hathorne, *Five Minutes*, p. 25.

<sup>255</sup> Tipton Mrs BT.

<sup>256</sup> Mr Davies December 1998.

<sup>257</sup> Brownswall was a privately constructed in 1958 near to Sedgley Bull Ring and consisted mainly of semi-detached houses interspersed with a few detached residences.

Sedgley”. His views confirmed the social mix in Sedgley housing estates, these particular houses were privately-built and “brand spanking new” in 1958.<sup>258</sup>

The proprietor of two Sedgley shops, described the status of customers residing in the surrounding houses. Her parents purchased a house from “Mrs Cooke that owned Cooke’s in Dudley...Major Westwood he owned his own business – the coal man. Mr and Mrs Field the butchers, Dr Alex Bekenn over the road and his wife always used the shop...so we could either go very very upmarket or come down sort of thing”.<sup>259</sup> A minority of Sedgley respondents differentiated, albeit tentatively, between themselves and inhabitants of the council estates, demonstrating class based social mores. Mrs Round explained that she was unaware of anyone experiencing financial difficulties:

“I’m sure there must have been. I know my mother used to visit people on what was called the scheme, you know the council estate...’cos that was built before the war...she used to visit people and I can remember going into one house which has got nothing to do with poverty at all. But I was amazed... because they’d got a saucepan on the table. That was something that astounded me...and I guess there was some poverty over there”.<sup>260</sup>

Similarly, Mr Gould, living in the Brownswall estate during the 1960s, mentioned the ‘scheme’ but was careful to avoid using derogatory terms, choosing his words as he avoided any semblance of snobbery!

“I remember I was quite keen on a girl who lived just down Springfield Grove or somewhere and I thought that the house was a bit too – small you know. And I thought what’s it like living here you know? You are aware that people are - different...not quite the place to go. But I mean it didn’t bother me, people are people as far as I’m concerned and where they live is irrelevant you know. But you *were* aware that maybe you were living.....you’d got a bit

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<sup>258</sup> Sedgley Mr TB. Mr TB is a specialist academic support tutor at Worcester University. His father was a Stock Controller at GKN and had a PhD in Mathematics and his mother was a teacher.

<sup>259</sup> Sedgley Mrs IW. Cooke’s was an exclusive furniture store catering for the more affluent members of local society

<sup>260</sup> Sedgley Mrs VR.

more space in your house than they'd got in theirs. You know you might be living in a nicer area".<sup>261</sup>

Interviewees residing on the estate appeared unaware of these views, believing that they lived in a "good" area and that people in Sedgley were similar to themselves in status and outlook.<sup>262</sup>

A partial explanation is that Sedgley's location was perceived as superior to the surrounding areas. Relatively isolated, surrounded by farmland and green space and situated over 700 feet above sea level, the environment was reputedly healthy. "A wonderful place...very safe...and laid back place and quite rural...at the bottom of the road were fields".<sup>263</sup> The apparent beneficial effects on health and Sedgley's close proximity to the rural landscape, in contrast with the industrialised environment of Tipton, explained the number of respondents moving into the area. A total of 14 individuals, out of 40 respondents, had moved to Sedgley between 1945 and 1970. Mr Gould's parents moved in 1958 because "mom was asthmatic and stuff and Sedgley was higher up for her, but er I think this was the thing. It was sort of healthier for me mother to live in Sedgley. (laughter) I don't know why 'cos it's not that far away. I suppose in those days my dad always had a car and he used to take us out for a run in the country and we'd obviously go through Sedgley down to Wombourn".<sup>264</sup> Mr TG moved in the late 1950s, he "discovered Sedgley" when the family went for a walk: "It was right on the edge of a very green environment...easy to walk out into a green field".<sup>265</sup> Marrying in 1952, Lucy James remained in Tipton until 1959 when the family removed to Sedgley.

"Well we'd got a child and we didn't want to stop there. If I speak the truth it was a better area. I had a very happy childhood, but there was a lot of poverty although we were lucky we never had that. But I mean...terraced houses and huge families living in two bedrooms...it wasn't squalor because people were quite clean ...Sedgley was an improvement for all of us".<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Sedgley Mr DG.

<sup>262</sup> Sedgley Mr NS, Mrs CB, Mr FG.

<sup>263</sup> Sedgley Mr TB.

<sup>264</sup> Sedgley Mr DG.

<sup>265</sup> Sedgley Mr TG.

<sup>266</sup> Sedgley Mrs LJ.

Mr and Mrs Houlton moved to Sedgley in 1960; They didn't consider house purchase in Tipton but knew Sedgley "from way back", feeling it was a "nicer" area.<sup>267</sup> Mrs Tolley "just loved the fact that it was by green fields".<sup>268</sup> Although Mr and Mrs Weigh, who moved to Sedgley in the early 1960s, said that they missed Tipton, they agreed that "this [Sedgley] is a much better and nicer area".<sup>269</sup>

Interestingly, Mr HT, who lived in the most exclusive area of Sedgley, said that at least seven or eight of his immediate neighbours previously resided in Tipton; most of them former pupils of Tipton Grammar school, suggesting that educational experiences may well have impacted upon social mobility.<sup>270</sup> As Mrs Weigh, who moved to Sedgley when she married explained, "I thought it [Tipton] was a nice area, but when I come to buy a house I wanted to get out of the area really cos we were surrounded by factories".<sup>271</sup> She contrasted the two areas: "Sedgley ... was a village...it was countrified...and we [Tipton] was industrialised".<sup>272</sup>

## Conclusion

Contemporary observers indicated that the Black Country was perceived as dilapidated and unattractive, yet comparatively prosperous. In a time of economic success, the nation's affluence was most noticeable in *this* area.<sup>273</sup> Certainly, Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton experienced higher than average population expansion and benefited from the economic prosperity engendered by the region's industrial base. In an era of change and affluence, there was some continuity in terms of substandard housing and overcrowding, which was slow to improve. Although, post-1945 the local authorities of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton faced similar environmental problems, all areas experienced improvements, which were higher than the national average in terms of household amenities. The district councils made sustained efforts to fulfil government directives on slum clearance and re-housing, in which planners gave consideration to environmental improvements and green spaces.

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<sup>267</sup> Tipton Mr OH.

<sup>268</sup> Tipton Mrs BT.

<sup>269</sup> Tipton Mr JW, Mrs VW.

<sup>270</sup> Tipton Mr HT. The relationship between social mobility, work and education will be discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>271</sup> Tipton Mrs VW.

<sup>272</sup> Tipton Mrs JB.

<sup>273</sup> Coates and Silburn, *Poverty*, p. 14.

Nevertheless in 1976, Wood stated that neither modification nor rebuilding had improved the general quality of the Black Country environment, which remained “handicapped [by] mean streets, twilight housing and plain slums.”<sup>274</sup>

However, Sedgley was perceived as superior in term of health benefits, due to the surrounding agricultural areas, sympathetic rebuilding programmes, an equal mix of social and private estates and fewer remnants of heavy industry. Despite statistics to the contrary, Sedgley respondents refuted suggestions of overcrowding or poor housing. Pensnett and Tipton were regarded as less salubrious and some Tipton residents felt particularly disadvantaged by their housing, both in terms of housing standards and the location of those homes. There was a stigma attached to those residing on certain inter-war housing estates, which was slow to dissipate; it was reflected in the attitudes and actions of officialdom – from teachers to rent collectors and librarians. Naturally then, all respondents were anxious to enhance their status and reputation by improved living conditions, through relocation to newer homes, ‘better’ areas, or by disassociation from the less respectable members of their communities.

Nevertheless, oral testimony indicates that the perceptions of respondents from all three areas were similar in their experiences of a changing post-war environment. Although some class-based characteristics remained regarding housing, the oral testimony revealed that maintaining respectability remained the prime factor with regards to location, perceptions of poverty and status. The traditional segregation of ‘rough’ or ‘respectable’ working class persisted throughout the period; to live amongst “decent, respectable people very much like ourselves” remained extremely important.<sup>275</sup> Consensual opinion was that the period between 1945 and the early 1970s saw environmental improvements in Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton, in terms of the infra-structure, amenities and housing stock. The gradual transition to modern housing was perceived by respondents, as a transition from the poverty of the past to a more prosperous future. The aspirations of the respondents to improved living standards were evident in their testimony. Generally the interviewees from all three

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<sup>274</sup> Wood, *Industrial*, p.19.

<sup>275</sup> Sedgley Mr SW.



areas recalled similar experiences and comparable beliefs concerning their localities in the post-war period.

The following chapters will examine the changes and continuities in the lives of the residents of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton. Particular emphasis is placed on their communities, work experiences, incomes, and their consumption patterns and saving strategies.

### **CHAPTER THREE: COMMUNITIES: AFFLUENCE, HOUSING, STATE WELFARE AND SOCIAL CHANGE**

By 1970, evidence suggests that despite slum clearance, rebuilding and successful pollution control,<sup>1</sup> the efforts of post-war planning to improve environmental and living conditions were not entirely successful. In the light of these concerns, this chapter will assess the impact of the environmental change upon traditional behavioural patterns between 1945 and 1970. In particular it will consider the financial and cultural implications of housing demolition and relocation and the effect upon social mores and community cohesion. It will question claims that community identity disintegrated as neighbourhoods were transformed by slum clearance.<sup>2</sup> It will suggest that, despite financial improvements and the physical transformation of individual localities, the close-knit community and kinship ties were slow to change. During the 1950s and 60s life continued to be regulated by concepts of neighbourliness, pride and respectability. As Mr RB who was born in 1941 explained:

“Everyone was different of course, but their acceptance as to what was expected was adhered to...have you heard of territoriality? There was a way there that if you’d gone wrong...it would be pointed out to you, so it was management by embarrassment to a great extent, because they didn’t want to be shown up by the people next door...every house, Sunday morning was a ritual, they’d be out doing the garden and by doing that they got friendship, comradeship and understanding, like the local mine of information, like a local walking newspaper really, they’d get to know everything that was going on and they’d become to draw closer and closer together...there was a great sense of pride”.<sup>3</sup>

He clarified the importance of respectability and the necessity of conforming to traditional patterns of behaviour or risk neighbourhood censure – “my parents wanted

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<sup>1</sup> Between 1952 and 1962 pollution in the area had been drastically reduced with many areas declared ‘smoke-less zones’. In 1950 Tipton had an average fall of 26 tons of dust per square mile but by 1962 this had fallen to 15 tons. *Birmingham Post*, 30<sup>th</sup> January 1962.

<sup>2</sup> Benson, *The Working Class*, p. 123; Lewis, *Women in England*, p. 10; Klein, *Samples*.

<sup>3</sup> Tipton Mr RB. Mr RB’s family lived on a Tipton council estate which was built in 1938.

everything to be right for me, and a lot of other parents did, so it was mandatory that we went to Sunday school”.<sup>4</sup> Mr RB’s experiences reflected those of the majority of respondents, clearly the newly-constructed communities in Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton continued to be regulated in the traditional fashion described by historians of the pre-war era.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Cultural and Social Trends***

Undeniably, British society experienced alteration in the post-war era. However, the causes and indeed the extent and type of change remains a contentious issue. High levels of employment and increased job security ensured an unprecedented affluence amongst many lower-middle and working-class families, with welfare payments providing a potential ‘safety net’ for times of hardship. Inevitably, cultural changes accompanied this affluence as disposable incomes increased, rationing and austerity ended and large numbers of families were re-housed on new estates.<sup>6</sup> The debate surrounding the post-war period has focused on the adverse effects of affluence on working-class culture; depicting a romanticised picture of a tight-knit and vibrant pre-war community, living in close proximity and bravely fighting adversity, and an affluent but increasingly fragmented and isolated post-war working class.<sup>7</sup>

Although neither of the above characterisations is likely to be totally accurate, it is true that commentators and the general public expressed concern over changing trends within the Black Country. Lack of community spirit had been noted on some housing estates as early as the 1930s and the post-war planners of 1947 aimed to address the relevant issues, and halt population drift from older areas and town centres wherever possible.<sup>8</sup> However, the 1971 census returns indicated a continuing trend, with “young parents moving...to new private estates on the edge of the Black Country”, leading to “further disruption of family ties, longer distance commuting, and...social problems resulting from a concentration of older people in the inner areas”.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Tipton Mr RB.

<sup>5</sup> See Chinn, Benson, Roberts.

<sup>6</sup> Nuttgens, *The Home*, p. 12. In Nuttgens estimation the political and social change which accompanied the war had a longer lasting effect than German bombing campaigns.

<sup>7</sup> Coates and Silburn, *Poverty*, p. 93. The authors are critical of those who portray romantic images of ‘cosy’ and insular slum communities as this reflects an inaccurate idea of working-class life; Hoggart, *Literacy*.

<sup>8</sup> Anon., ‘What Sort of Black Country?’, p. 53.

<sup>9</sup> Anon., ‘What Sort of Black Country?’, p. 53.

Commentators on the left lamented the loss of the traditional values of reciprocity, community cohesion and mutual aid, placing the blame firmly upon western capitalist values.<sup>10</sup> Seabrook, whilst admitting that the working class had “bettered itself”,<sup>11</sup> deplored the fact that it was “completely detached from its own traditions”.<sup>12</sup> Hoggart concurred that “most working people are in almost all respects better off, have better living conditions, better health, [and] a larger share of consumer goods”, but concluded that the accompanying cultural changes were detrimental to working-class lives and culture.<sup>13</sup> Petty’s experiences in Walsall endorsed perceptions of prosperity but highlighted the loss of traditional cultural mores of reciprocity and mutuality. In his autobiography he recalled the adverse impact of his neighbours’ affluence:

“It was certainly obvious to me that the *character* of the people seemed to change. After all, the working classes had for centuries been more or less attuned and accustomed to poverty or a low standard of life; and in my own experience the working-class character rarely improved with affluence. In the old days there had been a tradition of the poor helping the poor, the poor had been simple and frank and natural; but so many working-class people now were dressing and trying to behave and speak like the middle-classes”<sup>14</sup>(my italics).

His book, published in 1956, was, however, reviewed dismissively - “Mr Petty is an angry and proud man who does not wait for our response – he gives his own self-centred anarchistic answer...a very bad-mannered and sometimes self-pitying show”.<sup>15</sup> This indicated the reviewer’s conservative values and revealed stereotypical class-based reactions to an unconventional member of the working class.

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<sup>10</sup> Seabrook, J., *Landscapes of Poverty*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985; Coates and Silburn, *Poverty*.

<sup>11</sup> Seabrook, *Working-Class Childhood*, p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> Seabrook, *Working-Class Childhood*, p. 60. He believed that loss of traditional mores was due to dependence on the values of the market-place.

<sup>13</sup> Hoggart, *Literacy*, pp. 260-265.

<sup>14</sup> Petty, *Five*, p. 63. For biographical information on Petty see chapter two, p. 25, footnote 128. In his experience “the working-class character rarely improved with affluence”.

<sup>15</sup> Petty, *Five*, p. 6. The preface written by Angus Wilson, who went on to say “in this he is of the fifties – a little of *Lucky Jim*, and a great deal of the hero of *Look Back in Anger*”.

The impact of post-war planning and housing provision, both council and privately constructed, has been the source of much discussion.<sup>16</sup> Its effect upon society and upon specific communities has been the source of much debate,<sup>17</sup> particularly its impact upon working and middle-class lifestyles.<sup>18</sup> The evidence of this thesis endorses Sandbrook's claim that provincial communities adhered to customary mores and "familiar habits".<sup>19</sup> The main areas of contention are the effects of the financial consequences of removal to new houses, in terms of expenditure and social change and the impact upon society, the community, the family and on traditional behavioural patterns. The parameters of this debate will be explored through a detailed examination of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton, utilising both oral and documentary sources, in order to ascertain the impact of change upon people residing in these areas between 1945 and c1970. It will demonstrate that traditional social mores were slow to change, and the support networks of older communities retained relevance, as "even those...who moved with an aim of rising in the social scale often retained the social patterns of the culture which had formed them".<sup>20</sup>

### *Housing and Social Trends*

The economic repercussions of the demolition of slums and the accessibility of new housing of the 1950s impacted upon the population, altering working patterns of men and women, as they as endeavoured to improve their status and living standards. Inevitably new houses, commissioned by the local authority and private contractors,

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<sup>16</sup> Collins, M. *The Likes of Us: A Biography of the White Working Class*, London: Granta Books, 2004, p. 151. Written in the wake of press reactions to the media's treatment of the suspects in the Stephen Lawrence murder, Collins' work has been criticised for its attacks upon white middle-class liberal commentators who disparage the white working-class. Collins observed that neither increased affluence nor state welfare affected the staples of working-class culture in Southwark.

<sup>17</sup> Parker, M., 'High Society', *The Big Issue*, 18<sup>th</sup> May 2009, pp. 16-19. Parker debates the ideals of the European architect LeCorbusier, questioning whether his ideals were lost in the "race for cheap housing".

<sup>18</sup> In recent years a number of books have been written by authors who were born into working-class families but would now, largely because of their education and profession, be considered as middle class. For example Hanley, *Estates*; Collins, *The Likes*. Kuper, L. (ed.), *Living in Towns*, London: The Cresset Press, 1953. This book contains selected research papers in urban sociology from the University of Birmingham, which "shed light on the polarisation of groups within what pre-war legislators used to call the 'working classes'" and to examine the consequences of town planning decisions upon the residents of council estates. p. v.

<sup>19</sup> Sandbrook, *White Heat*, p. 190. Roberts, 'Neighbours', p. 38.

<sup>20</sup> Tebbutt, M., *Women's Talk?: A Social History of Gossip in Working-class Neighbourhoods, 1880 - 1960*, Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995, p. 154.

were built to higher standards, often with central heating and garages.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, they were costly to rent, or buy, and the financial implications of relocation were prime considerations for most families; increased rental charges prohibited some families from moving. New council houses were rented by the upper echelons of the working and the lower middle-classes.<sup>22</sup>

The rents of newly constructed properties, both public and private, were likely to be three or four times higher than older, dilapidated housing.<sup>23</sup> When Kathleen Hann's family were allocated a "brand new" council house in Wednesbury their rent doubled.<sup>24</sup> In nearby Wolverhampton the average rent of post-war council accommodation increased by 100% between 1956 and 1966.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, by the mid 1950s, one quarter of all people of *all classes* lived in publicly owned housing.<sup>26</sup> Oral testimony confirmed Sandbrook's assertion that it was not unusual for middle-class families to rent council houses.<sup>27</sup> Mr Brown, the director of a print company, lived on a council estate from 1955 until the late 1960s.<sup>28</sup> The father of Mr Southall, a cost-accountant, relocated his family into a Sedgley council house, which he eventually purchased in 1966. A local councillor "pulled a few strings" to facilitate a rapid move, which enabled his wife to nurse her elderly mother-in-law.<sup>29</sup>

Class-based distinctions of accommodation blurred as working-class families increasingly aspired to owner-occupation. Nationally between 1950 and 1970 home ownership almost doubled, from 27% to 50% of all households.<sup>30</sup> Although it is impossible to ascertain the class of the purchasers, inevitably a large proportion of first-time home owners were working class, undeniably encouraged by rising wages and the availability of houses and mortgages. In Schaffer's estimation, house purchase during the 1960s, was embarked upon by both classes as house rental signified a

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<sup>21</sup> Hopkins, *Rise and Decline*, p. 141.

<sup>22</sup> Bogdanor and Skidelsky, *Age*, p. 62; Young and Wilmott, *Family*, p. 129; Chinn, *Homes*, p. 65.

<sup>23</sup> Coates and Silburn, *Poverty*, p. 90; Barnsby, *Housing*, p. 63.

<sup>24</sup> Hann, *Tell It As It Was*, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Barnsby, *Housing*, p. 63.

<sup>26</sup> Hopkins, *The New Look*, p. 245.

<sup>27</sup> Sandbrook, *Never Had It*, p. 457.

<sup>28</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB.

<sup>29</sup> Sedgley Mr NS.

<sup>30</sup> Sandbrook, *White Heat*, p. 183; Akhtar and Humphries, *The Fifties*, p. 63; Bourke, *Working-Class*, p. 15; Halsey, A. H., *Change in British Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986. p. 308.

“lowering of social status”.<sup>31</sup> However, in reality only highly-paid, skilled manual workers could have contemplated house purchase.<sup>32</sup>

Motives for purchase varied, but regularity of employment combined with rising real earnings were major facilitators of home-ownership and houses were increasingly viewed as an indicator of aspiration.<sup>33</sup> In his account of working-class life Ron Barnes wrote disparagingly of those who “had a go” at buying their own home, which led them to “think” that they were middle class.<sup>34</sup> However, respondents confirmed that this trend escalated into the 1970s, with a “new breed” of working-class people attaining lower-middle class status by struggling to pay mortgages and “working in several jobs, rather like their parents”.<sup>35</sup> The trend towards owner-occupation was viewed with concern by Hanley, who perceived housing as the “one great failure of the welfare state,” reaffirming the gap between rich and poor and emphasising intra-class distinctions.<sup>36</sup> However, her negativity towards social housing was perhaps influenced by an over-developed class-consciousness, whereby she blamed relocation to a Birmingham council estate for her sustained feelings of inferiority and alienation.<sup>37</sup>

Undeniably, aspirations to acquiring modern homes were evident in the three areas after 1945. Sykes revealed an unquantifiable (but not insignificant) degree of upward mobility in post-war Gornal and a more significant rate of middle-class growth in Sedgley,<sup>38</sup> which he attributed to increased working-class owner-occupation. Ron Baker, born into a working-class Sedgley family, doubly increased his status in the 1950s when he established a tailoring business *and* purchased a house.<sup>39</sup> Respondents

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<sup>31</sup> Schaffer, F., *The New Town Story*, London: Paladin, 1972, p. 184.

<sup>32</sup> McKibbin, *Classes*, p. 73. Benson agrees that only elite members of the working class became owner occupiers, arguing that house purchase indicted social progress. *The Working Class*, p. 75.

<sup>33</sup> Burnett, *Social*, p. 274; Hanley, *Estates*, p. 32. Hanley considered that the estates provided the ‘aspirational’ working class with an opportunity to distance themselves from their working-class backgrounds, as only affluent tenants could prove their respectability by moving.

<sup>34</sup> Barnes, R., *Coronation Cups and Jam Jars*, Hackney: Centerprise, 1976, p. 65.

<sup>35</sup> Collins, *The Likes*, p. 208.

<sup>36</sup> Hanley, *Estates*, p. 97.

<sup>37</sup> However perhaps the depressive illness which she experienced as a teenager, may well have contributed to her extreme resentment of local authority homes and exacerbated a tendency to self-pity. Hanley, L. ‘This Life’, *You Magazine*, 9<sup>th</sup> September 2007, p. 7; Barker, P., Review in *The Independent*, 29<sup>th</sup> January 2007; Morrison, B., ‘From Hutch to Home’ in *The Guardian*, 6<sup>th</sup> January 2007.

<sup>38</sup> Sykes, *Popular*, p. 64.

<sup>39</sup> Gallo, *Tinker*, p. 165.

indicated their ambitions, during the 1950s and 60s, to move into modern homes. Those residing in rented accommodation generally aspired to owner-occupation at some juncture, either of their existing council house or a private home. Indeed, at the time of interview all respondents were owner-occupiers, regardless of their occupation or their location.

Vera Weigh grew up in Tipton during the 1950s and described the transition from a “terraced type house” when she was 14.

“It was agony, just terrible because you’d got to go outside to the toilet and there was no bath... [it was] bleak...no electricity until I was ten or eleven...in 1952 we moved to Robert Street...We thought we were in Buckingham Palace. Really nice houses, three bedrooms, upstairs and downstairs toilets and bathroom...brand new...we moved into this house all excited, beautiful, lovely!”<sup>40</sup>

The potential risks associated with owner-occupation were highlighted by Mr Weigh’s experiences in 1961. His mother-in-law argued that “you can’t have your own house it’ll be a rope round your neck all your lives...you’ll never be able to go out”. At work, “everyone was against it...everybody in the factory as well...people wouldn’t buy their own house they wasn’t that way inclined - they was frightened”.<sup>41</sup>

New homes, both public and private, resulted in higher, but inevitably more expensive, living standards. Additional furniture was required for larger rooms, utility bills could be prohibitive and a spirit of competition and rivalry necessitated additional outlay in order to ‘keep up’ with the neighbours. It was, as Abbott claimed, “the novel – and favourite – [modern] sport” on new estates.<sup>42</sup> In Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton, purchases were made “just to keep up with the Joneses”.<sup>43</sup>

Consequently, husbands worked longer hours and increasing numbers of women continued in paid employment after marriage. Women living on new estates worked to defray the additional expense of rent and travel.<sup>44</sup> In 1960, one family financed a

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<sup>40</sup> Tipton Mrs VW.

<sup>41</sup> Tipton Mr JW, Mrs VW.

<sup>42</sup> Abbott, *A History of the Family*, p. 96.

<sup>43</sup> Pensnett Mrs BD; Sedgley Mr SW; Tipton Rev. CH, Mr RB, Mr MJ.

<sup>44</sup> Coates and Silburn, *Poverty*, p. 98.



move when both parents were employed, but an unexpected pregnancy prevented mother working, which “made us poor”.<sup>45</sup> The incurred costs impacted adversely upon lives, necessitating overtime or alternative means of supplementing incomes, leading to diminished leisure-time.<sup>46</sup> Relocation to a modern home in Longbridge meant additional night shifts for Hanley’s grandfather, with the consequential “ruin” of his quality of life.<sup>47</sup>

Prohibitive rents resulted in additional paid labour to finance a move, or remaining in dilapidated homes. Housing mobility in Wolverhampton remained low as rents outpaced wage increases; between 1956 and 1966 average rents in the town rose by 137%, whilst weekly wages rose by only 57%.<sup>48</sup> In Tipton, council members rejected proposed increases to bring pre-war housing into line with new homes, arguing that it was “out of all reason to increase the rent of pre-war houses in which there was no electricity”, as tenants were currently declining new homes on the grounds of cost.<sup>49</sup> The *Tipton Herald* blamed high interest rates payable on government loans for the “very serious effect on average working-class families”, resulting in an additional 3s. 8d. per week on rents.<sup>50</sup>

Inevitably, the increased rent was defrayed either by the husband’s overtime, undertaking an additional job, or by married women continuing in employment, despite the birth of children. Mrs Greenaway and her husband moved to a Pensnett council house when their daughter was born in 1962. She ceased full-time employment, but worked as an Avon Cosmetics Representative and cleaned offices in the evenings, because “obviously the rent was much more than before”. As her children reached school-age, she returned to factory-work to finance the purchase of their home.<sup>51</sup> The cost of superior housing was widely acknowledged in Tipton, where Neptune Street was known as “Little Dinner Street because they [the houses]

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<sup>45</sup> Lewis, G., ‘From Deepest Kilburn’ in Heron, *Truth, Dare*, p. 233.

<sup>46</sup> Hopkins, *New Look*, p. 237.

<sup>47</sup> Hanley, *Estates*, p. 88; Schaffer, *The New*, p. 270. Schaffer argued that few people who lived in poorer areas were likely to afford the rent for a newer dwelling.

<sup>48</sup> Barnsby, *Housing*, p. 63. Although Barnsby’s left-wing political views must be considered as a defining factor in his writing.

<sup>49</sup> *Tipton Herald*, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1949.

<sup>50</sup> *Tipton Herald*, 1<sup>st</sup> December 1951.

<sup>51</sup> Pensnett Mrs PG.

were a lot bigger than most and people used to say we could only afford little dinners” due to the higher rents.<sup>52</sup>

In Wolverhampton, most of the Brew’s income was consumed by the mortgage, but “to own your own home in those days was an achievement”.<sup>53</sup> Following her marriage in 1957, Mrs Beaman of Pensnett continued to work “to help pay the mortgage because this house was very very costly it was £2,095...my mom said it’s a lot of money but I’m not going to put you off”.<sup>54</sup> School teacher Mary Tatem and her husband saved for a mortgage whilst living in rented accommodation; this could only be accomplished if they were both employed.<sup>55</sup> Aspirations to owner-occupation forced Mrs HW’s mother to return to work when her youngest child reached 5 in 1954 - “it was always mother’s ambition. Mother was the driving force, it was always her ambition to have her own house, and ‘cos when father retired we had to come out of the house...that was why she worked, to provide her own house, which she did”<sup>56</sup> Mrs Wesley took additional casual jobs when her children were small in the 1960s, recounting that “every penny we earned went on the mortgage”.<sup>57</sup> Muriel Brown returned to part-time work in 1957, when her child was two: “Well I think people aspired to get their own homes, and to get their own homes it needed two to work. It’s not a new thing that two people have got to work to get these mortgages. And I think then this aspiration started to grow that people wanted their own homes and the two of you had got to work”.<sup>58</sup> These ambitious ideals were reflected by virtually all respondents. When they married in 1964 Carol Bennett and her husband purchased a house in Sedgley; her comments were typical:

“Well yes I mean we felt proud I suppose because it was our own [house] that we were buying and I mean you - your parents wanted that for you as well...prior to that generation most people moved in with their parents and ...people similar to us anyway...yes [we were] the first one [generation] that

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<sup>52</sup> Tipton Mr DA.

<sup>53</sup> Brew, A., *Wolverhampton Voices*, Stroud: Tempus Publishing Ltd., Oral History Series, 2004, p. 28.

<sup>54</sup> Pensnett Mrs JB.

<sup>55</sup> Tatem, *Just Me*, p. 32.

<sup>56</sup> Pensnett Mrs HW.

<sup>57</sup> Sedgley Mrs IW.

<sup>58</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB.

started to think we're not going to do that we want our own house. The first ones probably that were even able to consider it".<sup>59</sup>

It was not solely the rise in rent, or mortgage, but other attendant costs which impeded relocation. The initial expense of the move was frequently combined with a necessity to purchase additional furniture for larger homes. An added cost of relocation to suburban estates was their distance from town, necessitating expensive journeys to work, to shop and socialise.<sup>60</sup> Travelling long distances to work incurred costs and removed the possibility of returning home for lunch, resulting in the purchase of expensive food at the works' canteen – a double outlay.

However, there are anomalies in the areas of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton, as re-housing impacted considerably less upon travel expenditure than Klein suggested and the oral evidence also challenges statistical evidence. Planning officers required details of the journeys between home and work, in order to determine housing requirements. Consequently, the Staffordshire County Council Survey of 1951 acquired the home addresses of all employees (both works and staff) from any "industrialist" with more than 200 in their employment,<sup>61</sup> to facilitate an assessment travel within the conurbation. They found that the daily movement of workers within the county was relatively restricted, (Table 2.1) therefore travel costs were comparatively low, suggesting that either new housing was built in close proximity to the old, or that housing was available close to places of employment.

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<sup>59</sup> Sedgley Mrs CB.

<sup>60</sup> Klein, *Samples*, p. 222.

<sup>61</sup> *Staffordshire County Council Development Plan: Survey Report and Analysis*, 1951, p. 99. They exchanged information with Walsall and Wolverhampton who had conducted similar surveys.

**TABLE 2.1 Location of Work of the Residents of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton  
(expressed as percentages of the total working population living in each area)**

Place of Residence	Place of Work												
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	Total
Brierley Hill U.D.C.	5	-	68	-	-	22	1	1	3	-	-	-	100
Sedgley U.D.C.	-	7	1	6	.5	-	11	-	7	-	-	68	100
Tipton M.B.C	-	4	-	1	1	-	-	3	69	5	17	-	100

Note - .5 used for percentages less than one.

Source: *Staffordshire County Council Development Plan, 1951: Survey Report and Analysis*, p. 101.

**Key:** A      Amblecote  
B      Bilston  
C      Brierley Hill  
D      Coseley  
E      Darlaston  
F      Rowley Regis  
G      Sedgley  
H      Smethwick  
I      Tipton  
J      Wednesbury  
K      West Bromwich  
L      Elsewhere

The statistics are particularly interesting for the areas relevant to this study: Brierley Hill (Pensnett) was considered to be self-contained to a “remarkable degree” with limited travel in or out of the area - a mere 3% travelling as far as Tipton to work. Almost 70% of Tipton’s inhabitants worked within the area and a further 17% in neighbouring West Bromwich. Although Mr Sheldon travelled from Tipton to

Birmingham-based Austin motors, employees were transported by the “works coach”.<sup>62</sup> Sedgley was exceptional, with 68% of its population working outside the area. The survey concluded that the workers of Sedgley were “probably divided, perhaps unevenly, between Wolverhampton and Dudley”,<sup>63</sup> therefore increased travel costs were more relevant to residents of Sedgley.

Although, statistical evidence endorsed suggestions that Sedgley became a post-war commuter village,<sup>64</sup> (Table 2.1) oral testimony indicated that the majority of respondents lived within one or two miles of their work-place. For those without cars the bus service was adequate, both in frequency and cost, with only respondents from Tipton’s ‘Lost City’ mentioning a problem. “We walked everywhere Ros, cos mom never had the bus fare so we had to walk everywhere” - the isolation of the estate was problematic. On one occasion in the early 1950s when hospital treatment was required:

“Dad wrapped me up in a blanket and carried me to the nearest bus stop about a mile and a half away. Cos you’d either got to walk through the estate across the cracker to Gospel End or through he estate to Ocker Hill or up and over the canals and fields to Princes End. No matter which way you walked it was about a mile and a half to the bus stop... Routinely we walked everywhere...we never got on a bus.”<sup>65</sup>

Nevertheless, regardless of travel costs, financial considerations impinged to some extent on decisions to relocate into new housing, whether council or private builds.

### ***Housing, Community and Reciprocity***

In addition to the financial strains, Blackwell and Seabrook highlighted the social and cultural implications of relocation.<sup>66</sup> Hoggart raised the difficulties of moving from communities where people shared the “common needs and amusements of a densely packed neighbourhood” and settling into new housing estates.<sup>67</sup> Emotive language described the “evacuation” of traditional neighbourhoods and the “fractured” lives of

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<sup>62</sup> Hathorne, *Slurry and Strawberries*, p. 20.

<sup>63</sup> Hathorne, *Slurry and Strawberries*, p. 102.

<sup>64</sup> Sykes, *Popular*, p. 64; Raybould, *The Economic*, p. 125.

<sup>65</sup> Tipton Mrs BT.

<sup>66</sup> Blackwell and Seabrook, *A World*, p. 86.

<sup>67</sup> Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 59.

the people who were “whisked away” – even those who relocated due to improving material circumstances.<sup>68</sup>

The traditional, static, pre-war communities were characterised, to a large extent, by the restricted geographical mobility of their inhabitants.<sup>69</sup> Consequently, it has been suggested that slum clearance and relocation inevitably impacted upon the communality and reciprocity of these areas, adversely affecting relationships within the neighbourhood. Historians of the early twentieth century depicted socially cohesive communities which, in the absence of state assistance, “survived because they bonded together” forming kinship networks providing mutual support.<sup>70</sup> Within these communities women played a vital role in mitigating the worst excesses of poverty.<sup>71</sup>

In Benson’s estimation, it was in the inter-war council estates that the disintegration of former neighbourhood solidarity was most visible, as the formation of close bonds was prohibited by the spacious surroundings and absence of public amenities.<sup>72</sup> Aware of the emotional problems of relocation, post-war planners attempted to address problems of isolation and absence of community identity, by providing for the social needs of the inhabitants of new estates.<sup>73</sup> Certainly, the 1946 survey of Wolverhampton’s housing requirements acknowledged this, arguing that developers should make concerted attempts to preserve “the neighbourhood”.<sup>74</sup> This recommendation was made as pre-war building schemes, based solely on technical

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<sup>68</sup> Blackwell and Seabrook, *A World*, pp. 85- 92. For a detailed overview of the experiences of working-class women and the transition to housing estates, see Clapson, ‘Working-Class Women’s Experiences’, pp. 345-365. Clapson takes the “rather unfashionable view that the transition to suburban and new town life was a favourable experience for the majority of working class women”, p. 345.

<sup>69</sup> Klein, *Samples*, p. 139. Although Bourke cautions that the extent of spatial immobility within working-class districts may be exaggerated. p. 140.

<sup>70</sup> Carl Chinn featured in *Our Mom and Our Wench*, an Evening Mail Special, February 1996, p. 39. This magazine focused on working-class women of Birmingham and was produced specifically for Mother’s Day of that year. It was comprised of readers’ letters and photographs supplemented with articles by Chinn, as well as personal column tributes to reader’s mothers. See also Roberts, *Women*; Meacham, *A Life*; Lewis, *Women*.

<sup>71</sup> Chinn, *Our Mom*, p. 39; Roberts, *Women*; Meacham, *A Life*; Lewis, *Women*.

<sup>72</sup> Benson, *The Working Class*, p. 123.

<sup>73</sup> See for example: *Staffordshire County Council Development Plan, 1951*; Brennan, *Wolverhampton*, (Wolverhampton Planning Survey).

<sup>74</sup> Brennan, *Wolverhampton*, p. 49.

factors, “failed to produce neighbourhoods” or foster “community”.<sup>75</sup> Planners utilised surveys and house-to-house enquiries in the Low Hill Estate, constructed in the 1930s, to test theories and ascertain the inhabitants’ preferences.<sup>76</sup> Surveys revealed that, whereas people in traditional communities shopped locally, those in new estates used local facilities as an “emergency source of supply”, preferring towns for shopping expeditions.<sup>77</sup> Changes in traditional retailing and spending patterns will be discussed in chapter six.<sup>78</sup> The survey concluded that artificially constructed communities did not automatically form socially cohesive units.<sup>79</sup>

The repercussions of planning failures were highlighted in Hanley’s experiences in Birmingham - isolation and unfriendliness.<sup>80</sup> Only one respondent (a Sedgley resident) expressed feelings of isolation; although her husband disagreed, believing that her emotions were the result of “nerves” when they moved to the area in the mid 1950s.<sup>81</sup> Respondents from ‘Lost City’ estate, constructed in the 1930s, recalled that the inhabitants tended to “stick together on the estate”, which retained traditional attitudes to communal support.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Brennan, *Wolverhampton*, p. 50. The planners were concerned to prevent a similar occurrence in the post-war period and felt that the solution lay in the building of Neighbourhood Units which were designed to provide the basic needs of each newly planned community. The basic needs were defined as: day-to-day shopping; cinema; churches; branch libraries; clubs and places of work. This would “satisfy the basic needs without undue travelling”. However, concern was expressed that the concept would fail unless the people used the facilities provided.

<sup>76</sup> Brennan, *Wolverhampton*, p. 51. Whether they preferred to use local facilities, usually domiciled in concrete precincts, or travel into the town centre for shopping, healthcare and entertainment. The expectations were that day-to-day activities would be undertaken locally, for example the housewife would be likely to be a regular attendee at a cinema situated close to her usual shopping centre. The degree to which Low Hill conformed to expectations would indicate the success or failure of the siting plan and the measure of ‘neighbourhood integration’. McKibbin, *Classes*, p. 194. McKibbin commented upon the absence of ‘parlour’ and corner shops and their replacement by precincts and shopping ‘centres’.

<sup>77</sup> Brennan, *Wolverhampton*, p. 48.

<sup>78</sup> Tebbutt, *Making Ends Meet*, p. 180. In Tebbutt’s estimation the lack of traditional retailing outlets upon new estates provided opportunities for door-to-door salesman.

<sup>79</sup> Brennan, *Wolverhampton*, pp. 176-177. The survey concluded that “The work presented... will not completely solve any of the difficulties met in carrying out a policy of neighbourhood planning,...but...[would] show the need for a fuller recognition and a further study of the dynamics involved in this sort of planning”.

<sup>80</sup> Hanley, *Estates*, p. 48, p. 68 and p. 201. A ten mile bus journey connected the new estate with her old world and she believed that the rebuilding of the area had impacted adversely on community spirit and cohesion.

<sup>81</sup> Sedgley – an off tape explanation by Mr GW of his wife’s illness.

<sup>82</sup> Tipton Mrs BT, Mr HT, Mr RB, Mrs Lakin.

It has been claimed that the mutual support-systems which characterised the pre-war communities were virtually redundant in the new post-war estates. Goldthorpe et al. argued that relocation “destroyed” working-class culture, as traditional patterns of behaviour and the rituals by which these mores were transmitted were unsustainable.<sup>83</sup> Akhtar and Humphries described the “spirit of change” which swept away past conventions, weakening traditional ties and behaviour patterns, as home and the nuclear family replaced relationships with the extended family and the community.<sup>84</sup> New estates experienced diminished mutuality, in Hanley’s view, causing a “loss of community spirit and a decline of neighbourliness”.<sup>85</sup>

However, Meacham challenged this, citing evidence from Liverpool to promulgate his view that “working-class residents in the 1950s relied upon their neighbourhoods to provide physical and economic security”.<sup>86</sup> Re-housing and benefits failed to impact upon the “rituals and traditions of the past” and the manner of working-class life remained unchanged.<sup>87</sup> Despite state welfare, Roberts found that families relied upon neighbours as a “second line of defence”, providing assistance in emergencies and the “mundane problems of every day life”.<sup>88</sup> In the Black Country the traditional ethos of the exchange of goods and services retained significance between 1945 and 1970; it was the norm – the “thing to do”.<sup>89</sup> Mrs Butler made sufficient stew to share with the Bullocks who returned the favour, when “we had food”.<sup>90</sup> Despite some decline, neighbourhood support systems continued to be of “considerable importance” long after the inception of the Welfare State; reciprocity remained vital – “Everybody looked after one another”.<sup>91</sup>

Certainly, oral evidence confirmed Sykes’ claim that customary behavioural patterns were maintained. In ‘the Gornals’ neighbourly assistance remained a central feature

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<sup>83</sup> Goldthorpe, et al., *The Affluent*, p. 13.

<sup>84</sup> Akhtar and Humphries, *The Fifties*, p. 8.

<sup>85</sup> Chinn, *Homes for the People*, p. 106.

<sup>86</sup> Meacham, *A Life*, p. 47.

<sup>87</sup> Kerr, *The People*, p. 3.

<sup>88</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p.199. Some of the social and cultural features of older terraced areas were transferred to the newer estates, although she noted some social dislocation in the Preston area.

<sup>89</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 205.

<sup>90</sup> Bullock, B., *A Pocket with a Hole: A Birmingham Childhood of the 1940s and 1950s*, Studley: Brewin Books, 1996, p. 68.

<sup>91</sup> Roberts, *Neighbours*, p. 38



of life and the neighbourhood was a “vital nexus for sociability” and reciprocity.<sup>92</sup> Mrs Southall relied on a neighbour to care for her baby in bad weather whilst she collected an older child from school. In return she shopped, collected prescriptions from the chemist or kept an eye on the neighbour’s grand-children; reciprocity was an integral component of community life.<sup>93</sup>

Sedgley respondents recollected that the customs, which prevailed in older neighbourhoods, were maintained in the new private and council housing estates. Mrs Round resided in one of the large Victorian houses near the centre of the village until 1967; she recalled her mother’s reciprocal arrangements for shopping, companionship and exchange of goods.<sup>94</sup> When Mr Southall’s family moved to the Beacon Hill estate, in 1964, his mother became so friendly with her next-door neighbour, Mrs Aston, that a gate was constructed in the dividing fence for ease of socialisation. As was customary, the majority of interaction took place between the two women, during daylight hours, whilst their husbands worked.<sup>95</sup> Despite a twenty-year age gap the women were firm friends, providing mutual support in the form of shopping, baking, and child-minding.<sup>96</sup> Throughout the period traditional methods of reciprocity and exchanging services were maintained.

Other Sedgley respondents confirmed the continuation of reciprocity during the 1960s - there was “a fantastic community spirit”, with people always willing to assist their neighbours.<sup>97</sup> Similarly, Brownswall estate “was a very friendly... really...we were forever you know. Parents would dump the child at one of the other houses and vice versa...very much so, which given that my parents aren’t the most sociable people it’s really surprising... she (mother) would turn to the neighbours, oh definitely”.<sup>98</sup> When Michael Cripps moved to a new estate, on the opposite side of Sedgley Beacon, in 1960 the neighbours were extremely helpful – “...they all helped each other out to do

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<sup>92</sup> Sykes, *Popular*, p. 68. The Gornals (Upper Gornal, Lower Gornal and Gornal Wood) were three of the villages which were under the auspices of Sedgley U.D.C. until 1966.

<sup>93</sup> Sedgley Mr NS.

<sup>94</sup> Sedgley Mrs VR.

<sup>95</sup> For a discussion of masculine attitudes to neighbours see Tebbutt, *Gossip*, pp. 163-166. Sedgley Mr NS. When Mr Aston retired, in 1968 as Baggeridge Colliery closed, he utilised Mr Southall’s garden, in addition to his own, to grow vegetables which were shared by the two families.

<sup>96</sup> Sedgley Mr NS.

<sup>97</sup> Sedgley Mr TB; Mrs DG; Mr SW.

<sup>98</sup> Sedgley Mr TB. The Brownswall estate contained a mixture of detached and semi-detached homes constructed at the end of the 1950s.

all the jobs you have to do when you move into a new house. Out in the garden everybody helped everyone else, you know, with putting fences up and er also putting lawns down and that sort of thing. When there were jobs to do people mucked in”.<sup>99</sup> His experience of male reciprocity was relatively unusual, whereas Mrs Brown’s observations are more representative. She described her neighbourhood as “more than friendly”:

“Yes it was a community, helped each other, [we] knew each other’s business. Nobody resented somebody else knowing your business...*instantly there* [to help]...looked after children, went round and did housework when it became necessary...a neighbour would come in and look after the family...They weren’t in and out of each other’s houses all the time because the men weren’t like that. It was the women.”<sup>100</sup>

Mrs Wade, who moved from Wednesbury to Sedgley in 1955, was an exception. Although her husband recalled that living in Sedgley was “lovely...very different” to their previous home, she was “*very* lonely...yes when I first came up”. It transpired that her husband’s acquaintance with the locality was facilitated through his employment whilst she was unable to work due to ill-health.<sup>101</sup>

Continuity in Sedgley may be due to the conscious integration of new housing into the existing community, enabling Sedgley Planning Department’s announcement that, unlike neighbouring areas, they had not developed new communities on the “outskirts”. They were “fortunately enabled to create a number of relatively small and well-sited estates in close proximity with existing centres of the population, thus extending communities and creating modern neighbourhood units based on existing shopping, business and transport facilities”.<sup>102</sup>

However, in Pensnett and Tipton, despite less integration of new estates into the existing communities, reciprocity and mutual aid persisted. Respondents maintained that immediate neighbours, others in close proximity and friends from church were

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<sup>99</sup> Sedgley Mr MC. Ettingshall Park was constructed at around the same time as Brownswall Estate and contained similar types of houses.

<sup>100</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB

<sup>101</sup> Sedgley Mr GW, Mrs RW1. Mr GW was employed by British Gas and was constantly travelling around the area.

<sup>102</sup> *Sedgley Official Guide, 1968*, p.17.

“always ready to help in troubled times”.<sup>103</sup> The general consensus in Pensnett was that “everyone helped”,<sup>104</sup> “we all worked together”.<sup>105</sup> During the 1950s and 60s Pat Greenfield recalled “you’d be in and out of each other’s houses as though it were your own”.<sup>106</sup> Mrs IT and her neighbours assisted with child-minding, shopping and sick visiting; in her opinion this exchange of services was a vital component of raising a family during the 1960s.<sup>107</sup>

Despite National Health Service provisions, Pensnett women still performed nursing and personal services into the 1960s.<sup>108</sup> Mrs Lavender was “always the one that you ran to if there was a problem. She was the like local doctor, no she wasn’t. Like - the local nurse. If anyone was having a baby or broke their leg she was the one you went to first”.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, Mrs Edwards “who... borned (sic) me – I was born at home and her was more or less a semi-midwife. They used to come over they’d do anything”.<sup>110</sup> Mrs Archer performed a comparable service, which continued until the late 1960s. “There was a lady on this estate...they’d say go and fetch Mrs Archer...she used to come with a black apron on and that was to lay somebody out. Then if you went again and she’d come out with a white apron it was for a birth... and if she came out with an earden (sic) bag on her she was coming to do your washing (laughter).”<sup>111</sup>

In Tipton, community services were also maintained throughout the period, with neighbours providing mutual assistance on a regular basis – childcare, help within the home, and shopping.<sup>112</sup> “When coal was delivered in a heap in the street everyone used to help you get it in.”<sup>113</sup> Barry Whitehouse described his locality as “friendly, neighbourly”, with neighbours knocking and entering houses before the door was answered.<sup>114</sup> During the 1960s Mrs JB’s neighbours were “very, very [helpful]. If

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<sup>103</sup> Preliminary conversation with Miss YB, Mr DM and Miss VC on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2007.

<sup>104</sup> Pensnett Mr KD; Mr NR.

<sup>105</sup> Pensnett Mr SG, Miss VC, Mr NR, Miss YB.

<sup>106</sup> Pensnett Mrs PG.

<sup>107</sup> Pensnett Mrs IT.

<sup>108</sup> Pensnett Miss VC, Miss YB, Mrs JB, Mrs BW.

<sup>109</sup> Pensnett Mrs JB.

<sup>110</sup> Pensnett Mrs BW.

<sup>111</sup> Pensnett Miss VC.

<sup>112</sup> Tipton Mrs MA, Mr DN.

<sup>113</sup> Tipton Mr DA.

<sup>114</sup> Tipton Mr BW.

anyone was in trouble they knock the door – ‘Can you come round?’ If they were not very well or if they ran out of anything – ‘have you got a bit of this or that?’ particularly garden tools and things that they were short of’.<sup>115</sup> During the 1950s Mr RB ran errands for his neighbours and they sat with his mother when she was ill; there was a “very very good understanding because there was a need for them to pull together...they’d got time for each other, they weren’t so independent.”<sup>116</sup> Ten years later if Mr Nixon “stayed out late playing football and was too late back for tea...she’d [the next door neighbour] give me something to eat at her house and likewise at our house with her son. So yeah they’d got nothing but they’d give you something”.<sup>117</sup> One respondent, born in 1944, “used to half live” in her neighbour’s house, during the 1960s, as “she was a dress-maker and I loved sewing”.<sup>118</sup> Vera Weigh recalled Mrs Mould baby-sitting for her parents, insisting that “really and truly you could call on anybody in that road” for assistance.<sup>119</sup> The oral testimony clearly refutes claims that re-housing and affluence necessarily diminished neighbourhood networks.<sup>120</sup>

In all three areas, friends and neighbours were treated as family and addressed as such. Mrs Detheridge’s neighbour was always addressed as aunty.<sup>121</sup> “‘Aunty’ May from the Terraces” and Mrs Weigh provided reciprocal help.<sup>122</sup> Mr Southall and his sister addressed their parent’s friends within the community as auntie and uncle.<sup>123</sup> Joyce Beaman’s neighbourhood “was all very friendly, they felt like family really”;<sup>124</sup> this sentiment was reiterated by Mrs Greenaway – “very friendly, very helpful, felt like family”.<sup>125</sup> In Tipton Mr MJ had “adopted grandparents over the fence... Granddad and Granny Chatin. The next door neighbours the Cherrington’s ...and the Darby’s, they lived next door ...I think it [Tipton] was very very family

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<sup>115</sup> Tipton Mrs JB.

<sup>116</sup> Tipton Mr RB.

<sup>117</sup> Tipton Mr DN.

<sup>118</sup> Tipton Mrs MD.

<sup>119</sup> Tipton Mrs VW.

<sup>120</sup> Lewis, *Women*; Benson, *The Working Class*; Hoggart, *Literacy*.

<sup>121</sup> Pensnett Mrs BD.

<sup>122</sup> Tipton Mrs VW.

<sup>123</sup> Sedgley Mrs NS.

<sup>124</sup> Pensnett Mrs JB.

<sup>125</sup> Pensnett Mrs PG.

orientated...everybody's family knew everybody else ...and if there were any problems neighbour helped neighbour. Everybody looked after everybody's kids".<sup>126</sup>

Although the mutual help and community support remained a vital constituent of post-war life, the close bonds and the inter-connectivity, which existed even within sectors of newer housing, were occasionally problematic. When questioned concerning mutual assistance Mrs Jones, a relative newcomer to Sedgley, in 1942, replied:

“The immediate neighbours yes. Everybody was [helpful] really weren't they? ... Everybody talked to everybody else... They were helpful. I think so very much so. Usually. Everybody was related to everybody else. We were the strangers when we came up here. We had to be careful who we spoke to because we didn't know if it was their cousin [we were talking about] (laughter).”<sup>127</sup>

That particular area consisted of dilapidated terraces and new homes – most of the slum housing was cleared during the early 1950s. In 1951 Rich's analysis confirmed that it was an isolated, but close-knit village where “people...are still attached to their own neighbourhood and like to remain in or near to it”.<sup>128</sup>

The material and financial improvements of the 1950s stimulated ambitions for future advancement, but even on newer housing estates, and regardless of class, traditional behavioural patterns were perpetuated. Despite material progress, a surprising number of people maintained “many of the old standards” throughout the period. By 1970 changes in social trends were gradual and, despite the existence of state welfare, communal aid and reciprocity continued to play an important role in the lives of lower-middle and working-class families.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Tipton Mr MJ.

<sup>127</sup> Sedgley Mrs PJ. The family moved to the Tipton area in 1939 from Hereford and moved to Sedgley in 1942.

<sup>128</sup> Rich, D., 'Spare Time in the Black Country', Kuper (ed) *Living in Towns*, p. 360. She described Coseley, one of the nine villages which originally constituted Sedgley, as “in the middle of a vast and industrially productive built-up area...[which is] singularly ill-provided with what planners call 'communal facilities' and 'urban amenities'”. p. 299.

<sup>129</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 200. The majority of Roberts' respondents experienced changes between 1945 and 1970 even if they were still located in older housing. In Roberts' estimation they were the result of 'widening social differences and changing social attitudes within the working class'.

### *Matrilocality*

New homes reputedly impacted upon traditional communities, causing sociologists to explore behavioural modifications.<sup>130</sup> Young and Wilmott attempted to ascertain the effect of housing policy upon family life, through a comparison between the traditional community of Bethnall Green and the “bleaker, more introverted life” on the new, larger estates. However, this survey drew “large conclusions based on small numbers”.<sup>131</sup> Jackson confirmed that re-housing in Huddersfield destroyed kinship and neighbourhood networks, blaming irresponsible local authorities for destroying irreplaceable “social capital”.<sup>132</sup>

It has been argued that the dynamics of familial relationships were also reconstructed post-1945. Seabrook insisted that the extended family “fell into rapid decay”,<sup>133</sup> as increased affluence and aspirations, combined with relocation, fragmented the extended family, replacing it with a nuclear family of parents and children living in loneliness and isolation.<sup>134</sup> Whereas earlier in the century the “significance of mothers extended into every aspect” of family life,<sup>135</sup> McKibbin concluded that changes in housing “broke the pattern” of women’s lives, weakening matrilocality.<sup>136</sup> Until 1945, lower-middle and working-class families resided in close proximity to their parents, especially mothers who functioned as a central figure in decision-making.<sup>137</sup> The matriarch was part of the old, defensive structure of poverty, providing assistance, assurance and security against the rest of society, particularly representatives of authority – in the form of rent collectors, truancy officers and other council officials.<sup>138</sup> In pre-war Birmingham, Chinn claimed that the mother and daughter relationship was particularly close, both emotionally and spatially.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Goldthorpe, et al., *The Affluent*, p. 159. They have argued that although behavioural patterns may be modified neither affluence nor residence in middle class localities necessarily lead to the integration of manual workers into middle-class society.

<sup>131</sup> Goldthorpe, et al., *The Affluent*, p. 159.

<sup>132</sup> Jackson, *Working-Class*, p. 150.

<sup>133</sup> Seabrook, *Landscapes*, p. 110.

<sup>134</sup> Schaffer, *New Town*, p. 192.

<sup>135</sup> Chinn, C., *Poverty Amidst Prosperity: The Urban Poor in England, 1834-1914*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995, p. 145.

<sup>136</sup> McKibbin, *Classes*, p. 519.

<sup>137</sup> Kerr, *The People*, p. 22.

<sup>138</sup> Seabrook, *Working-Class Childhood*, p. 202; Pam Taylor, ‘Daughters and Mothers – Maids and Mistresses: Domestic Service between the Wars’, cited in Clarke, et al., *Working-Class*, p. 127.

<sup>139</sup> Chinn, *They Worked*, p. 25.

However, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that matrilocality *remained* an important feature of post-war Britain. In 1950s Liverpool mothers and daughters lived “within easy calling distance”<sup>140</sup> and married daughters wept as they moved away from their childhood homes.<sup>141</sup> In the slums of Ship Street the extended family was nearby, with married daughters living within five minutes of their parents.<sup>142</sup> In new estates the availability of second-generation housing remained an important issue allowing families to remain in close proximity.<sup>143</sup> Certainly, sociologists advocated the necessity of preserving and protecting close familial relationships for the communal good, as the mother, or grandmother, was the head of the extended family and “her home is its meeting place”.<sup>144</sup>

Autobiographical and oral evidence indicated a sustained need for close proximity to the maternal home and continuing idealisation of the mother figure. This is endorsed by many of the memoirs and autobiographies of the time and is not confined to the mother/daughter relationship. Working-class men also idealised mothers and grandmothers; miners of Ashton visited regularly, acknowledging their “self-abnegation and sacrifice”.<sup>145</sup> Seabrook cited bachelors whose only “sweetheart” was their mother.<sup>146</sup> Louis Heren’s and Gary Smith’s mothers made all the important decisions,<sup>147</sup> whilst Gran Gullis came to the “rescue” of the Barnes family throughout her life.<sup>148</sup>

The oral testimony confirmed the views of Mays, Klein and others, that matrilocality survived into the period of post-war prosperity. Male respondents expressed admiration and respect for their mothers and grandmothers, desiring to remain close to their families. Following their wedding in 1946, Oliver Houlton and his bride lived with his parents for eleven months, moving to a house across the road where they resided for twelve years until his mother’s death.<sup>149</sup> Mrs Roberts’ husband insisted on

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<sup>140</sup> Mays, *Growing*, p. 93.

<sup>141</sup> Seabrook, *Working-Class Childhood*, p. 83.

<sup>142</sup> Kerr, *The People*, pp. 13-22.

<sup>143</sup> Klein, *Samples*, p. 227.

<sup>144</sup> Young and Wilmott, *Family and Kinship*, p. 49.

<sup>145</sup> Dennis, et al., *Coal*, p. 242.

<sup>146</sup> Seabrook, *Working-Class Childhood*, p. 82, p. 193.

<sup>147</sup> Heren, L., *Growing Up Poor in London*, London: Indigo, 1973, p. 39; Smith, *Winson Green*, p. 43.

<sup>148</sup> Barnes, *Coronation Cups*, p. 29

<sup>149</sup> Tipton Mr OH.

remaining with his mother until she died in 1957.<sup>150</sup> Spencer Wilson, married in 1953, recalled - “she was never a demanding mother and I was probably a bit spoilt”.<sup>151</sup>

For those marrying in the 1960s the situation was similar. Mr Whitehouse lived in the family home after marriage in 1964, as his mother “wasn’t enjoying the best of health”.<sup>152</sup> A minority of mothers were overtly domineering, but still commanded filial devotion. Mr MJ’s mother regulated and determined his life – “it was about controlling...I threatened to walk out [in 1960]...and my girlfriend at the time persuaded me not to”. At this juncture his wife interjected that, “*she* didn’t want him married”. However, his affection and respect for his mother was evident and his mother’s behaviour excused by her need to remain strong during his father’s wartime absences.<sup>153</sup> Indeed, in the recollections of the respondents virtually all imperious maternal behaviour was explained with affection and interpreted as concern for the survival and well-being of their children.

In the 1950s, Kerr concluded that the mother and daughter relationship retained its pre-war significance. In some instances, mother was more important than a spouse – “I couldn’t get on without me mother. I could get on without me husband. I don’t notice him”<sup>154</sup> Autobiographical evidence indicated that mothers remained the focus and matriarchs of Black Country communities, consulted over decision-making and remaining in close proximity to their married offspring.<sup>155</sup> “You had to have a good mother to bring you up. There was no money...so your family were important: there was nothing else.”<sup>156</sup> Kathleen Hann’s mother was a “great matriarch”, in the 1960s, four of her five children commenced married life in the family home and seven grandchildren “spent their babyhood there”.<sup>157</sup> In 1969 Nancy Watts resided in

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<sup>150</sup> Sedgley Mrs DR1

<sup>151</sup> Sedgley Mrs SW.

<sup>152</sup> Tipton Mr BW.

<sup>153</sup> Tipton Mr MJ. Mr MJ’s mother appeared to be exceptionally controlling, demonstrating her affection to her only child and this control will be explored in subsequent chapters concerning earning, spending, and saving.

<sup>154</sup> Kerr, *The People*, p. 40.

<sup>155</sup> Cotterill, E., *A Black Country Nurse at Large*, Kingswinford: The Black Country Society, 1973, p. 19; Haynes, *New Home*, Dayus, K., *Her People*, London: Virago, 1982.

<sup>156</sup> Price, *In My Life*, p. 24. Anonymous contributor to the Wolverhampton Heritage Project.

<sup>157</sup> Hann, *Tell It*, p. 140. Hann was from the Black Country town of Wednesbury.



Tipton with her 85 year old mother and sister, near to her extended family.<sup>158</sup> In Sedgley Mary Tatem lived near both sets of in-laws and her mother-in-law “found” the young couple’s first home.<sup>159</sup>

Oral testimony confirmed that in the post-war era matriarchs continued in their former role, regulating society and controlling their families. Living “on the Park Council Estate” in Tipton, during the 1940s and 50s, Mrs Allen’s foundry-man father purchased two houses but was forced to sell them because “she (mom) wouldn’t move” without Great Aunt Lou’s approval. She explained that they visited “*all* the time...we were a very close family then, you couldn’t stray the matriarchs wouldn’t let us stray”. In her experience these women continued to control post-war social mores; “Everyone had to adhere. If one fell foul...like I had another auntie that wasn’t quite right up to scratch...because my Uncle Jimmy worked away in Scotland. And if they thought she wasn’t adhering to what she should be, the matriarch, Gran, would tell one of the sisters...you know ‘go and see what’s happening there’”.<sup>160</sup>

Many families were controlled by a dominant female whose influence extended into the wider community. In addition to supervising housing choices, they influenced employment decisions and regulated spending and saving decisions (the latter three will be discussed in subsequent chapters). The extent of their dominance was indicated when respondents’ actions were explained, or excused, with the words - “mother didn’t like that”,<sup>161</sup> “mother was the driving force”,<sup>162</sup> “mother wouldn’t let me”,<sup>163</sup> or “mother said!”<sup>164</sup> Sheldon’s 1948 enquiry was “*astonished*” that “no less than 4% of the [Wolverhampton] sample had children actually living next door to them” and that more would have done so had it been physically possible.<sup>165</sup> In fact,

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<sup>158</sup> *Witness*, Dixon’s Green Methodist Church Dudley, Spring 2006, p. 2. Nancy was born in Princes End Tipton in 1911 and resided there until she moved to Dudley in 1970.

<sup>159</sup> Tatem, *Just Me*, p. 32. The Goldthorn Hill area remained part of Sedgley until the extensive boundary changes of 1966 when it became part of Wolverhampton.

<sup>160</sup> Tipton Mrs MA.

<sup>161</sup> Pensnett Mrs HW, Mrs BD.

<sup>162</sup> Pensnett Mrs HW.

<sup>163</sup> Tipton Mr MJ.

<sup>164</sup> Tipton Mrs MA, Mrs RW, Mrs JB.

<sup>165</sup> Sheldon, J. H. *Social Medicine of Old Age: Report of an Inquiry in Wolverhampton*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948, p. 195. This book was published for the trustees of the Nuffield Foundation and was instigated as a result of the alarming forecasts of population trends which predicted a fall in population and increasing numbers of the elderly who would require specialist services. It provides a fascinating insight into the health and social conditions of Wolverhampton’s elderly citizens and

almost 60% of widows and widowers lived with their offspring.<sup>166</sup> He found that 40% of the elderly depended upon the accessibility of family for their “happiness and domestic efficiency”<sup>167</sup> and he advocated close family proximity to ease the burden of caring for the younger generation.

The situation in nearby Wolverhampton was replicated in all three areas in varying degrees. All twenty respondents from Pensnett were born and remained in the area, living as closely as practicable to other family members, frequently next door. The distance from the maternal home was recalled in yards – Barbara Adam’s parents lived 150 yards from her maternal grandmother, Mr Evans’ grandparents “lived in Milton Street which is about 500 yards [away] ...they all lived in Pensnett”. One respondent lived next door to an aunt and uncle and his sister “had a bungalow at the bottom of the garden”.<sup>168</sup> His wife confirmed that this was customary, claiming that everyone in the area was inter-related - “their cat sat on our doorstep” – they were in some way vaguely related through marriage and kinship bonds.<sup>169</sup> When he married in 1970, aged 21, Mr KD moved to Brockmore: “and I hated it. I really did hated it...I’d always been from round here and I didn’t really know anybody”. Although Brockmore was less than a mile away the newly-weds returned to Pensnett within months.<sup>170</sup>

The situation was replicated in Tipton with 17 respondents living near family members, particularly parents and grandparents. Harold Parsons and his wife lived by both sets of parents; during the 1950s it was difficult to leave them, “our generation regarded it as our duty to stick by our parents”.<sup>171</sup> Mrs Houlton grew up in the same row of houses as other family members – “all relatives and down the line. They all belonged to mother’s family”. “Close within a mile radius you’d got

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stresses the importance of the family as a “fundamental part of the social biology of old age”. p. 141. More mothers would have lived closer to their families but this was prohibited due to post-war housing problems.

<sup>166</sup> Sheldon, *Social Medicine*, p. 147.

<sup>167</sup> Sheldon, *Social Medicine*, p. 156.

<sup>168</sup> Pensnett Mr BT, Mrs BA, Mr RE.

<sup>169</sup> Pensnett Mrs IT.

<sup>170</sup> Pensnett Mr KD.

<sup>171</sup> Parsons, H., *Substance and Shadow: An Autobiography of a Black Country Writer*, Birmingham: Barbryn Press, 1982, p. 91.

everybody”.<sup>172</sup> Mrs Leddy moved eight miles from Tipton when she married, in 1963; she was “always pulled back [to the area]”, as she now lived “a heck of a long way from home”.<sup>173</sup> Moving from Tipton to Sedgley, Mr Weigh “felt we was (sic) moving miles away”.<sup>174</sup> Mrs Tolley’s mother was upset when her daughter moved six miles – “she didn’t like it she thought I was moving to another country”.<sup>175</sup>

Only 50% of Sedgley respondents lived close to their extended families. “All mom’s and dad’s families lived in the surrounding area”<sup>176</sup> and the extended Bennett family resided “within 10 minutes” of each other, a situation which continues today, within that family and others.<sup>177</sup> Similarly, Mr Southall’s mother, who lived four miles from the maternal home and extended family, returned to her former home at every opportunity, occasionally causing friction in her marriage.<sup>178</sup> Mrs Jones lived next door to her mother-in-law, surrounded by her husband’s family, in-laws, cousins, aunts and uncles; her own son purchased a house next door when he married in 1971 and her daughter now lives “100 yards round the corner”.<sup>179</sup> Although fewer of the Sedgley respondents lived in such close proximity to their parents, the emotional bonds remained extremely important and regular contact was always maintained.

In all three areas it remained customary for newly-weds to move in with parents or siblings, at least temporarily, when they married.<sup>180</sup> Housing shortages and financial considerations impeded independence, whilst respondents waited for council accommodation or saved for mortgage deposits. In some instances, however, they moved in permanently, only living alone when all parents were deceased. Lucy James moved into her parents’ Tipton home when she married in 1952, then “mom and dad moved with us to Sedgley” in 1959.<sup>181</sup> It was three years after marriage before Mrs Brown and her husband were allocated a council house in Sedgley and

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<sup>172</sup> Tipton Mrs OE, Mr MJ, Mrs BT.

<sup>173</sup> Tipton Mrs JL.

<sup>174</sup> Tipton Mr JW, Mrs VW.

<sup>175</sup> Tipton Mrs BT.

<sup>176</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB.

<sup>177</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB, Mrs CB.

<sup>178</sup> Sedgley Mr NS.

<sup>179</sup> Sedgley Mrs PJ.

<sup>180</sup> For example Mrs JL, Mrs PJ, Mrs OE, Mr TG, Mrs DR1 and others.

<sup>181</sup> Tipton Mrs LJ.

“both my sisters stayed with mom until they got a council house”.<sup>182</sup> “I think ...at some stage my brothers and my sisters when they were married lived back there” in the parental home.<sup>183</sup> Bill Jones moved in with his in-laws, in 1964, remaining there for 16 years.<sup>184</sup> These, and other similar instances, all inevitably contributed to the overcrowding discussed earlier.

Without exception, respondents resided in the family home until their wedding, including Mr Evans who married in 1979 at the comparatively late age of 32.<sup>185</sup> Escape from the confines of family for educational purposes or National Service was only temporary; all respondents returned home when their courses ended. When Valerie Round completed teacher training at Gloucester College, in 1956, she returned to Sedgley “because I knew my parents wanted me to”. It was 1967 when she married, at the age of 34, and finally moved out.<sup>186</sup> In the same year David Gould left university, returning to work in the family business in Sedgley, established by his older brothers after demobilisation from the RAF ten years earlier.<sup>187</sup> All single respondents remained in the parental home whilst their parents were alive. Miss Plant, who is unmarried, stayed at home with her parents, subsequently living with all three of her married sisters at some point. She now resides with her two sisters.<sup>188</sup> The expectations of the families, especially the mothers, were that, regardless of gender, unmarried offspring should reside at home.

However, close proximity to family members and reliance upon a matriarchal figure had a reciprocal basis.<sup>189</sup> The elderly cared for grandchildren and helped with domestic chores – so that “on balance...the old people are giving the younger generation as much as they are receiving”.<sup>190</sup> This was confirmed by the oral testimony, with grandmothers taking responsibility for childcare and assisting with domestic duties until they became infirm and required help. Respondents spent a great deal of time with their grandparents. Mr Jones, who was born in 1938, saw his

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<sup>182</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB.

<sup>183</sup> Sedgley Mr FG.

<sup>184</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ.

<sup>185</sup> Pensnett Mr RE.

<sup>186</sup> Sedgley Mrs VR.

<sup>187</sup> Sedgley Mr DG.

<sup>188</sup> Pensnett, Mr DM, Miss VC, Miss YB, Miss NP.

<sup>189</sup> Sheldon, *The Social*, p. 147.

<sup>190</sup> Sheldon, *The Social*, p. 162

“grandmother Jones nearly every day” and accompanied her on annual hop-picking holidays.<sup>191</sup> Others described their upbringing as “granny-reared”, as they spent most of their formative years with the older generation.<sup>192</sup> In the 1950s Mrs Tolley “lived at gran’s as much as I lived at our house”.<sup>193</sup> Later, during the 1960s and 70s, whilst Mrs IW worked her mother took care of the grandchildren.<sup>194</sup> Mrs Southall helped with childcare for her daughter and daughter-in-law into the 1980s.<sup>195</sup>

In the absence of formal childcare provision grandmothers played a vital role, as women requiring employment to sustain living-standards increasingly relied upon the older generation. However, whereas most grandmothers appeared to relish their role and were “glad to be of use”,<sup>196</sup> Mrs Brown recalled her mother’s reluctance to babysit. “Well first of all my mom refused to look after her, saying ‘I’ve brought up five children and I don’t agree with you going to work’...but then she came round”.<sup>197</sup>

Inevitably the balance of care and responsibility shifted as mothers and grandmothers became increasingly infirm. Elderly, widowed or infirm grandparents automatically moved into the home of an offspring. Valerie Cartwright recalled that “me mom’s parents lived with us and me other grandma lived with one of me dad’s brothers”. Mrs Bagley, who married in 1964, took care of her grandmother and nursed her own mother during the early 1970s whilst she cared for her own children.<sup>198</sup> It is evident that, within the Black Country, close proximity to the matriarch and the extended family remained desirable throughout the post-war period and into the 1970s.

Family and neighbourhood ties within Tipton remained particularly strong, despite relocation. “A lot of the streets just moved together” from the slums to newer homes.<sup>199</sup> Mr Whitehouse recalled the people of Waterloo Street moving en bloc to new houses in Central Drive. “Most of the neighbours we knew, because the area where we were living most of it was due for demolition anyway so they moved them

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<sup>191</sup> Tipton Mr BJ.

<sup>192</sup> Mr MJ, Mrs BJ, Miss VC, Miss YB.

<sup>193</sup> Tipton Mrs BT, Rev. CH; Pensnett Miss YB; Sedgley Mrs VR.

<sup>194</sup> Sedgley Mrs IW.

<sup>195</sup> Sedgley Mr NS, Mrs CB.

<sup>196</sup> Sedgley Mr NS.

<sup>197</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB

<sup>198</sup> Pensnett Miss VC; Tipton Mrs RB.

<sup>199</sup> Mr Tolley 1999.

on to this new estate.”<sup>200</sup> Evelyn Green refused to move away from her mother into new accommodation - “They started to clear we (sic) out of some of these old houses...and I didn’t want to go so far away from my mother...so I stuck me (sic) ground” - until there was a vacancy opposite her mother’s home.<sup>201</sup> As late as 1970, the local newspaper advertised new homes for sale in Tipton, which were promoted as “Modest homes for young marrieds whose family roots are firmly set in this part of the Midlands” and as “*a home near mom for £3,850*” (my italics), which certainly confirmed the continuing primacy of matriarchs in this area.<sup>202</sup>

However, slum clearance inevitably resulted in some relocation of families from the vicinity of maternal homes. As indicated earlier, the relocation of young couples, with its resultant disruption of family ties, was perceived as a potential social problem by the Black Country Society.<sup>203</sup> Despite separation from kin and the old neighbourhood, Abbott found that regular contact was maintained by telephone and visits.<sup>204</sup> The acquisition of both telephones and cars was necessitated by relocation<sup>205</sup> and new patterns of family relationships evolved as weekends were occupied by *planned* visits to parents, grandparents and the wider extended family.<sup>206</sup>

Towards the end of the study period, indeed into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, traditional patterns were replicated, with the younger respondents perpetuating this customary behaviour. Mr Nixon, who was born in 1953, stressed the importance of maintaining contact through visits - “Yes every week. Gran and Granddad’s every weekend. Saturday and Sunday throughout my life really. We were all very close”.<sup>207</sup> Mr Southall’s response was similar – “Well on my mom’s side frequently. We used to stay there a lot. And on me dad’s side probably thinking back I’d say once a week”.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Tipton Mr BW.

<sup>201</sup> *Any Road Up: Memories of Life in Tipton*, collected and transcribed by Heather Wastie, 1998, The Moving Finger for Murray Hall Community Trust, p. 42.

<sup>202</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 20<sup>th</sup> March 1970, p. 14.

<sup>203</sup> Anon, ‘What Sort of Black Country?’, p. 53.

<sup>204</sup> Abbott *A History*, p. 156; Tebbutt, *Women’s Talk*, p. 156.

<sup>205</sup> Abbott, *A History*, p. 96.

<sup>206</sup> Klein, *Samples*, p. 227. Klein argued that the reduction of interaction with members of the extended family resulted in loneliness; ‘dropping in’ was no longer feasible and visits became formalised as planned excursions.

<sup>207</sup> Tipton Mr DN. He and his brother continued to make daily visits to his elderly mother until her death in 2009.

<sup>208</sup> Sedgley Mr NS.

Respondents who moved away returned to the parental home for obligatory weekly evening meals, until parents became infirm and were invited to eat with them.<sup>209</sup>

There was no evidence to support Schaffer's assertion that families welcomed relocation, which enabled young families to escape from a "three generation pattern that had become a tyranny and a brake on personal enterprise."<sup>210</sup> Although, the Midlands New Towns Society concurred with this, as the proportion of those who were pleased to leave traditional working-class housing "decreased as the informants' ages increased".<sup>211</sup> Nevertheless, oral testimony indicated that despite aspirations to improved living conditions, there was no evidence to suggest that respondents moved to avoid the 'tyrannical' nature of familial connections. Removal was consistently tempered with regret at relocation, albeit only a couple of miles, from the rest of the family. Only Mrs Leddy's husband experienced unmitigated pleasure at moving from his family, whilst she was always 'pulled back' to Tipton - "when Mike left it was like cutting a rope or a ribbon...he could never understand why I wanted to go back".<sup>212</sup>

Sykes' examination of the Black Country refuted many assertions concerning change in the post-war period, finding that, despite slum clearance and the construction of new estates, established kinship and neighbourhood networks survived; the inhabitants retained a strong sense of community and traditional values, with extended families living in close proximity until at least the late 1960s.<sup>213</sup> This was endorsed in Wolverhampton where the elderly remained close to the family unit; although they *were* more likely to be "spread over several houses" rather than residing in the same house.<sup>214</sup> Likewise, the oral evidence confirmed that the community and familial relationships remained an important component of life within Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton.

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<sup>209</sup> Sedgley Mr NS, Mrs IW, Mrs VR, Mrs PJ, Mrs CB; Tipton Mr HT, Mrs BT,

<sup>210</sup> Schaffer, *New Town*, p. 196.

<sup>211</sup> Norris, J., *Human Aspects of Redevelopment*, (published by the Midlands New Towns Society, 1960) cited in Klein, *Samples*, p. 226.

<sup>212</sup> Tipton Mrs JL. Mrs JL's husband had originally agreed to be interviewed but when I arrived his wife was alone and explained that he had gone to play golf as his childhood experiences were too painful to recall.

<sup>213</sup> Sykes, *Popular*, p. 65. He cited Mrs Jones, born in 1941, who had a total of 11 aunts and uncles living close to her parents.

<sup>214</sup> Sheldon, *The Social*, p.195.

Even when physical distance separated families, the close emotional ties and interaction retained importance and the mother/grandmother remained a dominant figure. Community and kinship played an enduring role in post-war lives. Regardless of increasing prosperity, mutuality thrived with neighbours providing support and assistance and the younger generation holding “fast to...older values, living by habit, aphorism and ritual”.<sup>215</sup> Therefore, despite affluence, embourgeoisement theories, the destruction, or reconstruction, of many localities and welfare payments, it appears traditional patterns of behaviour continued into the 1960s and beyond. The structures of communal support were not eroded by the extension of state welfare, and those who were threatened with destitution “established a complex relationship between alternative sources of help.”<sup>216</sup> Affluence failed to significantly erode customary behaviour and communities continued to embrace traditional mores, merely finding new and “more enjoyable ways of being working class.”<sup>217</sup>

The recollections examined above refute Cohen’s claims that re-housing dispersed family networks, destabilized communities and “destroyed matrilocal residence”.<sup>218</sup> In Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton, despite alterations caused by fluctuations in local industries and extensive building programmes, between 1945 and 1970 cultural and social change was gradual not radical. Increasing affluence allowed the respondents additional lifestyle choices, but many of the traditional mores and behaviour patterns continued with little modification. Community spirit still prevailed, reciprocity and mutuality remained important in the lives of the respondents; family and kinship ties were not necessarily broken by re-housing or owner-occupation and the role played by mothers and grandmothers survived despite the apparent transformation of post-war society.

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<sup>215</sup> Collins, *The Likes*, p. 152.

<sup>216</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 139.

<sup>217</sup> Weight, R., *Patriots: National Identity in Britain, 1940-2000*, London: Pan Books, 2003, p. 378.

<sup>218</sup> Cohen, P., ‘Sub-cultural Conflict and Working-Class Community’, Gelder, K., and S. Thornton, (eds.), *The Sub Cultures Reader*, London: Routledge, 1997, pp. 91-93. This chapter was written in 1972 and reflected Cohen’s experiences as an organizer of London Street Commune in the East End of London. In his estimation it was slum clearance and re-housing which fractured traditional community relationships leading to conflict.



## Community, Social Mores and the Welfare State

To many contemporary observers, 1945 heralded the end of poverty as the government prepared to introduce social security legislation, its comprehensive nature accounting “for all the basic and predictable needs of the population”.<sup>219</sup> Family Allowances, unemployment and sickness benefits and pensions would provide for the “ordinary needs of living”, when earning capacity was interrupted. It is undeniable that financial assistance alleviated absolute poverty and by 1970 the majority of people in Britain were “better housed, better fed and healthier than in the past”.<sup>220</sup> This is corroborated nationally and locally by commentators, respondents and autobiographies. However, given the continuity of cultural trends and behaviour patterns discussed above, it is unsurprising that the oral testimony demonstrated ambivalence to state assistance.

This section examines attitudes to state welfare, as previous work has, until recently, confined itself to a “political focus [which] has left something of a void in the historiography”.<sup>221</sup> The oral evidence indicated that residents of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton, unlike the subjects of Graves’ work in the East End of London, during the inter-war years, did not “yield...to the necessity of applying for state benefits when they were...no longer able to provide for their families”.<sup>222</sup> The respondents revealed perceptions of respectability and self-reliance, which rejected government ‘charity’ in favour of mutuality and independence. Their views were exacerbated by the apparent resentment and antagonism of the government employees and Post Office workers who dispensed the benefits, perhaps a continuity of the mutual distrust between recipients and administrators of pre-war means tested payments.

John Parker of Tipton had no doubt that the Welfare State alleviated poverty, as “industrial workers in the Black Country had been lifted from the deep poverty and deprivation which their predecessors endured, through the legislation of the 1945

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<sup>219</sup> Jones, *The Making*, p. 127.

<sup>220</sup> Akhtar and Humphries, *The Fifties*, p. 9; Heron, *Truth, Dare*, back cover; Halsey, *Change*, p. 75.

<sup>221</sup> Graves, P., ‘A Blessing or a Curse? Working-Class Attitudes to State Welfare Programmes in Britain 1919-1939’, *Labour History Review*, Vol. 74, No. 2. August 2009, p. 161.

<sup>222</sup> Graves, ‘A Blessing or a Curse?’. Graves examines working-class attitudes to state welfare provision in inter-war Britain. She focuses upon the East End of London, “a working-class ghetto with large...immigrant communities” to reveal that whilst state aid was likely to be rejected in the 1920s, it was more acceptable by the end of the 1930s.

Labour Government and other progressive changes”.<sup>223</sup> However, few respondents expressed unreserved appreciation of the benefit system. Miss Plant, who was born in 1936, recalled – “Well really old age pension was wonderful I would think. You know for our sort of our dad’s generation - they had nothing”.<sup>224</sup> John Petty concurred, but expressed reservations as “competent organisation can be cruel to those who do not fit easily into its moulds”.<sup>225</sup> Despite state funding, some people experienced financial difficulties, even during the 1960s - one family regularly ran out of food by Wednesdays and looked forward to Thursday’s Family Allowance.<sup>226</sup>

Stereotypical misconceptions of working-class attitudes to state aid were revealed by middle-class novelist H.E. Bates. Pop Larkin urged “Mr Charlton to use his loaf and take proper advantage of ‘the National Elf lark’ a service which, after all, Mr Charlton had paid for...Mr Charlton had already paid out millions to this *swindle* in weekly contributions. It must have cost him a fortune in stamps...It was after all the State that had started this lark – why not go sick...and have a bit of fun?”<sup>227</sup> (my italics) Although respondents might be reluctant to confess similar attitudes, the vast majority were adamant that the welfare state had impacted only minimally upon their consciousness and their lives.

Some individuals refused their entitlement, preferring to retain their independence. Undoubtedly this was due, at least partially, to memories of the Means Tested benefits of the inter-war years, which resulted in inspection visits from the Public Assistance Committee.<sup>228</sup> Any income, including contributions from relatives or charities, as well as savings, furniture and personal effects were taken into account before aid was provided.<sup>229</sup> The subsequent indignity and humiliation had a long-lasting impact upon working-class families. Some inhabitants of Bethnal Green, who were eligible for National Assistance, were unwilling to apply for state aid, perceiving it as charity

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<sup>223</sup> Parker, *A Black Country Boy*, p. xx, p. 83.

<sup>224</sup> Pensnett Miss NP.

<sup>225</sup> Petty, *Five Fags*, p. 5. Petty suffered both physical and mental incapacities which sometimes prohibited paid employment. He resorted to picking scrap from a site to the rear of Walsall’s blast furnaces.

<sup>226</sup> Lewis, G., ‘From Deepest Kilburn’ in Heron, *Truth, Dare*, p. 234.

<sup>227</sup> Bates, H.E., *The Darling Buds of May*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961, p. 82.

<sup>228</sup> Graves, ‘A Blessing or a Curse?’, pp.161-163.

<sup>229</sup> The Means Test was introduced in 1931, as part of cost-cutting measures intended to deal with the country’s economic crisis. By January 1932 an estimated 1 million people had been subjected to the test, of which 180,000 were denied unemployment benefit.

and arguing that they were asked too many questions.<sup>230</sup> The concept of discretionary Supplementary Benefits was contentious,<sup>231</sup> some preferring to starve than “ask for a penny”.<sup>232</sup> Coates and Silburn revealed that many Nottingham pensioners lived in poverty refusing to claim supplementary pension entitlements.<sup>233</sup>

Petty evinced a similar attitude. As claimants of state aid were stigmatised, he eschewed the 26 shillings per week state payment, preferring the self-sufficiency of scavenging waste metal from a Walsall tip.<sup>234</sup> Health permitting, his earnings were 12 shillings a day, providing he could evade the police.<sup>235</sup> Kathleen Hann’s mother was in “great distress” when requiring aid, and “only swallowed her pride for the sake of the children”.<sup>236</sup> Nigel Southall’s paternal grandmother Mabel Southall, a Sedgley resident until her death in 1968, adamantly refused to claim her pension entitlement which she perceived as charity.<sup>237</sup> Mrs Brown, also of Sedgley, recalled her “father’s great pride was that he never claimed, never had anything. Not a penny did he get from the state it was a great pride to him that throughout his life he’d been able to fend for himself financially”.<sup>238</sup> Similarly, Mr KD believed that charitable connotations and pride prohibited claims for state assistance – “Some of ‘em were too proud. I think that although they hadn’t got anything they’d rather have nothing than have like charity. I think a lot of them did. I think it was the way they were brought up”.<sup>239</sup> Entitlement to state aid was customarily rejected in favour of self-reliance.

During the 1950s one disabled Tipton resident:

“bought himself a bike with a box on the front and he sold matches, shoe laces and bits and pieces...people bought things from him because they felt sorry for him...he wanted to keep his independence. There was a stigma attached to state help. Lots of people wouldn’t accept payment off the state and sit at

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<sup>230</sup> Young and Wilmott, *Family*.

<sup>231</sup> Calvocaressi, *The British*, p. 40. Calvocaressi argued that one of the main defects of the system was the discretionary element which deterred many applicants. Timmins, *Five Giants*, p. 226.

<sup>232</sup> Klein, *Samples*, p. 205.

<sup>233</sup> Coates and Silburn, *Poverty*, p. 47.

<sup>234</sup> Petty, *Five Fags*, p. 16.

<sup>235</sup> Petty, *Five Fags*, p. 14.

<sup>236</sup> Hann, *Tell It*, p. 10.

<sup>237</sup> Subsequent conversation with Mr NS of Sedgley.

<sup>238</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB.

<sup>239</sup> Pensnett Mr KD.

home. They still carried on, it was pride, they wanted to be independent. Families still helped each other”.<sup>240</sup>

The community endorsed his actions, making regular purchases to assist his struggle for independence – pride and self–help were to be commended.

Mrs JB of Tipton was a counter-clerk at the post office through the 1960s and 70s. Her testimony is worth replicating in some detail as it demonstrates the continuing stigma attached to the benefits system, and ambivalence towards claimants and types of benefit, which in Vincent’s estimation were a legacy of pre-war perceptions.<sup>241</sup>

“It was national assistance then and it was only the very poor people that were allowed national assistance. And I don’t know that people knew that it was available but there was always the scroungers that did ... Stigma? Yes yes people over the post counter if they’d got number 11s [national assistance books] that was it. The pension was number 13. Some deserved it you know but there was a stigma, a stigma attached I consider anyway....Some people wouldn’t come in for pensions and national assistance when the place was full. They’d wait until all the people had gone out that they didn’t want to know [about their claims]. Very wary of who was in the office when they were collecting their national assistance.”<sup>242</sup>

Although claims for financial assistance were stigmatised, all respondents expressed appreciation and acceptance of medical treatment. Most mentioned free access to the family doctor and local hospitals, as well as optical and dental care. Pre-1948, parents were willing to finance children’s medical treatment, but unlikely to pay for themselves. “We always went to the doctor’s if we were ill, but mom and dad never went. They’d pay for us to go but not themselves. Not until the health service did kick in”.<sup>243</sup> Dorothy Rudd recalled “oh it did [make a difference] to my mother, she had false teeth. [Her] teeth were terrible before. *Oh it was fantastic*”. Her husband interjected “It was almost a joke, everyone had glasses and false teeth (laughter). The change was associated with false teeth and spectacles. I know that there were more

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<sup>240</sup> Tipton Mr DA.

<sup>241</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 143.

<sup>242</sup> Tipton Mrs JB.

<sup>243</sup> Sedgley Mr TG.

fundamental changes but that's what everyone seemed to – as I recall because it was a joke you know".<sup>244</sup>

"Oh it did, it did [make a difference]. Mind you a lot abused it they had a lot of glasses and teeth and such you know. Oh yes 'cos they could get the things for nothing so you see you know what people are like."<sup>245</sup> Mrs Jones described her eldest son, born in 1948, as a "national health baby". She continued "I don't know about the payments – the benefits you know, but the national health - the doctoring made a difference".<sup>246</sup> Carol Bennett, born in 1944, recalled "Oh it was wonderful. I remember them telling me that grandma had broken her ankle and she couldn't afford to go to have anything done about it and she'd walked with a limp."<sup>247</sup> Mrs Adams recalled - "oh my mother wouldn't have that. I was an only child; no I don't know anything about that. I remember as a child the free glasses were metal – round (demonstrates) and my mother would never let me have them I always had private ones".<sup>248</sup>

Whilst for most people free medical care was welcomed, financial aid, even in times of ill-health, was an admission of failure, entailing a forfeiture of respectability. Mrs Tolley's response was typical; she recalled her family's poverty during the 1950s and early 60s, caused by her father's continuing ill-health. "Dad wouldn't have asked for help. No, none at all. I think the only impact it [state welfare] had was that when you were ill you could go to the doctor without worrying about paying. I think it was a great relief". As she subsequently explained – "I think if people went to the state most people looked down on them you know. 'Oh they can't manage' and they talked about people who didn't work. Everyone was poor but you needed to feel that you could look after your own. Self-reliant that's the best word to describe it".<sup>249</sup> Mr Houlton tolerated the concept of medical care but recalled "there was a stigma attached to it (accepting financial aid generally). To have money at one time, to have money and live like that...oh I think people were independent definitely. Before...if

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<sup>244</sup> Tipton Mrs DR2, Mr PR, Mr OH, Mrs OH; Pensnett Miss NP, Mrs JB; Sedgley Mr SW, Mrs RW, Mrs PJ.

<sup>245</sup> Pensnett Mr SG.

<sup>246</sup> Sedgley Mrs PJ.

<sup>247</sup> Sedgley Mrs CB.

<sup>248</sup> Pensnett Mrs BA.

<sup>249</sup> Tipton Mrs BT.

you knew someone was living on the state! I knew a girl whose father was dying, it was terrible and her mother had to take washing in. I wouldn't say scandalised, but!"<sup>250</sup> In his opinion, and other respondents, any form of menial labour was preferable to losing self-reliance and self-respect.<sup>251</sup> Marion Allen believed that claimants of aid lost respectability – “National Assistance? People we knew didn't, it was looked down upon”.<sup>252</sup>

In Tipton, at least in Mr MJ's view, unemployment benefit was unnecessary, and claimants were regarded with a mixture of resentment and derision as “there was so much industry”. However, he subsequently recounted that,

“there was only one person that [he] knew that lived on the Welfare State...he must be nearly 90 'cos he's never worked a day in his life, ever. When everybody else had got three jobs he still hadn't got one he was on the labour, one of the few. Him and a bloke named Major - two people in the road! In fact he said if ever they come (sic) and offered me a job I think I'd drop down. They were their words and they've never worked *ever*”.<sup>253</sup>

Only Mr BT admitted claiming unemployment benefit, his attitude was interesting and ambivalent. He mentioned a strike of Austin Motor Company employees in the 1950s, recalling that he “had only union money and money from the labour exchange to give to mother (for his board)”. Later, when questioned about state welfare, he responded - “I don't remember it at all”. When reminded concerning payments from the Labour Exchange, he retorted “oh yes but only unemployment benefit - £3 for mother”.<sup>254</sup>

However, a minority of individuals saw acceptance of benefits as a natural and welcome phenomenon. ‘Everyone’ in Andrew Collins' locality was a recipient of welfare there was little social stigma attached.<sup>255</sup> This was endorsed by Geoff Bates,

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<sup>250</sup> Tipton Mr OH.

<sup>251</sup> Tipton Mr OH, Mrs OH, Mrs BT; Pensnett Miss YB; Miss VC; Sedgley Mrs MA.

<sup>252</sup> Tipton Mrs MA.

<sup>253</sup> Tipton Mr MJ. Note: Mr MJ's wife was not formally interviewed but was present throughout. She also lived in Tipton and where relevant and appropriate her interjections are also included.

<sup>254</sup> Pensnett Mr BT.

<sup>255</sup> Collins, A., *Where Did It All Go Right?: Growing up normal in the 1970s*, London: Edbury Press, 2003, p. 17.

an employee of the Culwell Works at Wolverhampton during the 1950s. His colleague, although of retirement age, returned from Canada when he “heard about the free teeth and glasses” from the National Health Service and state benefits.<sup>256</sup> Mr Tolley recalled that Tipton inhabitants “used to say they were going ‘up the Briars’ (when they needed financial help). I don’t know if that’s the name of the place where it was. They used to call it the Briars...there was no stigma attached - well there was so many in that plight you know. In the rougher areas...well not the rougher areas the *poorer* areas.”<sup>257</sup>

Although seeking financial help was equated with loss of self-respect and respectability, there was no stigma attached to Family Allowances, as they were designated for the benefit of children. Mrs Roberts, whose daughters were born in 1953 and 1957, recalled “it was eight shillings we had for one child, oh it was wonderful to me”.<sup>258</sup> Mrs Woolley who had previously stated “I don’t think we ever claimed for anything. Mom and dad didn’t claim”, admitted accepting family allowance “for my children”.<sup>259</sup> “Child benefit! I had seven and sixpence after that I think I had...but yes we used to save it and I’d buy them a winter coat, when I needed to buy a large item like a pair of shoes or a coat.”<sup>260</sup> Joyce Beaman, of Pensnett, recollections typified responses of most interviewees - “Yes I remember all that sort of thing. We didn’t have to pay for medical stuff and hospital visits. Family allowance was always spent on their [her daughters’] clothes. It wasn’t much to be honest...but on the other hand you know it was very welcome at the time”.<sup>261</sup>

The sole opposition to family allowances was voiced by a former Post Office Counter Manager. Despite approving of medical assistance she held somewhat controversial views of other benefits, influenced by her employment experiences, and right-wing political views:

“Yes but you didn’t get it for the first child only got it for the second...I don’t believe in it. I don’t believe in it now no. No because I don’t think that they should be paying for you to have children. Your prerogative whether you

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<sup>256</sup> Brew, *Wolverhampton*, p. 90.

<sup>257</sup> Tipton Mr BT.

<sup>258</sup> Sedgley Mrs DR1.

<sup>259</sup> Pensnett Mrs BW.

<sup>260</sup> Sedgley Mrs RW.

<sup>261</sup> Pensnett Mrs JB.

have them or not, if you have them you should be prepared to pay for them, I don't think the government should. *But if other people are having it I would have it, but I don't believe in it.*"

She explained that it was spent upon children's clothes "or whatever they needed, not for myself".<sup>262</sup> This typifies the attitudes of some post-office employees. Although it is difficult to ascertain whether this was a class-based issue, or an 'officialdom versus the people' debate, as several respondents reported unwarranted and sometimes officious interference from post-office staff, raising memories of social control. The incidents were related with a measure of indignation. For example, when Mrs Jones's mother died in the mid 1950s, the post office manager called personally at the house requesting the return of a proportion of that weeks' pension.<sup>263</sup>

Rose Wilson saved her family allowance to purchase coats for her daughters. "And I went in the post office and he said 'oh it's a good job you've come for this this week I was going to send it back because you don't need it. He wasn't very nice...he was well known for that sort of thing that you know...if I hadn't have gone when I did he would have sent it back". Her husband interrupted stating "we don't know really whether he would have had the power to do that" and Mrs Wilson continued - "or whether it was off his own bat or what, but I stood in the post office and he told me off...it seemed as though it was *his* money rather than, you know, money you were entitled to, yes...that was in 1958".<sup>264</sup>

Similarly in Pensnett, almost a decade later, post office staff intervened in their customers' financial arrangements. Sixteen year-old Mr Davison attempted to withdraw funds from his account - "I can always remember this because the woman in the post office didn't like it one little bit...she didn't like that...and she was really nasty about it you know. She said 'why bother to put it all in if you're drawing it all out'. She was really nasty about it. You could sense that - well I didn't only *sense* it was her actions you know, she didn't like it".<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Tipton Mrs JB.

<sup>263</sup> Sedgley Mrs PJ.

<sup>264</sup> Sedgley Mrs RW. Note that although Mrs PJ and Mrs RW were both residents of Sedgley they patronised different post offices.

<sup>265</sup> Pensnett Mr KD. It is not the remit of this study to focus upon the dynamics of the post office employees' relationship with their customers and these may well be isolated incidents. Staff may have felt endowed with the authority to preserve state interests, or the predominance of working-class



In the estimation of the respondents the welfare state impacted only marginally upon their lives. Many insisted that they were virtually unaware of its existence,<sup>266</sup> echoing Mr Gould of Sedgley - “it passed me by”.<sup>267</sup> Mr Whitehouse, born in 1939, said “I was aware of it but it didn’t really sink in what it was all about”.<sup>268</sup> The main beneficiaries were those requiring treatment for health issues, in the form of maternity care, false teeth and spectacles. The major impact was that individuals and families who had previously eschewed health care on financial grounds accessed free medical assistance. This was particularly important to the families whose poverty precluded their financing the 6d a week for medical cover.<sup>269</sup> Otherwise, oral testimony indicated that state benefits rarely infringed on their lives and perceptions of poverty, ‘charity’ was rejected in favour of self-help and independence. Although perhaps this was influenced by the negative, sometimes antagonistic, attitudes of Post Office employees.

It has been stated that the Welfare State abstracted the majority of the population from poverty. Equally it could be argued that the rejection of benefits demonstrated that prospective recipients were not in sufficient ‘Need’. In fact neither the acceptance nor the rejection of state welfare confirms the eradication of poverty after 1948. Social surveys indicated that poverty remained, particularly amongst the elderly and families with large numbers of dependent children<sup>270</sup> and a proportion of the population still perceived themselves as poor. Perhaps poverty was merely redefined, as it has been argued that families became poor when they were unable to disguise their poverty.<sup>271</sup> Concealment became difficult with the majority of families now accessing an increasing range of goods and services. There is no consensual definition of post-war poverty. Chinn defined it as a form of restriction - to “have a limited choice”.<sup>272</sup> Others indicated that various socio-economic groups were “expected to live in the same manner as their neighbours... [and] share in the same attitudes, assumptions and

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customers may have conferred upon the staff an assurance of superiority which, they believed, entitled them to unwarranted intervention. However, it does suggest that there is scope for further research in this area.

<sup>266</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ, Mrs HW; Tipton Mr DN.

<sup>267</sup> Sedgley Mr DG.

<sup>268</sup> Tipton Mr BW.

<sup>269</sup> Written notes from Mrs PJ of Sedgley.

<sup>270</sup> Coates and Silburn, *Poverty*; Vincent, *Poor Citizens*; Townsend, *Poverty*.

<sup>271</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 3; Steedman, C., ‘State-Sponsored Autobiography’ in Conekin et al., *Moments of Modernity*, p. 53.

<sup>272</sup> Chinn, *Poverty*, p. 1.

expectations” of their communities.<sup>273</sup> Therefore lacking sufficient income to live a similar lifestyle, or to acquire similar possessions, *could* result in poverty.<sup>274</sup>

A number of respondents, describing themselves as comparatively poor, compared their possessions with those of friends and neighbours. “No-one had a phone in those days only a doctor, nurse or lawyer”.<sup>275</sup> Carol Hathorne’s poverty was partially measured by the single volume in her book collection and the sole record in her mother’s collection.<sup>276</sup>

Nevertheless, there remained some families, in Tipton, whose poverty precluded the basic necessities, particularly until 1960. Cedric James, born in 1940, recalled the deprivation in Princes End. He initially stated that “we didn’t think about poverty, we were all in the same boat”. However, his experiences indicated exceptional poverty, “school days were hard but things improved when I started work”. Until 1960, when their house was demolished, the family “had no hot water, we used to wash in cold [water] in the brew house”. Furniture was extremely sparse – “There was nothing in the front room not even a door”, as this, and some floor-boards, were used for firewood, and the *News of the World* was utilised as a kitchen tablecloth. Until the mid 1950s the family slept under “silk sheets”, made from the lining of the overcoats which served as blankets. His clothes “were not good enough to hand down. I was given clothes when people died”. He wore his mother’s black stockings fastened with garters until he was 14 and possessed only one shirt which was washed and dried each evening.<sup>277</sup> Mrs Kendrick, born six years later, recalled similar circumstances. Until 1962 “money was very scarce indeed”, the family could not afford the rent despite her father’s full-time employment emptying gas meters. Both she and her brother wore “hand me down clothes”, “as far as children’s clothes were concerned jumble sales were the hit of the day” and both had holes in their shoes. Her mother “had a lot of jobs...trying to make ends meet and ooh the poverty”. “But things got better, financially all the way round. When I worked things got better”.<sup>278</sup> These experiences, although rare amongst respondents, indicate some continuity in the

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<sup>273</sup> Coates and Silburn, *Poverty*, p. 56.

<sup>274</sup> Seabrook, *Working-Class Childhood*, p. 89.

<sup>275</sup> Mrs Kendrick, 1998.

<sup>276</sup> Hathorne, *Five Minutes*, p. 16

<sup>277</sup> Mr Davies 1998.

<sup>278</sup> Mrs Kendrick 1999; Tipton Mrs BT, Mr GW.

cyclical nature of poverty<sup>279</sup>, during the period 1945 to 1970, as when both interviewees left school and gained full-time employment the financial situation within their families began to improve.

Despite acknowledgment of material improvements, a number of respondents recalled that “times were hard”,<sup>280</sup> particularly during the early part of the study period, with some claiming continuing poverty. However, oral testimony confirmed a changing definition of poverty, as society benefited from the general affluence and instigation of state welfare. Increasingly, poverty became a relative concept correlating to average standards of living.<sup>281</sup> Necessities were socially conditioned, items which individuals felt that they needed to “participate fully” within the community.<sup>282</sup> Consequently, to lack access to the same consumer durables and amenities as the majority of the population would result in individuals, and families, becoming “marginalised through their poverty”.<sup>283</sup>

## Conclusion

In the world of post-war affluence, where government and planners combined in a concerted effort to provide modern housing, the social and cultural behavioural trends in Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton were comparatively slow to change. Respondents were receptive to the opportunities and status which new homes conferred, appreciating the benefits of the newly constructed social housing and fostering ambitions to relocate. This confirms what Clapson calls his “rather unfashionable view” that relocation was a pleasurable experience for most working-class women and a “goal... [which] remained strong in working-class cultural values since 1945”.<sup>284</sup> Their recollections endorsed the claims of Chinn, Sandbrook and others,<sup>285</sup> that lower-middle class families rented council houses and confirmed Schaffer’s

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<sup>279</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 20. It has been demonstrated that, during the early part of the twentieth century, “together with old age, childhood was the period of greatest risk, when the efforts of the contributors to the family economy were most in danger of being overwhelmed by the needs of its consumers”.

<sup>280</sup> Mrs Lakin, 1998; Tipton Mrs DR1, Mr MJ, Mr HT, Mr BW.

<sup>281</sup> Abel-Smith and Townsend, *The Poor*, p. 63. This could refer to differences in home environment, material possessions, financial or educational resources.

<sup>282</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 303; Pollard, *The Development*, p. 271.

<sup>283</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 303.

<sup>284</sup> Clapson, ‘Working-Class Women’s Experiences’, p. 365.

<sup>285</sup> Chinn, *Homes*, p. 65; Sandbrook, *Never Had It*, p. 457; Bogdanor and Skidelsky, *Age*, p. 62; Young and Wilmott, *Family*, p. 129.

assertion that increasing numbers of skilled workers became owner-occupiers.<sup>286</sup> Inevitably then, post-war housing contributed to the visual blurring of class-distinctions, as working-class families aspired to the purchase their own homes in the improving economic climate. However, the comparative cost of residence in a modern home resulted in some modification of behavioural patterns in order to finance these ventures. Increasingly, men worked overtime, or undertook additional work and married women sought paid employment to subsidise higher rental, or mortgage payments and to equip larger houses with the requisite consumer durables.

The oral evidence questions the assumptions of Benson, Lewis, Chinn, and others that relocation inevitably caused the disintegration of neighbourhood bonds and networks of mutual aid and reciprocity.<sup>287</sup> Despite state welfare and higher levels of prosperity, in all three areas the importance of community spirit and the interchange of services retained significance into the 1970s, on council and private housing estates. Indeed, in some instances slums were cleared and neighbours moved en bloc and town-planners, despite mistakes, were attempting to address the problems of isolation and social unity on new estates.<sup>288</sup> Only Mrs Wade alluded to the loneliness and seclusion described by Hanley.<sup>289</sup> The remainder were adamant that neighbours and members of their immediate locality provided “help in times of trouble”, and that this traditional exchange of services continued to play a role in post-war Black Country communities.<sup>290</sup>

The recollections of the respondents, confirmed by autobiographical evidence, also challenges the findings of some sociological surveys, which claimed that relocation destroyed kinship networks and weakened matrilocality.<sup>291</sup> The oral testimony of males and females revealed that the extended family retained importance in the post-war period. Although the traditional role of the matriarch in the defensive structure against poverty carried less significance in the time of affluence, mothers, or other

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<sup>286</sup> Schaffer, *The New Town*, p. 184; Hanley, *Estates*, p. 13; Benson, *The Working Class*, p. 75; McKibbin, *Classes*, p. 73.

<sup>287</sup> Benson, *The Working Class*, p. 123; Roberts, *Women*; Chinn, *Homes*; Meacham, *A Life*, Lewis, *Women*.

<sup>288</sup> See Brennan, *Wolverhampton; Staffordshire County Council Development Plan, 1951*.

<sup>289</sup> Hanley, *Estates*.

<sup>290</sup> Pensnett Miss YB.

<sup>291</sup> Goldthorpe, et al., *The Affluent*; Jackson, *Working-Class*; Seabrook, *Landscapes*; McKibbin, *Classes*.

strong women continued to exert their authority and influence over family decision-making and the regulation of community norms. There was a continuing reciprocal basis within generational relationships, with grandparents assisting until infirmity necessitated role-reversal. Daughters were particularly anxious to retain close proximity to their mothers and the removal to a new estate, albeit relatively nearby, was the cause of some apprehension. However, the close emotional ties were maintained and, as Clapson concluded, new patterns of regular visiting evolved, contact was maintained via telephone, and some chain migration was in evidence.<sup>292</sup>

The provision of state welfare impacted only marginally upon the psyche and behaviour within the communities of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton. Respondents maintained scant recollection of the post-war benefit system, other than access to free medical care. Certainly, they were reluctant to claim assistance and adhered to tenets of independence and mutual aid. As Ted Gulliver confirmed, “my family didn’t have anything, never had no benefits...they used to live on what they earned”.<sup>293</sup> There is a clear discrepancy with attitudes displayed in the 1930s East End, where the customary self-help strategies of the working-class during short-term unemployment were unsustainable when “unemployment lasted for years”.<sup>294</sup> This may be attributable to the fact that the Black Country was, to some extent, cushioned from the worst excesses of the economic slump, thus facilitating the maintenance of customary attitudes to respectability, status, and self-help.

Post-war affluence, the physical transformation of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton and the inception of state welfare undoubtedly affected traditional neighbourhoods, particularly with relocation to new housing. However, despite these improvements, the oral testimony confirmed that communities continued to utilise traditional strategies of self-help, reciprocity and matrilocality, used by previous generations for the alleviation of poverty.

The following two chapters will explore the ways in which the respondents and their families attempted to derive sufficient income in order to sustain independence and customary behavioural patterns.

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<sup>292</sup> Clapson, ‘Working-Class Women’s Experiences’, p. 353.

<sup>293</sup> Tipton TG.

<sup>294</sup> Graves, ‘A Blessing or a Curse?’, p. 178.

**CHAPTER FOUR:**  
**FORMAL EMPLOYMENT: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN THE WORLD**  
**OF WORK**

It is generally accepted that, despite fluctuations, the period from 1945 to 1970 was one of developing affluence for the majority of British people. Of course, the immediate post-war years were a time of increased privation, whilst the government addressed the country's economic problems.<sup>1</sup> Once the euphoria surrounding state welfare subsided, the population and the press demonstrated increased frustration with such austerity. In 1946 the *Dudley Herald* angrily enquired "who is to blame that things are not better than they might have been? What is to blame for the...worsening shortages of food and other commodities? We must have more food and coal and houses and not a plethora of words".<sup>2</sup> However, the subsequent economic recovery heralded an unprecedented period of full employment and wage rises when "*almost everyone of working age could find a job*" and increasing numbers of people enjoyed the ensuing prosperity.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, a family's income may have been derived in many forms and not solely confined to, or measured by, the wages gained from the full-time employment of the male breadwinner. Consequently, it is essential to consider the employment of women and children and their contribution to the family economy. This chapter will examine the experiences of the entire family with regards to full-time formal employment. It will contend that, despite increased employment opportunities and higher wages, particularly in the Black Country, attitudes to employment and the family economy evolved slowly. There was a great deal of continuity with the pre-war period and individuals adhered to their customary roles within the family. It will refute the

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<sup>1</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 27th July 1946, p. 4. Dietary restrictions worsened with bread rationing in 1946, causing "harassed housewives" of the Black Country to "besiege" bakers with questions, and the local newspaper to claim that "the wave of panic buying ...[caused] chaos up and down the country". For a detailed analysis of life in the immediate post-war period see Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*.

<sup>2</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 16<sup>th</sup> February 1946, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Clarke, *Hope*, p. 255.

assertions, of Kynaston and others, that post-war teenagers were free to spend their income “as they chose”.<sup>4</sup>

The historical consensus is that by 1954 jobs were readily accessible in most areas of the United Kingdom and unemployment remained consistently low.<sup>5</sup> According to Clarke, full employment was the “real underpinning of social security,” allowing individuals to combat poverty through their own endeavours rather than through state welfare.<sup>6</sup> The employment of the West Midlands exceeded the national average and incomes were increasingly high, with the region reaching the absolute height of post-war prosperity between 1960 and 1973.<sup>7</sup> In 1976 Wood described the area as “*the industrial region par excellence*” (my italics), with above half of its employment in manufacturing, at a time when one-third of the country’s workforce was similarly employed.<sup>8</sup> As collieries closed, metal industries predominated in the West Midlands, focusing on heavy metal processing, engineering and the production and assembly of metal goods - particularly in the Black Country, where 60% of all employment was to be found in metal-related industries between 1960 and 1973.<sup>9</sup> Skilled workers were well recompensed for their efforts, receiving wages above the national average.<sup>10</sup> One of the area’s severest critics wrote of “the free for all in the graded opulence of the car industry,” concluding that the result of personal prosperity was the ugliness and inertia of the urban environment.<sup>11</sup>

High regional employment levels were due to the concentration of manufacturing and engineering companies requiring skilled manual labour.<sup>12</sup> These conditions resulted

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<sup>4</sup> Abrams, M., *The Teenage Consumer*, London: The London Exchange Press, 1959, p. 9; Kynaston, *Family Britain*, p. 663.

<sup>5</sup> Hopkins, *Social*, p. 191; Halsley, *British*, p. 174. Halsley used official statistics and the series compiled by Fernstein to demonstrate that throughout the period between 1948 and 1970 unemployment rates remained at less than 2.7% of the insured labour force. For 14 of those years the figures were under 2%; Clarke, *Hope*, p. 255 argued that only in 8 out of 23 years did the number of registered unemployed average 2%; Sandbrook *Never Had It*, p. 103. However Wood warned that unemployment levels were an unsatisfactory guide to economic stability in the West Midlands as the “complexity of its industrial pattern, the economic stability over a long period and the simple lack of easily identified ‘problems’ make the region peculiarly difficult to examine”. Wood, *Industrial*, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Clarke, *Hope*, p. 255.

<sup>7</sup> Wood, *Industrial*, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> Wood, *Industrial*, p. 40.

<sup>9</sup> Wood, *Industrial*, p. 73; Rowlands, *West Midlands*, p. 73. Approximately 20% of these workers were employed within industries related to the motor trade.

<sup>10</sup> Moorhouse, *Britain*, p. 107.

<sup>11</sup> Moorhouse, *Britain*, p. 112.

<sup>12</sup> The 1951 census revealed that urban areas of south Staffordshire contained a higher proportion of skilled workers than the rest of England and Wales. In Staffordshire out of every 1,000 men 18 were

in a labour shortage until the late 1960s, which was counteracted by high levels of employment amongst females, the young and the elderly, as well as immigration.<sup>13</sup> In May 1950, 1.5% of the entire population was registered as unemployed, when the number of unemployed in the West Midlands was 9,928 – a mere 0.5%.<sup>14</sup> The level of Black Country unemployment in 1955 was approximately 1% below the national average.<sup>15</sup> Throughout 1961 local newspapers recorded falling unemployment levels and shortages of skilled workers. In January of that year, there were only 6,300 unemployed in the entire Black Country and skilled craftsmen, particularly carpenters and bricklayers for the building industry and engineers for the motor industry, were required.<sup>16</sup> There were “abundant” job opportunities in engineering throughout the period.<sup>17</sup> By June 1961, the national level of unemployment was 1.3%, but the regional figure was 0.9%<sup>18</sup> and headlines stated that “unemployment is at rock bottom”.<sup>19</sup> In 1965 additional skilled labour was still sought<sup>20</sup> and unemployment levels were 0.8% compared with national figures of 1.5%.<sup>21</sup> Although unemployment later started to rise, by 1969 the Black Country still presented a “significantly rosier picture” than other areas.<sup>22</sup> At the end of the period, in 1970, the *Dudley Herald* continued to report unfilled vacancies and falling unemployment levels.<sup>23</sup>

Employment levels in Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton remained high into the 1970s. The construction of Sedgley housing estates was impeded by a shortage of qualified gas and electricity fitters, in 1950,<sup>24</sup> and only 130 men were registered as unemployed within the village.<sup>25</sup> By October 1961 “abundant” vacancies were recorded, as

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regarded as ‘professional’; 114 intermediate grades; 565 skilled; 171 semi-skilled and 143 unskilled. *Dudley Herald*, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1955, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Moorhouse, *Britain*, p. 44 and p. 162.

<sup>14</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 24<sup>th</sup> June 1950, p. 2. Only 1.5% of the population (314,700 people) was registered as unemployed, despite a reduction in the size of the armed forces.

<sup>15</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 1950, 1955, 1961, and 1965. For example, in 1950 and 1955 the national average stood at 1.4% and the Black Country at 0.5%. In 1961 the national average was 1.3% and 0.7% in the Black Country and in 1965 the figures were 1.5% and 0.8% respectively.

<sup>16</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 20<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> January 1961, p. 4, p. 8, *Dudley Herald*, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1961, p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1961, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1961, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1961, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1965, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 9<sup>th</sup> January 1965, p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> The national unemployment levels had risen to 2.6% but the West Midlands remained beneath the national average at 1.9%. *Dudley Herald*, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1969, p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 27<sup>th</sup> February 1970, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 30<sup>th</sup> September 1950, p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Sykes, *Popular*, p. 57.



Sedgley employers “fought” for limited numbers of school-leavers.<sup>26</sup> When the employment situation in Britain was becoming volatile, the 1971 census indicated a mere 2.4 % of males unemployed in Pensnett and 2.1% in Sedgley,<sup>27</sup> both of which were lower than the national rate of 3.5%.<sup>28</sup>

Unemployment statistics for Tipton revealed a similarly optimistic situation; local newspapers reported high employment levels and numerous vacancies throughout the period. In 1947 there were 0.1% registered as unemployed, far lower than other areas of the Black Country<sup>29</sup> and workers travelled from Scotland and north-east England seeking employment. The labour shortage resulted in an influx of Polish workers to Horsley Engineering in 1948, with company records demonstrating that the replacement of two platers was “practically impossible”. The Minister of Labour stated that “there was no-one unemployed in Tipton”.<sup>30</sup> In 1950 employers expressed grave concerns that, despite “numerous inducements” and apprenticeship schemes, there were over 400 unfilled vacancies in Tipton factories. When one factory threatened relocation if their application to purchase land was rejected, local councillors were unrepentant; Alderman Perkins stated that if the firm closed “employees can go to the Employment Exchange, where... the manger will be only too glad to find them work” from the hundreds of vacancies.<sup>31</sup> Ten years later in 1961 15 people were registered as unemployed in Tipton<sup>32</sup> and in 1965 the figure stood at 23.<sup>33</sup>

Advertisements confirmed the plethora of employment opportunities, seeking boys for foundry-work and the metalwork industries and girls for clothing and haberdashery

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<sup>26</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1961, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> *Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council Research and Information Team Folder*, 1975.

<sup>28</sup> *Halsley, Change*, p. 174.

<sup>29</sup> *Staffordshire County Council Development Plan, 1951*, p. 103.

<sup>30</sup> Allen, *A History of Horsley*, 1993, pp. 153-6. This book provides a fascinating insight into one of Tipton’s foremost engineering companies, utilising company records, minute books, catalogues, manager’s daybooks and board minutes for 200 years.

<sup>31</sup> *Tipton Herald*, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1955. PSB Wire Industries Ltd., a company manufacturing wire netting, was refused permission to expand. They threatened to close down and lay men off but councillors were concerned to maintain the balance of employment and houses and wished to build additional council houses. Councillor Udall stated that “it is towns like Tipton which survive slumps...you must have both jobs and houses for the people to come”.

<sup>32</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1961, p. 6; *Sunday Mercury*, 10<sup>th</sup> October 1960.

<sup>33</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1965, p. 6. This consisted of 21 men and 2 women.

factories.<sup>34</sup> However, caution is needed when interpreting these adverts, as vacancies could reveal an increasing reluctance to undertake factory work - reflecting changing attitudes to manual labour and increasing aspirations amongst young people and their parents. For example, in 1954 Mr Jones's father, a shift-worker employed at a steel works, discouraged his son from similar employment, preferring him to undertake white-collar work.<sup>35</sup>

The number of job vacancies in Tipton continued to cause concern; the Secretary of Tipton Employment Committee revealed a labour shortage with over 500 unfilled positions in factories and offices. The Committee arranged to visit a "northern town" to recruit additional workers. At the time of the meeting, in December 1950, only one person was registered as "wholly unemployed".<sup>36</sup> Although, possibly environmental factors influenced employment decisions, with some migration to more salubrious areas of the country; as in 1956 the shortage of teachers was ascribed to the state of the town - "It is much better to teach in Torquay than Tipton".<sup>37</sup> Ten years later the Labour Exchange still advertised 500 unfilled vacancies.<sup>38</sup> In 1969 the newspapers reported a "continual demand for skilled men and full-time women factory workers,"<sup>39</sup> with one firm in Locarno Road recruiting workers from Coventry to fill their shortfall.<sup>40</sup>

Employment figures for Pensnett are extremely difficult to extrapolate due to their inclusion in the Brierley Hill area and this is compounded by the fact that statistics for Brierley Hill were divided between Stourbridge and Dudley employment exchanges. Nevertheless, figures for these areas remain low in comparison with the national average. For example, in January 1965 there were 161 men and 42 women registered

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<sup>34</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 4<sup>th</sup> March 1950, p. 3. In cooperation with employers and the youth employment service a scheme was introduced to invite Tipton school-leavers to visit the region's factories and receive career guidance.

<sup>35</sup> Informal conversation with Bill Jones 15<sup>th</sup> June 2007; Sedgley Mr SW, Mr NS.

<sup>36</sup> *The Herald*, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1950, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> *Express and Star*, 25<sup>th</sup> September 1956.

<sup>38</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1966, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 17<sup>th</sup> October 1969, p. 18.

<sup>40</sup> Mr Drew June 1999.

unemployed in “Stourbridge and part of Brierley Hill”<sup>41</sup> and this figure continued to fall throughout that year.<sup>42</sup>

For much of the period, employment in Pensnett was dominated by brick companies, steelworks and light engineering works. In 1946, the manager of the local Ministry of Labour and National Service office estimated that the majority of the working population was employed in trades and industries situated within the U.D.C. boundaries.<sup>43</sup> Round Oak Steelworks in Brierley Hill was a major employer for the Pensnett area, as were the surrounding brickyards and tile manufacturers who utilised the plentiful supplies of fireclay in the area. Many women were traditionally employed in the brick yards as brick kiln or ‘brickle workers’, as they were called locally. This form of onerous manual employment continued into the post-war period, with numbers of female school-leavers “automatically” seeking jobs at the brick companies and returning when their children were of school age.<sup>44</sup> In 1961, 83 year old Nellie Coleman had ‘clocked up’ a total of 59 years service working bare-foot as a slop moulder in Harris Pearson’s Brickyard, where she continued to work.<sup>45</sup> Miss Bennett’s mother used the threat of employment in the brick yards as a means of encouraging her daughter to work hard at school – “mom used to threaten that if you don’t work hard at school as (sic) ‘get your head down’ you’ll end up in the brick works”.<sup>46</sup>

Sedgley, although increasingly a commuter village, was dominated by the main employers Baggeridge Colliery, which closed in 1968, Baggeridge Brick Works, which is still in operation, the Gibbons Group of refractory and engineering works, with numerous smaller companies specialising in castings and general engineering. Throughout the period the local authority was anxious to attract industrial development and encourage local investment.<sup>47</sup> Like Pensnett, the area was rich in fireclay and several companies were formed to fulfil “urgent demand for tiled

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<sup>41</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1965, p. 6.

<sup>42</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 1965.

<sup>43</sup> Brierley Hill U.D.C. *Local Government (Boundary Commission) Act, 1945*, Published in 1946, p. 7. This information is corroborated by Table Four : Place of Work of Residents of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton.

<sup>44</sup> *Black Country Bugle*, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2007, p. 18.

<sup>45</sup> Cook, R., ‘A Black Country Childhood’, *The Blackcountryman*, Summer 2000, p. 23.

<sup>46</sup> Pensnett Miss YB.

<sup>47</sup> *Sedgley Official Guide*, 1963, p. 31.

fireplaces” in new homes after the war.<sup>48</sup> Few Sedgley women were attracted to work in the brick and tile yards, preferring clerical or domestic employment.<sup>49</sup> In 1951 over 33% of employed Sedgley women worked in the clerical and commercial sectors and 25% in textiles, clothing and domestic services<sup>50</sup>.

In the immediate post-war era, employment opportunities in Tipton were dominated by heavy industry requiring skilled labour; the majority of men were employed in general metal trades and engineering,<sup>51</sup> although there were fewer employment opportunities for women.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, as the years progressed, women workers were increasingly in demand and advertisements encouraged married women to undertake full-time paid employment. Women’s employment and income in all three areas of this study will be discussed in more detail below. A glance at the Tipton Borough Directory for 1962 revealed the continued predominance of heavy industry in the area with iron and steel stockholders, engineering companies and platers and patternmakers dominating Tipton businesses.<sup>53</sup>

The wages gained from full-time paid employment undoubtedly comprised the major proportion of most families’ weekly income. The ‘affluent society’ of the post-war was based on rising average wages,<sup>54</sup> which increased by 130% between 1955 and 1969.<sup>55</sup> Between 1945 and 1970 the wage rates of most manual workers were consistently rising,<sup>56</sup> whilst weekly hours of work were beginning to fall.<sup>57</sup> The average weekly wage of 1950 had risen by 50% to £11 in 1955 and by 1964 the average wage was over £18.<sup>58</sup> Locally, wages were “well above the national average”

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<sup>48</sup> *Sedgley Official Guide*, 1953, p. 23. For example S & W Glazed Tile Company was formed in 1937 for this express purpose. It was expanded several times during the 1940s and 1950s.

<sup>49</sup> Sykes, *Popular*, p. 60.

<sup>50</sup> Sykes, *Popular*, p. 52. Statistics were not available for the war years or for 1961 as the relevant census figures provided occupational tables by large regions and the figures for sub-regions such as Sedgley were summarised into categories too broad to facilitate comparison. For 1971, as mentioned above, the boundary changes prohibit comparisons.

<sup>51</sup> Brennan, *Wolverhampton*, p. 74.

<sup>52</sup> Brennan, *Wolverhampton*, p. 40.

<sup>53</sup> *Tipton Borough Directory*, 1962, Barretts Publications Ltd.,

<sup>54</sup> Sandbrook, *Never Had It*, p. 103.

<sup>55</sup> Sandbrook, *White Heat*, p. 184.

<sup>56</sup> Halsey, *Change*, p. 180. Note: This takes no account of general fluctuations due to overtime or short-time, or any piecework or productivity bonuses.

<sup>57</sup> Halsey, *Change*, p. 178.

<sup>58</sup> Clarke, *Hope*, p. 255.

throughout the 1950s and 1960s<sup>59</sup> and Black Country school-leavers were tempted by a range of employment opportunities promising high rates of pay.

Potential bank clerks anticipated salaries reaching £4,000 in junior management positions and advertisements for the National Coal Board raised expectations that school leavers could earn £5 per week in the mining industry.<sup>60</sup> In September 1962 rates of pay in the firebrick industry were 2/3d per hour for 16 year old starters, rising to just over £12 per week for an experienced moulder.<sup>61</sup> However, skilled female moulders in the same company were paid just over £8 per week.<sup>62</sup> Trade union officials expressed concern that young people were attracted to “dead end jobs” due to an inflated wages system, which paid an unskilled 15 year old boy £7. 2s. 6d. per week - almost double that of apprentices.<sup>63</sup> In 1965 the *Dudley Herald* informed school-leavers that “opportunity knocks loudly and nowhere...is there an area richer in job opportunities than the Black Country”.<sup>64</sup>

It was generally accepted that skilled workers received high wages during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>65</sup> For example, in 1965, Sedgley Conservative Councillor Hickling advocated a rent rise as the majority of council house tenants were “on very good wages”.<sup>66</sup> Carol Hathorne’s father’s employment in the Austin car factory was reputedly so well paid that an aunt was heard to comment “its awl right for some! E’ll be on twenty quid a week now! I s’pose [now] it’ll be all swank” (sic).<sup>67</sup> In 1964 production line workers of the West Midlands were “among the highest paid manual workers in the land” with a potential earning capacity of £30 per week.<sup>68</sup> Inevitably, unskilled workers and women received much lower wages. In 1966 workers received £12 per week for working 12 hour shifts *every day of the week* filling sausages in a

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<sup>59</sup> Rowlands, *West Midlands*, p. 362. Rich, ‘Social Relationships’, pp. 33-34. In her 1951 study of Coseley, Rich found that skilled workers in Coseley could earn as much as £14. In her estimation moulders were amongst the “wealthiest” workers in that area.

<sup>60</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1961, p. 7. The £5 weekly wage was offered to school-leavers from the age of 15 years old.

<sup>61</sup> “Shut End, the brick works that was considered second to none”. *The Black Country Bugle*, 9<sup>th</sup> February 2006, p. 15.

<sup>62</sup> *The Black Country Bugle*, 9<sup>th</sup> February 2006, p. 15.

<sup>63</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1961, p. 11.

<sup>64</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1965, p. 14.

<sup>65</sup> Kuper, ‘Blueprint for Living Together’, *Living in Towns*. Motor industry employees in Coventry were said to be “earning well” by 1952. p. 71.

<sup>66</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 30<sup>th</sup> January 1965, p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> Hathorne, *Five*, p. 20.

<sup>68</sup> Moorhouse, *Britain*, p. 107.

Tipton factory.<sup>69</sup> One respondent recalled that even in the most affluent areas “wages were terrible in the factories if you hadn’t got the skills”.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, the rising wages for skilled men contributed to the blurring of class incomes, as factory workers’ pay-packets gained parity with middle-class salaries, causing one disapproving Dudley headmaster to comment that teacher’s pay was “so low [that] they are living near to the poverty line”.<sup>71</sup>

### ***Male Employment***

The primary function of a husband and father in the pre-war period was that of breadwinner.<sup>72</sup> This was inextricably linked to the concept of masculine respectability and duty<sup>73</sup> – the ‘keeping’ of wives and families, by which the husband, through his labour, provided an adequate sum of money for the family.<sup>74</sup> In the post-war era, husbands continued to gain satisfaction and pride from their ability to support their families.<sup>75</sup> Seabrook’s respondents defined a ‘good’ husband as one who provided his wife with sufficient housekeeping money<sup>76</sup> and this continued throughout the study period. Despite significant changes in attitude, in 1970 the husband was “still the chief, and sometimes only, wage earner” in a typical family unit and their ability to provide for the family remained a vital component of masculinity.<sup>77</sup>

All respondents confirmed the view that for most families after 1945, the male wage packet remained “central” to family finances.<sup>78</sup> As discussed above, for many men in the Black Country rates of remuneration were comparatively high. But the high pay rates were offset to some extent by the arduous working conditions endured by many factory employees, raising concern for their health and their quality of life. Mr Tolley

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<sup>69</sup> Kettle, C., (ed.), *Turning Up in Tipton: Local people talk about their first experiences of work*, Voices from Sandwell, 1990, p. 44. Transcripts of this oral history project are available at Sandwell Library.

<sup>70</sup> Tipton Mr JW.

<sup>71</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1950, p. 5.

<sup>72</sup> The concept of male breadwinner continued beyond this period in the coal mining area of Ashton in Yorkshire and in many other areas. Dennis et al., *Coal*, p. 174.

<sup>73</sup> Benson, *Consumer Society*, p. 182. Benson argued that it was a husband’s duty to “provide his family with as high and steady an income as he could”.

<sup>74</sup> Lewis, *Women in England*, p. 219.

<sup>75</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 94.

<sup>76</sup> Seabrook, *Working-Class*, p. 139.

<sup>77</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 18.

<sup>78</sup> Clarke, C. J., ‘Capital and Culture: The post-war working class revisited’ in Clarke, et al., *Working Class*, p. 197.

recalled that conditions in foundries were such that “you couldn’t see the bloke next to you,” resulting in industrial illness, loss of time and incomes.<sup>79</sup> This is confirmed by Carol Hathorne who noted that on the bus “the air was full of ...the oily smell permeating from work clothes stiff with sweat and dust”.<sup>80</sup>

In order to attain high wages men worked “crucifyingly long hours of regular overtime” in dull, repetitive jobs.<sup>81</sup> The Midlands car industry was distinguished by its “system of high rewards for abnormal efforts” leaving production-line employees too exhausted to fully appreciate their affluent lifestyles.<sup>82</sup> Marwick described a “life sentence” of arduous and uncongenial overtime for manual workers aspiring to middle-class living standards.<sup>83</sup> In 1950s Coventry, Peter Bailey’s adolescence was distinguished by the fact that husbands and fathers were continually absent as they were working overtime.<sup>84</sup>

The *Dudley Herald* also expressed concern over working hours and conditions; an editorial claimed that at the end of 1965 one in three manual workers would enter the “make believe world” of the forty hour week - a “mythical” figure as overtime was necessary to fulfil orders and attain adequate wages.<sup>85</sup> Respondents confirmed that overtime was obligatory for most men. Arthur Jones of Pensnett, a shift-worker at Round Oak Steelworks, worked overtime “every Sunday of the year” during the 1950s and 60s, except for the day of the Sunday School Anniversary when he attended the services and celebrations.<sup>86</sup> Overtime was rarely refused when it was available - particularly amongst older men who recalled the difficulties of the 1930s. Amongst family men: “overtime became a big factor when we had children...I used

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<sup>79</sup> Mr Tolley December 1998.

<sup>80</sup> Hathorne, C., *All Shook Up*, Dudley: The Kate’s Hill Press, 2007, p. 9.

<sup>81</sup> Coates and Silburn, *Poverty*, p. 50; Moorhouse, *Britain*, p. 107, He observed that men employed in the Birmingham and Black Country car industry earned high wages for ‘ridiculous extra stints of overtime.

<sup>82</sup> Moorhouse, *Britain*, p. 108.

<sup>83</sup> Marwick, *British Society*, p. 127.

<sup>84</sup> Bailey, P., ‘Jazz at the Spirella: Coming of Age in Coventry in the 1950s’ in Conekin, et al., *Moments*, p. 24.

<sup>85</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 13<sup>th</sup> June 1965, p. 5.

<sup>86</sup> Informal conversation with Bill Jones on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2007. The weeks of the Sunday School Anniversary were sacrosanct for many people in the Black Country when they would become involved in services and celebrations even when they were not regular attendees. Although it must be stressed that the entire Jones family was heavily involved with Woodside Methodist Church throughout the year.

to work till eight or nine at night”.<sup>87</sup> However, a minority perceived overtime pay as their personal spending money: “Saturday mornings that was like er your pin money wasn’t it?”<sup>88</sup>

Regardless of hours worked, some forms of employment were particularly injurious to health - several respondents whose fathers were foundry-men recalled the detrimental effects of their employment. Mr KD’s father died at the age of 53 weighing “around six stones...made ill by foundry work.”<sup>89</sup> Mr Weigh’s employment choice was influenced “because all the family was in the foundries and mother didn’t want me to go into it because it was dirty and dangerous”. His father, a moulder, died of occupational disease when Jack was three months old.<sup>90</sup> Following a school visit to his works, Mrs Weigh understood her father’s capacity for “a drink and a smoke”. “There was just black smoke and this red hot molten metal running down and he’d got leather fitted over his shirt and I thought no wonder he likes a pint...no air...you’ve never seen conditions like it in your life”.<sup>91</sup> Mr Tolley explained the adverse working conditions, extreme heat and manual labour: “A chap I met...he used to drink a crate of Guinness a day when he was working on the foundries...they used to have a bucket of water with barley in and blokes used to have to put something back. With salt and barley you know”.<sup>92</sup> Disregarding conditions of employment, those with the requisite skills and training were in demand in all three areas throughout the period; wages were high and job opportunities were plentiful.<sup>93</sup>

However, there were excellent facilities at some of the larger engineering plants. The *Tipton Handbook* claimed that: “Industrially Tipton has developed along modern lines. New factories have been erected in various parts of the borough and many well-designed buildings are complete with their own sports grounds and other ‘visual’ amenities... A far cry, indeed, from the blackened works of earlier years.”<sup>94</sup> Respondents corroborated that social amenities were one factor which influenced

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<sup>87</sup> Sedgley Mr SW - who worked until 8 or 9 o’clock most week nights, Mrs CB; Mrs DG; Tipton Mr JW.

<sup>88</sup> Tipton Mr JW, Mr TG; Pensnett Mr NR.

<sup>89</sup> Pensnett Mr KD; Tipton Mrs BT, Mrs VW.

<sup>90</sup> Tipton Mr JW.

<sup>91</sup> Tipton Mrs VW.

<sup>92</sup> Tipton Mr HT.

<sup>93</sup> Tipton Mr HT, Mr RB, Mr OH; Sedgley Mr NS.

<sup>94</sup> *Tipton Official Handbook*, (undated but 1960s), p. 23.



employment decisions. “[I] had been to one or two things there [and] there was a great social life there - which it was. I mean we’d got tennis courts and our own swimming baths there...and a disco and a jukebox and you could go at lunch times – cricket, football it was absolutely wonderful yes the social side of it”.<sup>95</sup> Vono, Palethorpes and other firms built sports fields, swimming pools, dance halls and cinemas, providing a good social life, “there was everything for you”.<sup>96</sup>

Mr Weigh’s skills as a semi-professional footballer and toolmaker, ensured that throughout the period his services were sought by a number of companies. “If you could play football you got offered a good job...the dressing rooms down there were as good as Albion’s football ground.”<sup>97</sup> Employment was popularly sought at companies with a reputation for modern facilities and for employee welfare.<sup>98</sup> Paternalistic directors at Vono, and other major employers, were concerned for their employees’ well-being. “Prior to social services setting up meals on wheels the directors made sure that meals were supplied to elderly or frail pensioners...they set up a trust to fund activities of elderly people. Old people’s clubs and the Sons of Rest benefited”.<sup>99</sup>

As a consequence of labour shortages, changing jobs was relatively simple between 1945 and 1970. There was, however, continuity in methods of obtaining employment; word of mouth or family and friends who were “in the know” ensured that new jobs were easily accessible and the recommendations of reliable employees usually sufficed as reference.<sup>100</sup> Personnel departments accepted friends or family members as employees and entire families were engaged to work upon personal endorsement. Fathers and other male relatives regularly assisted their offspring to obtain work. Mr Southall’s father, an accountant at John Thompson’s, obtained engineering apprenticeships for his son, a nephew and a number of friends from their Methodist church – “Well mainly because dad worked there. They had an opening

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<sup>95</sup> Sedgley Mrs CB, Mr NS: Tipton Mr PR. *The Eagle*, Vono’s internal company magazine, proudly proclaimed the newly refurbished reception area and staff facilities. *The Black Country Bugle*, 7<sup>th</sup> January 2010, p. 16.

<sup>96</sup> Tipton Mrs VW.

<sup>97</sup> Tipton Mr JW. The company provided players with new boots and equipment for those unable to afford their own kit.

<sup>98</sup> Vono, John Thompson, Cannon, Round Oak.

<sup>99</sup> Tipton Mr Churchman.

<sup>100</sup> Informal conversation with Bill Jones on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2007.

there and they took me on. So mainly it was being in the know”.<sup>101</sup> Personal recommendation was desirable, as young men were likely to focus on work when fathers, uncles, or neighbours could hear of their misdemeanours or lack of commitment.<sup>102</sup> In 1960s Pensnett, young men wanting employment joined the church choir as “a lot of blokes in that choir was at Gibbonses and they used to say if you want a job at Gibbonses go to church and join the choir. One of the choir members was managing director...so if you want a job go to church”.<sup>103</sup>

Throughout the period, given the plethora of heavy industry and employment opportunities, redundancy or loss of work was little more than a minor inconvenience. For instance, in 1955, 400 redundant Black Country workers “soon found new jobs”<sup>104</sup> and respondents recollected the ease with which alternative employment was found. At Round Oak Steelworks there were “always” vacancies for skilled and unskilled workers; interviews were conducted on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays when the company doctor was on-site for medical examinations and successful applicants were employed “there and then”.<sup>105</sup>

Oral testimony revealed that job dissatisfaction or additional pay were the main reasons for change. Mr Churchman recalled that in Tipton there was “some coming and going” as men changed employment, “those who wanted to work didn’t have much trouble”.<sup>106</sup> “It was so easy it was unbelievable - anybody could walk out of a job at ten o’clock in the morning and have another by 12. ‘What job do you want?’ It was fantastic then”.<sup>107</sup> Mrs Weigh’s father “had 10,000 jobs”, her husband explained - “he was a piece worker and he moved around wherever he could get more money.” “I could have walked out in any direction from where I was working or from my house. Any direction at all I could have got a job...Yes in fact I was asked [offered

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<sup>101</sup> Sedgley Mr NS, Mr TG, Mr SW; Tipton Mr DN, Mr PR, Mr RB.

<sup>102</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ.

<sup>103</sup> Pensnett Mr KD.

<sup>104</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 25<sup>th</sup> June 1955, p. 7.

<sup>105</sup> Informal conversation with Bill Jones 15<sup>th</sup> June 2007. Bill was a deputy employment officer at Round Oak Steelworks in the 1960s and was promoted to manpower planner in 1974. He later became personnel manager at a Willenhall company where he remained until retirement.

<sup>106</sup> Mr Churchman July 1999.

<sup>107</sup> Tipton Mr MJ.

work] several times...I got several jobs and [when] I didn't start they give me more money".<sup>108</sup>

Similarly, in Pensnett when Mr KD left school in 1964:

"I left school [and] I just looked around and said where do I want to go and work? ... I've got a mate and he had three jobs in a week. He started on Monday at one place and had a bust-up with the gaffer on a Tuesday morning, walked out and got another job on Tuesday afternoon and started on Wednesday. Friday morning low and behold he'd got another job and that's how it was, you could go anywhere. I mean when you went to a place for a job. 'When can you start?' that's how it was...I didn't even have a proper interview...I walked in and he said can you start next week?"<sup>109</sup> One toolmaker, recalled that "you could just tell the gaffer, say gerroff I'm going to get a job round the corner".<sup>110</sup>

Therefore changing jobs was "easy" and consensual opinion was that it was the late 1970s before the situation changed and employment opportunities declined.<sup>111</sup>

Although work was easily obtained, respondents believed that the husband's continuing employment was crucial. As Mr Churchman remarked "you were really glad to [have] work" as it was important to be able to support your family".<sup>112</sup> This occasionally entailed actions which placed the well-being of the family above loyalty to workmates or unions. During the 1950s' strike at the Star Foundry in Tipton, Cedric Davies' father climbed over the gate to get into work. "Dad couldn't be out of work – he had a family to look after".<sup>113</sup> Mr Drew an engineer in Tipton concurred, describing the necessity of "chasing money", moving from factory to factory to improve income as his family grew; in his opinion "if a job paid 10 bob...extra you'd move and that was the extent of your life", but he maintained that it was "pretty easy"

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<sup>108</sup> Tipton Mr JW. His talents as a semi-professional footballer undoubtedly enhanced his employment opportunities.

<sup>109</sup> Pensnett Mr KD, Mr SG, Mr RE.

<sup>110</sup> Pensnett Mr NR. Mr NR left school in 1957 when he was 15. "I messed about first. I went to be an electrician and I packed that in then I went to the glassworks down Wordsley to be a glasscutter and I day (sic) like that. I moved about a bit like until – I even worked at Round Oak for about 3 months on the furnaces and I couldn't stick that."

<sup>111</sup> Pensnett Miss VC, Miss YB, Mr SG; Sedgley Mr FG, Mr SW, Mr MC.

<sup>112</sup> Mr Churchman July 1999.

<sup>113</sup> Mr Davies December 1998. Mr Davies was one of six children.

to change employers, finishing one job on Friday evening and starting a new one on Monday morning.<sup>114</sup>

Despite the statistical evidence of Halsey, Rowlands, and others, respondents rarely affirmed that they were well-paid.<sup>115</sup> However, they admitted a gradually improving situation with regards to wages – “Average, oh average, better than our parents”.<sup>116</sup> Comparative pay-rates for lower middle-class clerical occupations were lower than skilled manual labourers. As Mrs MD, born in 1944, recalled, “Dad’s wasn’t a well-paid job, a staff job [employed by the local council] ...superannuation attached but it wasn’t very highly paid. Dad couldn’t afford a car till later”.<sup>117</sup> The wife of a professional footballer was one of the few respondents to indicate satisfactory pay-rates during the 1950s. “Ray was pretty-well paid then, comparatively speaking, as a footballer. But it wasn’t a terrific wage”.<sup>118</sup> A miner’s daughter explained, “I can remember my dad getting £5 a week and he thought that was marvellous because teachers got that”.<sup>119</sup> A substantial pay increase was a memorable occasion – “I remember one particular summer [in 1953] when dad got home a five o’clock...and said ‘Sally you’m talking here now to a £1,000 a year mon (sic). Twenty pounds a week he picked up”.<sup>120</sup>

In a minority of families the breadwinner’s income was unstable, especially during the 1950s and 60s. Their earning were derived from self-employed occupations, categorised as middle-class; but the businesses were unpredictable, particularly in comparison with the steady incomes of manual workers. Mrs Houlton’s father was a self-employed structural engineer whose income “wasn’t regular. When he was out of

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<sup>114</sup> Mr Drew June 1998. Mr Drew was highly politicised and constantly referred to ‘poor pensions, the ineptitude of successive governments and lack of facilities for the working-class’. He used the phrase ‘chasing money’ several times during the course of the interview.

<sup>115</sup> Halsey, *British*; Rowlands, *West Midlands*; Kuper, ‘Blueprint’.

<sup>116</sup> Pensnett Mr BT; Sedgley Mr GW.

<sup>117</sup> Tipton Mrs MD.

<sup>118</sup> Sedgley Mrs PJ. Her husband played football for Aston Villa until the mid 1950s when he played part-time for Worcester City and drove one of the lorries in the family haulage business. Mrs PJ was comparing her husband’s income with the wages of others in her area. In the 1950s First Division footballers earned between £5 and £10, 000 per annum which was, according to Sandbrook, more than twice the national average. Sandbrook, D., ‘The Showman and the Reluctant Revolutionary’, *The New Statesman*, 26<sup>th</sup> March 2009. In 1961 top players earned £20, which was £5 more than the national average.

<sup>119</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB.

<sup>120</sup> Tipton Mr RB.

work he was out of work, mother couldn't pay the rent".<sup>121</sup> Similarly, the son of a garage proprietor recalled that income "fluctuated violently", depending on car and lorry sales; and the businesses of Mr Tolley's father suffered similar problems.<sup>122</sup>

The role of trade unions in relation to pay, or other issues, was rarely mentioned. In Pensnett, Mr BT recalled that wages generally "crept up gradually as trade unions became more influential".<sup>123</sup> However, Spencer Wilson, who worked as a toolmaker until the 1980s, believed that wages were low because of union members' failure to present a united front. Wages were "just about adequate but employees of Sankeys were never well-paid":

"Well I know that for a fact because [of] the unions we were all members of. We were paid in the Midlands engineering-wise we were paid a little bit under the rate...I think we were paid a bit under the rate. Well quite a bit under the rate because the union officials who used to come round to the union meetings told us we should be getting more as skilled men...we had quite a few spats as regards working to rule. Everybody did exactly what they should do and nothing else and we used to have the odd strike you know, things like that. And quite a bit of that went on in the sixties because the motor-trade was very belligerent... but I think we always failed because we never backed each other up... If all members of the AEU - if they'd have all come out and backed us up we should have got somewhere but they never did!"<sup>124</sup>

However, regardless of the actual income, the contents of the breadwinner's wage packet remained a contentious issue, with some husbands unwilling to reveal their precise income.<sup>125</sup> In these instances money was apportioned as the man - the "economic master" decided - allowing him autonomy over his earnings.<sup>126</sup> "He never used to turn his money up...mom never even saw his wage".<sup>127</sup> Police Superintendent Roger Bagley argued that unions fought against wages being paid directly into the

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<sup>121</sup> Tipton Mrs OH.

<sup>122</sup> Tipton Mr OH, Mr HT.

<sup>123</sup> Pensnett Mr BT.

<sup>124</sup> Sedgley Mr SW.

<sup>125</sup> Klein, *Samples*, p. 45; Young and Wilmott, *Family*, p. 26; Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 49.

<sup>126</sup> Mays, *Growing*, p. 86.

<sup>127</sup> Tipton Mrs PB.

bank “because their members were saying if you pay my wages into the bank my missus will know my earnings”.<sup>128</sup> Other husbands revealed the precise amount of their earnings, handing over the entire sum “on a Friday night ... [leaving] its disposition to their wives”.<sup>129</sup>

The oral testimony revealed a generational divide. “In the old days husbands didn’t tell. I don’t know if dad told mother, but we always shared.”<sup>130</sup> Mr Davison’s parents married in the early 1930s and “[dad] was very secretive about what he was earning”.<sup>131</sup> Similarly, Bill Jones and Mr RB confirmed that “we never knew what me dad earned cos...as I say he just gave mother housekeeping” - “Mom didn’t ever know what dad earned”.<sup>132</sup> Vera Weigh’s “dad just gave mother what *he* thought”.<sup>133</sup> All respondents indicated that their attitude to earnings was less secretive than the previous generation, with husbands and wives sharing equal responsibility for financial matters. The complexities of earning, budgeting and housekeeping will be discussed in chapter six.

### ***Female Employment***

During the first half of the twentieth century, most women - regardless of class or marital status - undertook paid employment out of financial necessity. Women’s work was closely allied to traditional female occupations in the lowest paid sectors of the economy. Nevertheless, during two wars, women fulfilled vital roles, maintaining the country’s industrial output and supporting the war effort in employment customarily reserved for men. At the cessation of hostilities in 1918, and again in 1945, women were expected to return to unpaid domestic duties in the home, allowing men to reclaim their former employment, and role of breadwinner.<sup>134</sup> However, economic recovery was slow in the late 1940s, recurring problems of the 1950s produced a

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<sup>128</sup> Tipton Mr RB.

<sup>129</sup> Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 49.

<sup>130</sup> Pensnett Mr BT.

<sup>131</sup> Tipton Mr PD.

<sup>132</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ; Tipton Mr RB, Mr MJ, Mrs PB.

<sup>133</sup> Tipton Mrs VW.

<sup>134</sup> Pennington, S., and B. Westover, *A Hidden Workforce: Homeworkers in England, 1850-1985*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1989, p. 152. As the war neared its conclusion women with domestic responsibilities (i.e. husband and children) were the first to be released from paid employment.

severe labour shortage and married women were exhorted to seek employment outside the home.

A falling birth rate amongst women of all classes<sup>135</sup> theoretically gave women more opportunities to seek paid employment and this was further facilitated by a shift in the balance of economic activity from manufacturing to service.<sup>136</sup> Lewis described the huge increase in married women's paid employment as "the most startling development of the post-war period".<sup>137</sup> However, childcare and domestic responsibilities were perceived as a woman's primary role, which continued to influence the range of jobs that they undertook and their hours of employment.<sup>138</sup> Autobiographies of the era suggested that women's paid work was in addition to domestic duties. Reflecting the social and cultural mores of the period, work also had to accommodate familial responsibilities.<sup>139</sup> In 1947 the official stance was ambivalent, with the government encouraging women as home-makers whilst simultaneously exhorting them to seek paid employment.<sup>140</sup> Women themselves expressed doubts about the propriety of married women seeking paid employment; a 1947 survey revealed that less than one fifth of full-time housewives were in favour of female employment, and only one third of *employed* women approved.<sup>141</sup>

The increasing availability of part-time employment within the formal economy is frequently used to explain the rise in married women's employment after 1950.<sup>142</sup> However, regardless of post-war affluence, it is evident that financial necessity remained an important factor. Roberts concluded that, "the rising standards of living after the Second World War should not obscure the fact that there were still families where the father's wage was too small to support the family".<sup>143</sup> Women's work was "essential rather than optional".<sup>144</sup> This was endorsed by Vincent's argument that increasing numbers of dual-income households was *the* major factor in the alleviation

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<sup>135</sup> Between 1870 and 1950 the birth rate fell amongst women of all classes. Lewis, *Women in England*, p. xi.

<sup>136</sup> Lewis, *Women in England*, p. xi.

<sup>137</sup> Lewis, *Women in England*, p. 218.

<sup>138</sup> Pennington and Westover, *Hidden Workforce*, p. 153.

<sup>139</sup> Stafford, *Light*; Parker, *Black Country*; Brew, *Wolverhampton*; Hann, *Tell It*.

<sup>140</sup> Bruley, *Women*, p. 124.

<sup>141</sup> Bourke, *Working-Class*, p. 126.

<sup>142</sup> Halsey, *Change*, pp. 32-34; Josephs, J., *Women at Work*, London: Phillip Allen, 1983, pp. 116-120.

<sup>143</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 125.

<sup>144</sup> Badger, 'Household Consumption', p. 77; Wilson, *Only Halfway*, pp. 42, 51, 58.

of family poverty by the early 1960s - as the woman's wage was usually more than the amount of child benefit and guaranteed "basic prosperity", as long as the husband remained fully employed.<sup>145</sup> However, this was dependent upon the personal qualities of individual husbands and the amount of housekeeping funds they surrendered to their wives. Excessive drinking and gambling had severe repercussions upon family income and this will be discussed in chapter six.

Although official statistics confirmed rising numbers of women in work, the nature of that employment was largely confined to the customary female occupations - unskilled factory work or domestic-related duties.<sup>146</sup> Nationally, in the immediate post-war period, women's occupations continued to be gender-related,<sup>147</sup> low-paid employment in traditional areas of the labour market.<sup>148</sup> The occupational segregation of male and female workers declined only marginally in the mid to late twentieth century, with the bulk of female workers remaining in low-status jobs in the service industry.<sup>149</sup>

There was little change between 1945 and 1970; in 1951 86% of women were employed in female-dominated occupations, falling to 84% by 1971.<sup>150</sup> However, female employment opportunities in the Black Country were plentiful, as the oral testimony confirmed. The Centre for Urban and Regional Studies suggested in 1969 that firms who were "short" of female labour should move to the Black Country, as women in the area were likely to be persuaded to undertake paid work.<sup>151</sup> As increasing numbers of married women returned to work, a 1971 edition of the *Dudley Herald* ran an article explaining "How Working Mothers Manage".<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 183.

<sup>146</sup> The rate of married women's employment had increased from 13% in 1931 to 30% by 1951. Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 144.

<sup>147</sup> Lewis, *Women in England*, p. x. Lewis asserted that working-class women's employment outside the home reflected their domestic responsibilities - cleaning, laundry and cooking. The sexual divisions of labour resulted in women working in low paid, low status jobs "at the lower end of any job hierarchy".

<sup>148</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 119.

<sup>149</sup> Bourke, *Working-Class*, p. 124.

<sup>150</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 119, McKibbin, *Classes*, p. 520.

<sup>151</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 14<sup>th</sup> November 1969, p. 11.

<sup>152</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1971, p.10.



Newspaper advertisements throughout the period continually reflected a gendered approach to employment. Local banks advertised vacancies for school-leavers in 1965; girls were offered *jobs* as cashiers and young men with *careers* in management, with entry salaries of £200 “above the grade for their ages”. Although, girls with A-levels results were promised “equal consideration” if they were prepared to qualify.<sup>153</sup> Employment opportunities were similarly gendered at Woolworths’ stores with ‘young ladies’ invited to apply for clerical and shop-floor jobs and ‘young men’ for management trainees. On the same page of the newspaper Tansad of Tipton, manufacturers of prams and invalid carriages, offered boys employment in metal fabrication and assembly and girls work in the upholstery and sewing departments.<sup>154</sup> As discussed above, Pensnett brickworks paid skilled females substantially lower rates than their male counterparts. Mrs JB, who was employed by the Post Office in 1954, was an exception as “Equal pay came in very early for Post Office people...we became one of the first to get equal pay for women. It wasn’t when I started... but by the time I got married [in 1959] it had eased in”.<sup>155</sup> However, advertisements were beginning to reflect widening employment opportunities for females. Magazines and newspapers from the late 1940s suggested women training as Army Nurses<sup>156</sup> and, as early as 1950, Will’s Flake cigarettes advertisements suggested that ‘Feminine Achievement: [as] A Business Executive’ could be accomplished by smoking their products!<sup>157</sup>

Parental expectations adhered to stereotypical views of women and work. Further education in particular was deemed unnecessary for girls who would marry and become mothers. The headmistress of Dudley Girls High School expressed concern that parents preferred girls to obtain employment rather than study for two further years to gain A-levels. Interestingly, she also intimated that girls themselves were “confused by the opposing views of work and labour saving gadgets”.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1965, p. 15.

<sup>154</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 14<sup>th</sup> March 1969, p. 18.

<sup>155</sup> Sedgley Mrs JB.

<sup>156</sup> *Woman’s Weekly*, 18<sup>th</sup> February 1956, p. 60. Queen Alexander Army nurses featured in a number of similar advertisements.

<sup>157</sup> *Everywoman*, May 1950, p.78.

<sup>158</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1955, p. 5.

Women seeking employment continued to use traditional means; respondents obtained jobs via the mediation of family and friends. Olive Houlton's employment at the Vono Works was "asked for" by a friend of the family. "Usually somebody who worked there was your family and they'd ask for you...somebody asked for me at Vono".<sup>159</sup> Personal contacts, in the family, church, and community facilitated career opportunities. "Mr Gwilt set up a business and asked me if I wanted to go and work for him. I mean I'd knowed (sic) him all my life".<sup>160</sup> Mrs BD 's Sunday school teacher, "Dorothy Foizey got me an interview at Dudley Teacher Training College".<sup>161</sup> Women seeking employment were generally inclined to "follow friends and family...all your friends and relatives worked there so you tended to go to those places".<sup>162</sup>

Women, like their male counterparts, "could just walk out of one job into another".<sup>163</sup> This continued into the 1970s as "there was full employment and people used to leave jobs and start. It was very easy, people used to do it all the while".<sup>164</sup> Clerical or manual work was obtained without difficulty – "jobs for men and women were very easily available then [1960s]".<sup>165</sup> Mrs JB recalled that "it was easy then in '54 you could choose your occupation then".<sup>166</sup> In the 1960s Mrs MD, a bank clerk, recollected the ease of exchanging jobs, "you could virtually walk out of one job, go to one or two places and get another".<sup>167</sup> When her youngest child started school in 1975, Joyce Beaman gained employment at "an agency where they were crying out for temps".<sup>168</sup>

Women's work has always been notoriously difficult to quantify - their employment tending to be on a more casual or ad hoc basis than men's and frequently omitted from census returns.<sup>169</sup> However, between 1951 and 1971, the British labour force increased by 1.5 million to almost 25 million, the majority of the additional labour

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<sup>159</sup> Tipton Mrs OH.

<sup>160</sup> Pensnett Mrs BW.

<sup>161</sup> Pensnett Mrs BD.

<sup>162</sup> Tipton Mrs VW.

<sup>163</sup> Tipton Mrs MA.

<sup>164</sup> Tipton Rev. CH.

<sup>165</sup> Sedgley Mrs CB.

<sup>166</sup> Tipton Mrs JB.

<sup>167</sup> Tipton Mrs MD.

<sup>168</sup> Pensnett Mrs JB off tape.

<sup>169</sup> Lewis, *Women in England*, p. 219.

was supplied by women,<sup>170</sup> with the number of married women in paid employment nearly doubling from 22% to 42%.<sup>171</sup> In the 1960s, the proprietor of a mobile shop in Tipton gauged the increasing numbers of married women working in local factories by the growing number of those leaving empty bags, shopping lists and cash in the outhouse. Mr Tolley said that he “didn’t see some of them from one week to the next” as they began to undertake full-time paid employment; he filled the bags and left a note of the cost for payment during the following week.<sup>172</sup>

Although much post-war affluence is directly attributable to higher wages and low unemployment, undeniably the increasing number of married women in paid employment contributed to prosperity levels within individual families.<sup>173</sup> However, they were not necessarily engaged in full-time employment, as in 1984, the size of the full-time female labour force had remained constant, at around 5.6m.<sup>174</sup> In 1956 a mere 12% of the female labour force worked part-time, but by the early 1970s the figure stood at 40%.<sup>175</sup> Employers desperate for job vacancies to be filled were increasingly willing to offer part-time work for married women.<sup>176</sup> Mrs Kendrick worked in Tipton, during the 1960s and 70s, where factory jobs were so abundant that “you could work one place one day, leave and work somewhere else the other”.<sup>177</sup> In Pensnett, Val Cartwright always worked in manual employment, which was readily available within the immediate vicinity. Jobs were easy to obtain or replace, and comparatively well-paid, but “they were terrific (sic) long hours. I worked from eight o’clock to a quarter to six...and...on a Saturday. Yes, yes it was 60 something hours”.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Pennington and Westover, *Hidden Workforce*, p. 152; Halsey (ed.), *British*, p. 168.

<sup>171</sup> Hopkins, *Rise and Decline*, p. 163. In the interwar years women comprised fewer than 30% of the total occupied population but by 1971 this had increased to 36%. Halsey, *British*, p. 168; Bourke, *Working-Class*, p. 99. The number of female manual workers remained fairly stable but the proportion of non-manual workers was steadily rising.

<sup>172</sup> Mr Tolley December 1998.

<sup>173</sup> Roberts, ‘Women, the family economy’, p. 16.

<sup>174</sup> Lewis, *Women in England*, p. 219.

<sup>175</sup> Lewis, *Women In England*, p. 219.

<sup>176</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 122.

<sup>177</sup> Mrs Kendrick May 1999.

<sup>178</sup> Pensnett Miss VC, Miss NP, Mrs DB, Mrs BW.

Women's wages were rising throughout the period, but confined to around 50% of their male counterparts.<sup>179</sup> Between 1950 and 1965 the average hourly earnings of full-time female workers was 59% of men's and a wife's salary was about half of her husband's.<sup>180</sup> Ted Gulliver, a core maker into the 1970s, recalled that "they were nearly all women yeah...same as me, core making jobs. Women worked as hard as the men", but for lower wages.<sup>181</sup> In the 1960s skilled female moulders were earning around 33% less than skilled males and just under £1 per week less than male labourers.<sup>182</sup>

Despite low pay-scales throughout the period, woman's paid employment played a crucial role in the family economy. In 1948 the West Midland Group endorsed this, arguing that future planning should recognise that in areas where the percentage of employed women was low then living standards were correspondingly low. Variations in the proportions of females in employment were due to the industrial structure of the areas - "the nature of their distinctive industries". The report identified Tipton, along with adjacent Coseley and Kingswinford (adjacent to Pensnett), as deficient in industries suitable for women workers, indicating the necessity of attracting suitable firms to the area.<sup>183</sup> Married women followed bimodal employment patterns, working until the birth of the first child then returning to employment in times of financial necessity<sup>184</sup> - "giving up" when the "immediate need" subsided.<sup>185</sup> However, post-war experiences in Barrow, Lancaster and Preston, indicated that instances of women working out of "dire financial necessity" gradually decreased with the corresponding increases in men's wage rates.<sup>186</sup> Nevertheless, Bernstein believed that the financial contribution of working-class women remained crucial to the solvency of the family.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Pollard, *Development*, p. 265.

<sup>180</sup> *Conurbation*, p. 119; Hopkins, *Rise and Decline*, p. 164.

<sup>181</sup> Tipton Mr TG.

<sup>182</sup> *Black Country Bugle*, 9<sup>th</sup> February 2006, p. 15. Skilled males earned 244/- per week and females 164/-, whilst labourers earned 182/- per week.

<sup>183</sup> *Conurbation*, p. 128. The percentages of women employed in Tipton (27.29%), Coseley (27.6%) and Kingswinford (26.97%) are in marked contrast with Tettenhall in nearby Wolverhampton (35.15%) or Birmingham (35.13%).

<sup>184</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 122.

<sup>185</sup> Kerr, *People*, p. 30.

<sup>186</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 124.

<sup>187</sup> Bernstein, *Myth*, p. 295.

Undoubtedly, in some families the husband's wages were supplemented by their wives, but increasingly women worked for more complex reasons than in the past. Public opinion adapted to women's contribution to the labour market and began to perceive the economic and social advantages.<sup>188</sup> Abbott suggested that women undertook paid employment solely to buy specific extras for the house or children,<sup>189</sup> but in Tipton, John Parker's mother "undertook part time casual work throughout her married life" out of financial necessity.<sup>190</sup> In 1969, the Tipton Local Employment Committee commenced the year with a meeting to discuss the "difficulties in the way of married women wishing to continue to work", reported under the heading "How Women Escape Boredom". The committee concluded that the "need to augment the family income and a wish to escape boredom were thought...to be the main reasons" for women's work. They indicated the popularity of working the twilight shift to overcome the difficulties associated with familial responsibilities.<sup>191</sup>

Oral testimony raised the difficulties of married women seeking employment, reflecting the ambivalence of women and their husbands. "Some men didn't like their wives working; they thought it looked as if they couldn't afford to keep them".<sup>192</sup> During the 1950s and into the 1960s, Mr Bagley's mother was a housewife because "it was a matter of pride for father to say 'my missus don't go to work' or 'no wife of mine works'".<sup>193</sup> Some husbands objected vociferously to working wives; one respondent's mother "took in washing and ironing....she used to get half a crown, something like that and it used to be a big basket". Her husband objected, and "there was a big row and me dad said you're not doing it any more". His wife subsequently resigned herself to a domestic role, but their daughter reflected that as a result "we were always short of money".<sup>194</sup> In the 1950s, Mrs Sheldon obtained part-time employment as an out-worker for Newey's of Tipton, putting hair grips onto cardboard ready for sale. Her husband disapproved, believing that he should support the family, and disliking the intrusive nature of employment, giving her "an extra ten

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<sup>188</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 125. She cited Klein who argued that women had a duty to support the struggling British economy, and presented women with an alternative to the domestic ideology.

<sup>189</sup> Abbott, *History of Family*, p. 94.

<sup>190</sup> Parker, *Black Country*, p. 17.

<sup>191</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 3<sup>1st</sup> January 1969, p. 17.

<sup>192</sup> Sedgley Mrs PJ.

<sup>193</sup> Tipton Mr RB.

<sup>194</sup> Tipton Mrs VW.

bob a wick (sic)...to get rid o' the bloody 'umwork".<sup>195</sup> However, his opinions modified following his wife's miscarriage and he relented feeling that work outside the home would "be good" for his wife.<sup>196</sup>

Reasons for women's work were complex and the necessity of acquiring additional income (and consumer durables) had to be balanced against the concept of neglected homes and children. Bill Jones believed "half the ladies didn't work [as] they didn't have equal rights".<sup>197</sup> Mrs Brown's husband and her mother expressed concern when she returned to work - "just part-time to get out for a bit", in 1957. "Well first of all my mom refused to look after her. 'I've bought up five children and I don't agree with you going back to work'". She overcame their objections, as "I'd got to have that [mental stimulation] but absolutely the money made all the difference".<sup>198</sup> Mrs Bennett's mother sometimes "had the occasional *little* job perhaps cleaning or something, never anything permanent you know she'd be there more so for us. Dad was a bricklayer...and...didn't get paid when the weather was bad and sometimes mom would think well I'll go and earn a little bit. But we always liked her at home and dad did really".<sup>199</sup>

In 1957, when her youngest child was two and a half, Mrs Brown wanted part-time employment as a librarian, "he [her husband] was very ang[ry]. Well quite angry you know. He said 'what about Susan? You know you don't go to work until she's old enough to go to school'. (laughter) But we managed to come to some agreement".<sup>200</sup> In 1961, Mrs Nixon found employment; her son "remember[ed] father being very angry when mom started to work. Very, yes". His father changed jobs taking "shift work...and literally doubled his money overnight in an effort to stop mom going to work but she still carried on. She always worked".<sup>201</sup> A few wives worked part-time without their husband's knowledge. Olive Houlton's father only became aware of his

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<sup>195</sup> Hathorne, *Five Minutes*, p. 73.

<sup>196</sup> Hathorne, *Five Minutes*, p. 120.

<sup>197</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ.

<sup>198</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB.

<sup>199</sup> Sedgley Mrs CB.

<sup>200</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB.

<sup>201</sup> Tipton Mr DN.

wife's employment when she was unable to purchase his cigarettes, "well she says 'I've been at work, how could I queue?' He was miffed I can tell you".<sup>202</sup>

A minority of women with children were employed full-time in factories. Mr Tolley's mother-in-law and her sister worked as welders in a local factory, other women were employed in foundries as core-makers – "that was a job, making cores for the moulders, all that filth".<sup>203</sup> Ted Gulliver worked at Beans Foundry from 1954 alongside females, "they were nearly all women...same job as me core-making jobs. Women worked as hard as the men for a weekly pay-packet. £17 a week...we was piece-work you see? The more you made the more you got".<sup>204</sup> Mr Nixon's mother was a chain-maker and a welder during the 1960s.<sup>205</sup> However, it appears that stereotypical gender-based attitudes to women and work remained – Joan Hancock, the only woman on the shop floor, volunteered for redundancy in the late 1970s as she "couldn't stand by and see a gentleman lose his job because they [men] are the main breadwinners".<sup>206</sup>

Oral testimony revealed that the majority of work accessible to married women was part-time and stereotypical. This work was virtually unheeded, disregarded as negligible, both by the respondents and their spouses. Mrs Woolley was dismissive concerning her part-time employment – "I didn't work for nine years cos I had the children. Oh I tell a lie I took on a job at Gill and Weaver's cleaning".<sup>207</sup> Following motherhood, in the 1950s, Mrs DR "didn't have a job as such, but my friend had a leaflet distribution service and I did that...it was hours to suit the applicant".<sup>208</sup> Mr Drew displayed similar reactions to his wife's employment, initially stating that she worked until their children were born. He subsequently recollected his mother caring for the children while his wife was a school-crossing warden - work which he dismissed as "only" part-time and "not paying much".<sup>209</sup> Married in 1953, Mrs DB declared that "I didn't work any more after marriage. Oh, I had a job at the club at

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<sup>202</sup> Tipton Mrs OH.

<sup>203</sup> Tipton Mr HT.

<sup>204</sup> Tipton Mr TG.

<sup>205</sup> Tipton Mr DN.

<sup>206</sup> *Memories Made In Sandwell*, Transcripts from Sandwell Museum Service, Tipton Tape 2.

<sup>207</sup> Pensnett Mrs BW.

<sup>208</sup> Sedgley Mrs DR1.

<sup>209</sup> Mr Drew June 1998.

Tiled House Lane –caretaking”.<sup>210</sup> Despite two small children, Mrs Greenfield worked as a cleaner and a cosmetics representative. However, her husband stated that “Pat didn’t work after we had our children”, although later qualifying that statement with “you did do a bit of part time though”.<sup>211</sup>

Lily Garbet originally intended to work as a welder for two years, following her marriage, in order to “get some money behind us”, but remained in that employment for 31 years.<sup>212</sup> Although motives for working *were* varied the financial reward was crucial for most women. Bruley indicated that married women worked to provide “extras” for the family<sup>213</sup> and this is endorsed by some respondents. Mrs Parker’s part-time casual work paid for “occasional small luxuries,”<sup>214</sup> and Mrs Sheldon’s job on a twilight shift at the Champion Bakery, in the 1950s, provided extras, as a “little job” would enable the family to “goo (sic) out more – to the pictures or out into the country”.<sup>215</sup> Married women frequently referred to their employment outside the home as a ‘little’ job or a ‘bit’ of work and the financial reward for their efforts was often alluded to as ‘pin money’ or pocket money.<sup>216</sup> A minority of respondents stressed that they, or their mothers, worked solely to “make ends meet” - as Mrs Kendrick said “to ease the situation [because] money was tight”.<sup>217</sup>

A relatively small number of women worked purely from personal preference unmotivated by necessity, although perhaps induced by the need for financial autonomy. In Spencer Wilson’s opinion “it was the war which gave women the freedom [to work]” despite marriage and children.<sup>218</sup> This was confirmed by Mr MJ, whose mother worked virtually from his birth in 1940. His father was a regular soldier for 25 years and his mother worked as a Capstan Lathe Turner “until she had to retire” in the early 1980s. “Dad was away in the war, at least for the first eight

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<sup>210</sup> Pensnett Mrs DB.

<sup>211</sup> Pensnett Mr SG.

<sup>212</sup> Brew, *Wolverhampton*, p. 94. Lily Garbet was born in Wolverhampton in 1920.

<sup>213</sup> Bruley, *Women*, p. 124; Roberts, ‘Women, the Family Economy’, p. 17. Roberts concurred with this view and argued that the idea of women working for ‘extras marginalised women’s wages in their own perceptions and those of their families.

<sup>214</sup> Parker, *Black Country*, p. 17.

<sup>215</sup> Hathorne, *Five Minutes*, p. 120.

<sup>216</sup> Abbott, *History of Family*, p. 95; Benson, *Consumer Society*, p. 198. Work of this kind was usually part-time, often casual and poorly paid with few prospects of promotion or improvement.

<sup>217</sup> Mrs Kendrick May 1999. Mrs Kendrick, an only child who was born in 1946, used the phrase ‘to make ends meet’ throughout her interview as did Mrs Lakin. Tipton Mrs BT, Mrs VW.

<sup>218</sup> Sedgley Mr SW.



years...she carried on anyway. My mother never gid (sic) up working for nobody...that's the only way to describe her...my mother wanted her independence".<sup>219</sup> From 1967, despite having small children, Marion Allen was employed as a barmaid and cleaner before establishing a small catering business. She "worked all the time so we hadn't got any money worries".<sup>220</sup> Similarly, in the 1960s, "knowing my mom I think it would be purely financial I think it was *pride* she wanted to get things".<sup>221</sup> Mrs Woolley's attitudes and experiences exemplify those of younger respondents, she worked part-time until her children were at school and then full-time because she "wanted to be out (of the house) ...and I enjoyed it because I used to like to go to work but the money, the money was the problem as well ... the money was there in your hand and it was extra".<sup>222</sup>

Nevertheless, a minority of working mothers were compelled by their personal circumstances. The ill-health or death of a spouse, a large family, or a husband who was negligent with the housekeeping forced women to undertake a series of poorly paid, casual jobs, earning them immeasurable respect and admiration from their offspring. The fathers of several respondents<sup>223</sup> were incapacitated by health problems and despite state welfare, their wives and families struggled with the effects of poverty. Mr KD, was born in 1949, and his "Mom was a housewife. Yeah well...she had loads of different part-time jobs, working in the fish shop, peeling potatoes and things like that. Anything she could do actually...numerous little part-time jobs at different times, anything that could earn a bit of money".<sup>224</sup> Betty Tolley's mother was a full-time welder, from 1962, supporting a semi-invalid husband and two daughters. When her children were younger "she used to have two or three cleaning jobs on the go at a time....I don't know how she used to manage really it was a hard life for her".<sup>225</sup>

Although flexible shifts and part-time jobs facilitated women 'going out' to work, a number of women, unable or unwilling to leave their familial responsibilities,

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<sup>219</sup> Tipton Mr MJ.

<sup>220</sup> Tipton Mrs MA.

<sup>221</sup> Tipton Mr DN.

<sup>222</sup> Pensnett Mrs BW.

<sup>223</sup> For example Mrs BT, Mr KD, Miss YB, Mrs VW.

<sup>224</sup> Pensnett Mr KD.

<sup>225</sup> Tipton Mrs BT.

continued the tradition of undertaking homework. The practical advantages were obvious – the women were at home and able to continue their domestic duties without undue disruption; they avoided the practicalities of making childcare arrangements and there was little inconvenience to the rest of the family. Although opportunities for homework were dwindling in the post-war period and working outside the home was increasingly acceptable, the system endured in a number of industries. Homeworkers' conditions of employment were traditionally poor, lacking protective legislation with derisory remuneration.<sup>226</sup> In the post-war period home-workers were “no more visible” than those of earlier eras and the number of women employed in this “clandestine” manner was unknown.<sup>227</sup> Certainly women in all three areas found employment which could be completed at home. Ron Barker employed female outworkers sewing garments for his tailoring business throughout the period. They were employed to hand-finish the clothes - sewing buttonholes and linings, working at home because of small children or disabled relatives.<sup>228</sup> Work was delivered to his employees and the finished garments collected, but many were less fortunate in other industries.

Out-workers employed by Neweys of Tipton collected their work from the factory, necessitating the use of a pram or pushchair to transport the hair clips, pins, hook and eyes, or needles. These highly visible conveyances were a potential source of embarrassment within the neighbourhood, advertising a family's precarious financial position.<sup>229</sup> Consequently, some husbands refused to permit their wives to undertake such employment. Nevertheless, throughout the period outwork was commonly collected from the factory at 6.45 am and described as ‘slave labour’.<sup>230</sup> Virtually all respondents mentioned Neweys as potential source of income for women with children and the elderly beyond the 1960s. “It was *very* common in those days, the ladies went to Neweys and they'd get a big pram load of hairgrips and that was rife...and all the kids used to do it as well if they'd got to be back [at the factory] for a

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<sup>226</sup> Pennington and Westover, *Hidden Workforce*, p. 157.

<sup>227</sup> Pennington and Westover, *Hidden Workforce*, p. 156. Roberts, ‘Women, the Family Economy’, p. 16. According to Roberts the official figures have “seriously underestimated” the number of women who worked from home and any serious quantification is impossible. The 1957 National Union of Tailor and Garment Workers Conference passed a motion to investigate homeworking in the clothing trade but no cohesive policy regarding homework was formulated.

<sup>228</sup> Gallo, *Tinker*, p. 169.

<sup>229</sup> Hathorne, *Five Minutes*, p. 72; *Black Country Bugle*, 6<sup>th</sup> May 1999, p. 5.

<sup>230</sup> Hathorne, *Five Minutes*, p. 71. Tipton Mr DA, Mrs Mcroft, Mrs Cartwright. Mrs Lakin, her sister, Mrs Kendrick's mother, all worked for Neweys at some stage during their married lives. They expected to earn approximately 7 shillings a week.

certain time...collar studs, pins, clips...loads of people did that by us".<sup>231</sup> "Yes, Neweys, used to fetch the pins from Neweys and the press studs...yeah a lot of outwork there with the pushchairs. I think they got about a tanner a box...Mrs Yates next door...she was in her 70s and she'd go down and have a box."<sup>232</sup> "Neweys, outwork, you've heard of them? I know for a fact that mother when we was children used to do it. It was either clips or press studs and even in the sixties you'd see them pushing the pram up to Neweys to swap them for ones they'd done...Peanuts they was getting it was just slave driving...there was one old lady in the 60s press studs...and the speed that she did it!"<sup>233</sup> As late as 1970 much of women's work was casual, "irregular hours and at irregular intervals". Women were frequently paid in cash and evaded account books for that reason.<sup>234</sup> The evidence confirmed Roberts' view that women's wages contributed to post-war affluence, allowing many families to fulfil their aspirations towards improved living standards.<sup>235</sup>

Women continued to supplement their earnings by undertaking a variety of jobs reflecting their work in the home, by servicing the needs of other families.<sup>236</sup> Despite increased affluence, as in previous generations, respondents supplemented their incomes with domestic work or childcare in lower middle-class homes, enabling them to simultaneously care for their own offspring. Marion Allen and her friends all "had to do little cleaning jobs".<sup>237</sup> Mrs Lakin had a succession of domestic jobs during the 1950s and 60s. She cleaned the house of her husband's employer - heavy manual labour, scrubbing floors and toilets (accompanied by her daughters during school holidays) but felt that "it wasn't hardship 'cos I knew that at the end of the day I was gonna get paid". In addition to the cash she also received food - "when you was in need you didn't care if it was left offs (sic)... I'll never be ashamed to admit that I used to go scrubbing and cleaning". She scrubbed the cellar steps of a cousin for a paltry 6d, a cup of cocoa and a sandwich, remarking that "it wasn't like somebody saying I feel sorry for her, so when you've done something for it you don't lose your dignity." Mrs Lakin also cleaned for the owner of a "very posh" ladies dress shop and

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<sup>231</sup> Tipton Mr DA.

<sup>232</sup> Tipton Mr HT.

<sup>233</sup> Tipton Mr BW, Mrs BT, Mr BT, Mrs PB; Sedgley Mrs PJ.

<sup>234</sup> Roberts, *Women, the Family*, p.16.

<sup>235</sup> Roberts, *Women, the Family*.

<sup>236</sup> Pennington and Westover, *Hidden Workforce*, p. 153.

<sup>237</sup> Tipton Mrs MA: Sedgley Mrs PJ.

“instead of paying wages she put the money on a club card and if I wanted anything for the kids, coats, dresses or jumpers...I’d have them and she’d take them out of my wages”.<sup>238</sup>

Between 1960 and the 70s, Mrs Kendrick’s mother was a chambermaid at the Ward Arms public house in Tipton.<sup>239</sup> In Sedgley, Frank Green’s mother was a barmaid in the evenings, enabling her to care for the home and family during the daytime.<sup>240</sup> In addition to working three nights at the local pub, between 1967 and 1982, Marion Allen delivered newspapers and undertook domestic work when her children were small.<sup>241</sup>

The provision of state welfare increased employment opportunities for women, particularly in the realms of ‘caring’ professions - jobs in education, health and welfare.<sup>242</sup> Several respondents and/or their mothers found part-time employment in schools as dinner ladies, canteen staff, school cleaners, or school-crossing wardens. This was advantageous as the hours were appropriate for those with children and the holidays coincided with school terms.<sup>243</sup> In the 1950s, Mrs Churchman took advantage of the extended Home Help Service, instigated by Tipton’s Medical Officer of Health. “This was when the children were going to school. He found me places to visit in the area of the school....I worked nine till one...I started in 1953. It was a very good scheme, it was ideal... the health service was expanding”.<sup>244</sup>

Despite some new employment opportunities in the post-war period, many women supplemented their husband’s earnings in traditional part-time female occupations, demonstrating a measure of continuity with the early part of the twentieth century. In some instances, despite the existence of state aid, it was the woman’s financial contribution which continued to maintain family solvency at certain periods of the family cycle, sometimes in addition to welfare payments, but on many occasions as a substitute for the claiming of benefits.

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<sup>238</sup> Mrs Lakin December 1998. Mrs Lakin was one of the women whose husband suffered from a series of debilitating illnesses.

<sup>239</sup> Mrs Kendrick May 1999.

<sup>240</sup> Sedgley Mr FG.

<sup>241</sup> Tipton Mrs MA.

<sup>242</sup> Rosen, A., *The Transformation of British Life, 1950-2000: A Social History*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003, p. 101.

<sup>243</sup> Tipton Mrs JL, Mr PD, Mrs MD, Mr TG; Mr Drew.

<sup>244</sup> Tipton Mrs Churchman.

### *Teenage Employment*

In earlier generations the income gained from children's wages played a vital role in the survival of the family unit. Although the *raison d'être* was understood, in many instances, children were frequently used as "little drudges".<sup>245</sup> In the inter-war years it was customary for children's financial contributions to assist with bill payment. Due to the loss of potential income, denying a son or daughter marriage "died hard" in some areas.<sup>246</sup> A small number of respondents stated categorically that their mother or mother-in-law's reluctance to sanction their marriage was due to financial considerations.<sup>247</sup> Mr Southall's grandmother would have preferred that all three of her offspring remained single and living at home and was disappointed when her eldest son married.<sup>248</sup>

Nevertheless, it is claimed that the family's importance as an economic unit declined after 1945.<sup>249</sup> Inter-war social surveys suggested that "young wage-earners *invariably* kept a significant portion of their weekly earnings" for personal expenditure (my italics).<sup>250</sup> These perceptions intensified in the period after 1945. Benson asserted that individual family members were increasingly accustomed to regard wages as belonging to the earner.<sup>251</sup> Hoggart believed that children's earnings no longer contributed to family finances,<sup>252</sup> which was reiterated by Chinn's view that girls enjoyed a brief interlude between school and marriage when they could "spend money for their own pleasure".<sup>253</sup> Akhtar and Humphries revealed that between 1958 and 1966 relatively few adolescents contributed to the household bills.<sup>254</sup> Kynaston recently claimed that teenagers' earnings were "unfettered by family responsibilities".<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Dayus, *Her People*, p. 6.

<sup>246</sup> Forrester, *Lime Street*, p. 19. It is undeniable that daughters were perceived as particularly useful as they would also take care of siblings and aged parents. Consequently "keeping a daughter permanently at home, often denying her marriage" had other advantages in addition to the financial benefits.

<sup>247</sup> Tipton Mr MJ, Mrs JL; Sedgley Mrs RW.

<sup>248</sup> Sedgley Mr NS.

<sup>249</sup> Marwick, *British Society*, p. 43.

<sup>250</sup> Fowler, D., 'Teenage Consumers? Young wage-earners and leisure in Manchester, 1919-1939', p. 136, in Davies, A., S. Fielding and T. Wyke, (eds.), *Workers' Worlds: Cultures and Communities in Manchester and Salford, 1880-1939*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992.

<sup>251</sup> Benson, *Affluence and Authority*, p. 12.

<sup>252</sup> Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 116.

<sup>253</sup> Chinn, *They Worked*, p. 94.

<sup>254</sup> Akhtar and Humphries, *The Fifties*, p. 43.

<sup>255</sup> Kynaston, *Austerity*, p. 293.

However, these changes in the finances of young people are not as clear-cut as historians have suggested and were certainly not applicable to all adolescents of that era. Teenage Helen Forrester, for example, had an evening job in addition to her full-time employment, in order to earn spending money, as “mothers believed that they owned...everything that their children earned” and her wages were seen as belonging to her mother.<sup>256</sup> In 1950s Liverpool, children handed their wages directly to their mothers, hoping to receive pocket money in return.<sup>257</sup> This was confirmed in Birmingham where Gary Smith gave his unopened wage packet, containing £2 4s 6d, to his mother, who extracted 30s allowing him to retain 14s 6d.<sup>258</sup> Also in the 1950s Birmingham Brenda Bullock recalled family poverty, whilst “others of the neighbours were better off than we were...because they had older children working and bringing money into the house”.<sup>259</sup>

Kathleen Hann confirmed that this practice continued in the Black Country. She claimed that during 1950s, it was “traditional” to hand over your unopened wage packet to your mother until you were 21.<sup>260</sup> In 1953, when 21 year old John Beck returned to Sedgley after his National Service, his mother finally allowed him to retain his weekly wage and pay ‘board’.<sup>261</sup> In Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton earnings were traditionally “turned up” unless you were saving to get married, in which case you might be “let off”.<sup>262</sup> Even Yvonne Bennett, who was usually allowed autonomy over her earnings, gave away her first week’s pay - “mom said we shall give this one to grandmother?” No explanation for this act of generosity on the part of her mother was either asked or received.<sup>263</sup> The practice continued regardless of class or income. Mr RA, whose father was a works manager, “handed everything over” to his mother, contributions were “very gratefully received”. During his interview he half-jokingly enquired whether a previous respondent (a former school friend) had mentioned that his widowed mother “waited behind the door with a shovel” to extract his wages.<sup>264</sup> In 1957 when one Tipton teenager became an apprentice plater his mother was

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<sup>256</sup> Forrester, *Lime Street*, p. 12.

<sup>257</sup> Kerr, *The People*, p. 60.

<sup>258</sup> Smith, *Winson Green*, p. 44.

<sup>259</sup> Bullock, *A Pocket*, p. 64.

<sup>260</sup> Hann, *Tell It*, p. 155.

<sup>261</sup> Beck, J., *Perhaps I’m Really Mervyn Davenport*, Middlesex: New Millennium, 2003, p. 94.

<sup>262</sup> Pensnett Mr DM; Miss VC; Mrs SG; Mrs IT.

<sup>263</sup> Pensnett Miss YB.

<sup>264</sup> Pensnett Mr RA.

standing by the work's gates waiting for the 17/6d in his weekly wage packet: "Let's have your money son' she said smiling", giving him a few "coppers" back.<sup>265</sup>

A surprising number of respondents, regardless of class, occupation, or gender, gave their entire pay-packet to their mother throughout the period. Again, motives were not clear-cut, as in some families the surrender of a teenager's earnings was crucial to economic survival and in others the youngsters were following traditional social mores. "We handed over our pay-packet to our moms (sic) and she gave us pocket money. She did that until I got engaged in 1951. I'd got a wonderful mom and dad".<sup>266</sup> Mrs Woolley "never opened my wage packet. I used to give it to me mom. Never opened a wage packet until the week before I got married [in 1965] and mom give it me then".<sup>267</sup> As late as 1966 one Tipton teenager worked twelve hour shifts for seven days earning £12, which was handed to her mother; she received £2 pocket-money for "tights and shoes".<sup>268</sup> "It was mandatory, every penny you turned up and they would decide how much pocket money you had...up until virtually I was married...Just showed the control...[but] I was more than pleased to be able to do it".<sup>269</sup>

The harshness of Mr MJ's mother, who was exceptionally controlling and relatively affluent, caused continuing resentment - "I never paid board, she wouldn't let me. I had pocket money". Consequently, he was unable to save towards his wedding in 1961, which was "very very hard it was and very cruel to do it...I was working seven days a week...my mom kept it...I was bought clothes, suits and things like that. I could have as many suits as I wanted just couldn't have the money...she liked having my wages, just wanted my wages". His wife commented that his mother never wanted him to marry; when the tape was off he added that "we married on a Saturday and mom had my wages off me the night before, she never apologised to anyone, right or wrong".<sup>270</sup> A similar situation existed with Mrs JL's husband, "Mike *never* had any money...there was always an attitude from her [his mother] that she always

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<sup>265</sup> Kettle, *Turning Up in Tipton*, p. 34.

<sup>266</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB.

<sup>267</sup> Pensnett Mrs BW.

<sup>268</sup> Kettle, *Turning Up*, p. 44.

<sup>269</sup> Tipton Mr RB.

<sup>270</sup> Tipton Mr MJ.

wanted to get as much money as she could”.<sup>271</sup> These comments and similar experiences refute assertions that the majority of post-war teenagers were freed from financial responsibilities towards their families.

On a number of occasions respondents were reluctantly compelled to leave school as their parents, usually their mothers, deemed that they should work. The advice of teachers was ignored and scholarships were refused if “mother said”.<sup>272</sup> In the late 1950s, one school girl was forced to leave school before her GCEs as her mother was expecting another baby and her potential weekly wages of £3 were “needed” by the family.<sup>273</sup> Although Betty Tolley hoped to study for A-level examinations, her mother declared that “you can forget that you’re nearly 15 you’ve got to go to work”.<sup>274</sup> Some respondents chose to leave school because of perceived financial obligations. Despite ambitions to become a lawyer, Mr Nixon left grammar school in 1968 to commence a technical apprenticeship:

“I think it was because they [his parents] would have had to support me for longer. Yeah I didn’t know ‘cos I’m talking 15 or 16 and my brother would have been 8. You know if I could have seen – I mean a couple of years after me leaving school mom went full-time anyway. And obviously talking to her now and dad they were pretty well off and could have easily managed”.

His ambition was also curtailed by his working-class roots - “I got the perception that with this background –well!”<sup>275</sup> His comments, along with others, indicate the resilience of class and critique the notion of class dilution in the 1960s.

Teenagers allowed to remain in school were, nevertheless, expected to earn in their spare time and contribute towards the family budget. Carol Hathorne’s mother “found” her a Saturday job at Woolworths in Great Bridge earning 12s, half of which was to be given to her mother. When she left school, in 1960, Carol’s job in a library was paid monthly, but, as it was due to commence in September, “I had to go and get a job for a month...in a wages office...Mom said we can’t manage without any

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<sup>271</sup> Tipton Mrs JL.

<sup>272</sup> Tipton Mrs BT.

<sup>273</sup> Hathorne, *Five Minutes*, p. 162. £3 appears to a fairly typical sum for teenagers to pay in board and many respondents mentioned this amount. Pensnett: Mr BJ, Mr BT, Mr SG.

<sup>274</sup> Tipton Mrs BT. She was a pupil at a Tipton Secondary Modern School and in the top 2% of the year.

<sup>275</sup> Tipton Mr DN.



money for a month”.<sup>276</sup> “The trouble is we need yer to bring some money in *now* - September’s more than a month away”.<sup>277</sup> Mother allowed her to “keep ten bob pocket money” from her £3 wages, which “was more than ... [she’d] ever had in one go”.<sup>278</sup> Most teenagers felt obligated to contribute from their earnings, acknowledging that children should ‘put something back’. Mrs Tolley “had to” get Saturday work at the local George Masons in 1960, as the family was comparatively poor. She was sometimes allowed to keep her wages, but “it depended really on whether mom needs it or not. But it wasn’t so much the wages that were important, it was the things you could bring home...like the end cuts of meat, cheese and broken biscuits and things like that”. She felt that this was usual, during that period, confirming that all of her close friends had similar work.<sup>279</sup>

Parents allowing offspring to retain their earnings were usually regarded as ‘lenient’.<sup>280</sup> Mrs IT, who married in 1962, was not expected to contribute; she “used to bring home cakes and stuff” as an occasional treat for the family.<sup>281</sup> Some mothers requested a token gesture towards keep, “I was an only one so she didn’t have much off me”.<sup>282</sup> During the 1960s, Mrs MD and her twin “used to give mom so much. Not really enough but she wouldn’t have any more”.<sup>283</sup> Mr Weigh regretfully recalled that “mother wasn’t bothered if I kept the lot...in fact I think I was a bit skinny” towards her.<sup>284</sup> Such leniency was evident in smaller families, especially for only children and in some lower middle-class households, where teenagers’ earnings were more likely to be regarded as pocket money rather than to be utilised for bills or living expenses. It was, as Mr Burgin recalled, “more of a token than a realistic reflection of how much it cost to keep me”.<sup>285</sup>

Despite the existence of state welfare, oral testimony revealed that children in full-time work eased financial problems, giving credence to the continuing existence of

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<sup>276</sup> Hathorne, *Five Minutes*, p. 162.

<sup>277</sup> Hathorne, *All Shook Up*, p. 4.

<sup>278</sup> Hathorne, *All Shook Up*, p. 10.

<sup>279</sup> Tipton Mrs BT.

<sup>280</sup> Cookson, *Our Kate*, p. 180. A mother who didn’t enforce the ‘tipping up’ of an offspring’s wages was certainly perceived as lenient in most working-class areas.

<sup>281</sup> Pensnett Mrs IT.

<sup>282</sup> Tipton Mrs JB.

<sup>283</sup> Tipton Mrs MD.

<sup>284</sup> Tipton Mr JW.

<sup>285</sup> Sedgley Mr TB.

the poverty cycle. Cedric James, one of six children, described growing up as “hard”. The family’s financial situation improved by 1960, as some of the children were employed.<sup>286</sup> As a teenager Mrs Kendrick, who was born in 1946, worked full-time and paid the rent on occasions when her father, who was employed emptying gas meters, was unable to afford it. She left school in 1961, obtaining work as a ‘viewer’ in Ewitts which helped the family economy.<sup>287</sup> Her employment enabled “things to get better financially – all the way round”.<sup>288</sup> A number of respondents recalled the easing of financial difficulties as children gained employment.<sup>289</sup>

Obtaining employment was relatively simple for teenagers in all three localities. Again, family contacts were important and recommendations were common, confirming the assertion of Willis that “all possible contacts...are explored...scoured for jobs”.<sup>290</sup> Carol Bennett left school in 1960 to work as a shorthand-typist at the local steelworks. She gained employment as “my grandfather had worked there and a lot of my uncles”.<sup>291</sup> Miss YB explained that “it was Mr Bunce, who was friends with Mr Bartlett, who worked at Dando’s...and Mr Bunce said I’d like to recommend this young lady who has just left school [in 1953] and I got it”.<sup>292</sup>

Respondents obtained jobs without difficulty, “it was quite easy as there were a lot of jobs”;<sup>293</sup> “they could walk in and out of jobs every day”.<sup>294</sup> But parents, frequently mothers, intervened usually, although not exclusively, on financial grounds:

“When I was 15 [in 1955] I had a clerical job offered me at Webb’s seeds but...when my mother knew what the money was she said oh well by the time you’ve paid your bus-fare ... This factory wanted my father to come and cut the water off, so father said ‘right if I do that for you give my daughter a job’, so I went... and was given this job in a factory...because money was tight

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<sup>286</sup> Cedric James December 1998.

<sup>287</sup> A ‘viewer’ was the term for someone who worked in quality control at the factory.

<sup>288</sup> Mrs Kendrick May 1999. The phrase “I paid the rent” was repeated several times during the interview.

<sup>289</sup> Sedgley Mr FW, Mrs CR; Tipton Mrs BT, Mr HT, Mrs Lakin.

<sup>290</sup> Willis, P., *Learning to Labour: How Working-Class Kids get Working-Class Jobs*, Aldershot: Gower Publishing, 1988, p. 39.

<sup>291</sup> Sedgley Mrs CB.

<sup>292</sup> Pensnett Miss YB.

<sup>293</sup> Tipton Mrs BT.

<sup>294</sup> Pensnett Miss YB.

mother saw it as a good chunk to come into the house”.<sup>295</sup> Dorothy Roberts was employed in the accounts department at Beans Industries in 1949 – “it was mom really, my aunt came round and said you’ve got to get her into Neweys to earn some money and my mother said ‘*she’ll do what she wants to do and I’d like her to go into an office*’ (my italics)”, which she did!<sup>296</sup>

Clearly, a substantial number of families in all three localities expected their children to contribute to the family income well beyond the period suggested by most historians, into the 1970s. The revelations of the respondents challenge Osgerby’s claims that teenage earning and saving, during the 1950s and 1960s, was “unfettered by family responsibilities”.<sup>297</sup> Most children contributed earnings whilst they were at school, and in several instances the financial situation of their parents rendered this a necessity. Teenagers’ wages were perceived as a welcome addition to the household budget. Although, not all respondents were expected to relinquish their pay-packet in its entirety, a considerable number were. Regardless of their parents’ income and occupation, most of those remaining in education past the age of 15, undertook part-time employment to provide for them and assist the family. In general, the respondents perceived this financial aid as obligatory, but mostly it was customary – “the thing to do”.<sup>298</sup>

### **Work, Education and Social Mobility**

Michael Caine recently described increasing opportunities for social mobility as working-class individuals penetrated the rarefied world of theatre and film, in the early 1960s. “The sixties was a big class thing, that’s what it was all about. An entire class of young working-class people said ‘screw you; this is how it’s going to be for us’”.<sup>299</sup> A combination of increasing affluence and enhanced educational opportunities provided a basis for all respondents to conclude that the period between 1945 and 1970 facilitated an improving lifestyle, especially when contrasted with that

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<sup>295</sup> Pensnett Mrs HW.

<sup>296</sup> Sedgley Mrs DR2.

<sup>297</sup> Osgerby, B., ‘Well It’s Saturday Night and I Just Got Paid: Youth, Consumerism and Hegemony in Post-War Britain’ *Contemporary Record*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Autumn, 1992, p. 293.

<sup>298</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ.

<sup>299</sup> 8<sup>th</sup> November 2009. Sir Michael Caine in an interview for the BBC - the Andrew Marr Show. It was his contention that until this juncture acting was confined to well-connected individuals who spoke without regional accents. But he believed that the social mobility aspect of employment was pertinent to all areas of society.

of previous generations. Oral testimony revealed the importance of occupation as a crucial factor in the self-definition of status. Born in 1954, Mr Southall, the son of an accountant, was an apprentice draughtsman who felt that the family, despite living on a council estate, “would be middle [class] but nearer to the lower...I suppose from the job”.<sup>300</sup>

The evidence suggests that the majority of respondents, regardless of family background and social status, aspired to white-collar employment. Women whose mothers worked in factories or in casual domestic jobs aspired to clerical work, with the civil service or the financial sector.<sup>301</sup> Similarly, sons of general labourers, semi-skilled workers, or foundry men sought apprenticeships and qualifications in order to improve both their working conditions and wages. Only three male interviewees appeared to support Willis’s assertions that the experiences of working-class life confined them to manual labour.<sup>302</sup> Ted Gulliver explained “I didn’t choose [core-making]. Well everybody else was doing it...all me mates were doing it”.<sup>303</sup> According to the respondents, occupational mobility, whilst not necessarily altering perceptions of an individual’s class, was an indicator of personal progression and success. When Carol Hathorne obtained work as a wages clerk, “Nan...began to tell me for about the hundredth time that I was the first member of our family to *ever* work in an office”.<sup>304</sup>

In terms of status, the acquisition of a ‘good’ job was as important and obviously inextricably linked to the attainment of congenial housing. Although none of the respondents directly suggested that occupational mobility was associated with class mobility, the connotations were clear.<sup>305</sup> Ambition and the desire for material

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<sup>300</sup> Sedgley Mr NS.

<sup>301</sup> See Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family*, for a detailed examination of increasing employment opportunities for young women between 1918 and 1950.

<sup>302</sup> Willis, *Learning to Labour*. His ethnographic study of twelve boys in the final year at a Birmingham school indicated that the working class colluded with the relations of domination in a Capitalist society. At the time of writing Willis was a research fellow at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies.

<sup>303</sup> Tipton Mr TG.

<sup>304</sup> Hathorne, *All Shook Up*, p. 7.

<sup>305</sup> For an in-depth assessment of young women and work in the inter-war years see: Todd, ‘Poverty and Aspiration’, pp. 119-142. This article examines the relationship between gender, life-cycle and social class, concluding that young working-class women used “employment as a means of escaping the economic insecurity which shaped their mother’s lives”, and achieving a measure of financial stability.

advancement were manifest in the ways in which education and employment were recalled. As Mr BT and other respondents explained, there was an inherent longing to “do better than our parents”.<sup>306</sup> This was evident in the importance which was placed in attaining prestigious employment and in education - at school and at higher levels.

Parents encouraged both sons and daughters to avoid factory work and seek an “office job”,<sup>307</sup> or undertake apprenticeships to gain a skill. Bill Jones, son of a steel-worker, obtained employment at the steelworks as a statistics clerk, demonstrating the relative ease of social mobility via employment opportunities.<sup>308</sup> Miss Bennett was threatened with manual work if she underperformed at school.<sup>309</sup> One respondent was offered factory employment when she left school in 1955, but her mother insisted that she obtained clerical work as “she wanted to keep us apart” (i.e. respectable).<sup>310</sup> Training as a comptometer operator set Mrs Tolley apart from her peers, as “it was quite – you know prestigious. I was one of the few who went into office work”.<sup>311</sup> On his father’s advice Mr Jones undertook an engineering apprenticeship to avoid shift-work and manual labour and Spencer Wilson became an apprentice as “I had aspirations of wanting to do something a little bit better you know...to continue education”.<sup>312</sup>

Respondents attaining Grammar or High School explained that this enabled them to obtain white-collar work.<sup>313</sup> Several respondents from fairly deprived working-class backgrounds felt that employment in local government or banking was the result of their superior secondary education.<sup>314</sup> For example, the confidence acquired when she passed the 13+ and went to grammar school allowed Rev. CH to gain initial work in a library, retrain as a journalist, in the 1960s and then become an Anglican Minister, in the 1970s.<sup>315</sup> “See my father was quite determined that we’d all (Mrs Brown and her five siblings) go to high school,” as education was the key to well-paid

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<sup>306</sup> Pensnett Mr BT, Miss YB; Tipton Mr RB, Mr DA.

<sup>307</sup> Sedgley Mrs DR2.

<sup>308</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ. His father refused to countenance his working in the factory see page 7.

<sup>309</sup> Pensnett Miss YB.

<sup>310</sup> Pensnett Mrs HW.

<sup>311</sup> Tipton Mrs BT.

<sup>312</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ; Sedgley Mr SW.

<sup>313</sup> Tipton Mrs PB, Mrs MD, Mrs JB, Mr DN; Sedgley Mrs PJ, Mr NJ, Mr DG, Mrs MB; Pensnett Mrs BA, Miss YB.

<sup>314</sup> For example Mrs MD, Mrs JB, Mrs PJ.

<sup>315</sup> Tipton Rev. CH.

employment. When she left school in 1947 Mrs Brown was employed at the local exchange as a telephonist which “was quite highly thought of”.<sup>316</sup> Teenagers of the 1950s and 60s felt pressured to gain these coveted places – “I’d have been very disappointed if I hadn’t got there [to Tipton Grammar]”.<sup>317</sup> Much of the pressure to succeed emanated from within the family, as well as from the individual concerned. A number of respondents, expressed the view that failure at this stage would have resulted in “letting everyone down”.<sup>318</sup>

For those leaving school at 15, the period between 1945 and 1970 offered numerous retraining opportunities, at a later stage. When her husband died in 1962, 44 year old Amy Lawrence undertook nursing training so that she could support her young family.<sup>319</sup> Throughout the 1950s and 60s, a number of interviewees responded to teacher training courses advertised in the *Express and Star*.<sup>320</sup> In 1959, Mr TG saw an advertisement publicising the shortage of qualified teachers and left his employment as at draughtsman at a local engineering company to retrain. Despite the fact that he was married with children, his “mother was horrified that I was giving up a safe job and said that father would turn in his grave”. In the early 1960s when their children were at school, his wife also retrained as a teacher.<sup>321</sup> In 1961 Mrs Brown responded to a similar advert “for mature students to consider teaching” at Dudley Teacher Training College. Despite her husband’s previous reservations, even anger, concerning his wife’s paid employment, she nonetheless made progress: “when I decided to become a teacher he did back me because I think he really felt that was properly what ... would [make me] happy”.<sup>322</sup> When Mrs DG married in the late 1960s, her fifty year old mother, who previously worked in the textile industry, also retrained as a primary school teacher.<sup>323</sup>

A number of respondents and family members, who had served technical apprenticeships, became college lecturers in vocational topics during this period.

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<sup>316</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB.

<sup>317</sup> Tipton Mr DA.

<sup>318</sup> Sedgley Mr NS, Mr DG, Mr TG.

<sup>319</sup> Funeral eulogy of Sedgley resident Amy Lawrence April 2008.

<sup>320</sup> Sedgley Mr TG.

<sup>321</sup> Sedgley Mr TG.

<sup>322</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB, Mr TB.

<sup>323</sup> Sedgley Mrs DG.

Three respondents, the father of Mr DA, and Mrs Bennett's brother, took advantage of their qualifications in engineering and electronics to make the transition to these middle-class occupations during the 1960s and early 70s. Frequently the progression was gradual, with respondents initially supplementing their income teaching evening classes at local colleges.<sup>324</sup>

All respondents who held formal professional qualifications, from metallurgists, teachers, and accountants, to members of the Institute of Personnel Management were anxious to explain that education has assisted them to improve their status, if not their class. Although never refuting their largely working-class origins, they implied that a combination of examinations, opportunity and formal employment had allowed them to make a certain progression, which distinguished them from their former peers and classmates.

## **Conclusion**

Oral testimony confirmed the view that between 1945 and the early 1970s, despite an influx of workers from other areas of Britain, and abroad, there was a proliferation of jobs which offered gradually increasing remuneration for the residents of Pensnett, Tipton and Sedgley.<sup>325</sup> However, as Moorhouse indicated, the wages of manual workers, which were well above the national average, were gained by continuing to work for long hours under conditions which remained detrimental to their health.<sup>326</sup> Enhanced educational opportunities facilitated new levels of social mobility, with both male and female members of some lower-middle and working-class families aspiring to, and gaining, white-collar employment, and access to professional qualifications.

However, despite Marwick's assertions that the importance of the family as an economic unit was in decline,<sup>327</sup> an increasing number of women found full and part-time employment and teenagers, in all three areas, continued to contribute to the family economy into the 1970s. Regardless of the evidence of social surveys and the conclusion of historians that "adolescents managed to retain a growing proportion of

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<sup>324</sup> Pensnett Mr RE, Mr KD; Tipton Mr DN, Mr DA; Sedgley Mrs CB.

<sup>325</sup> Hopkins, *Social*, p. 191; Halsey, *British*, p. 174; Clarke, *Hope*, p. 255; Sandbrook, *Never Had It*, p. 103.

<sup>326</sup> Moorhouse, *Britain*, pp. 107-108; Marwick, *British Society*, p. 127; Coates and Silburn, *Poverty*, p. 50.

<sup>327</sup> Marwick, *British Society*, p. 43

their growing incomes”,<sup>328</sup> the oral testimony clearly indicates that teenagers perceived a continuing financial obligation to their families. Indeed, a surprising number of them were expected to hand their unopened wage packet to their mothers well beyond the age suggested by Abrams and certainly beyond the age of 16 suggested by Fowler.<sup>329</sup> Parents, particularly mothers, retained a good deal of control over the career choices of their offspring, for social as well as financial reasons.

Despite the introduction of careers advisors and employment exchanges, men, women and children continued to find employment through traditional means – via the recommendation of family and friends and parents continued to influence their children’s career decisions. This reliance could, as Todd argued, “ease the job search, but could also limit a girl’s occupational choices”.<sup>330</sup> However, the respondents’ ambitions to improve both their status and incomes appeared to overcome these limitations through a combination of job mobility and further education.

Although women’s employment opportunities increased, Kynaston indicated that the “sort of work realistically available remained on the whole extraordinarily limited”<sup>331</sup> into the 1960s and attitudes to married women’s paid employment were extremely slow to change. The female respondents indicated that their motives for employment were ambiguous – a mixture of financial necessity, economic independence and the need for stimulation outside the confines of family life. The concepts of respectability and duty remained inextricably linked to a man’s ability to support his family. Ambivalence was displayed towards working wives, with a number of male respondents expressing the view that women’s earnings were ‘pin money’. Women’s employment opportunities remained gender restricted, their rates of pay remained low and their working-hours reflected their continuing responsibility for the majority of domestic duties.

Nevertheless, despite numerous methods of acquiring income, which will be discussed in the following chapter, formal, full-time employment was perceived and

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<sup>328</sup> Benson, *Affluence and Authority*, p. 12; Fowler, ‘Teenage Consumers’, p. 136; Kynaston, *Austerity*, p. 293. See also Akhtar and Humphries, Chinn and Hoggart.

<sup>329</sup> Abrams, *Teenage Consumer*, p. 9; Fowler, D., *The First Teenagers: The Lifestyle of Young Wage earners in Interwar Britain*, London: The Woburn Press, p. 98; Kynaston, *Family Britain*, p. 664.

<sup>330</sup> Todd, ‘Poverty and Aspirations’, p. 128.

<sup>331</sup> Kynaston, *Family Britain*, p. 575.



highly valued as the main means of providing family security, achieving financial success and attaining social mobility. Recollections of arduous work and long hours, notwithstanding, memories of full-time employment were imbued with pride and satisfaction. For the majority, their employment was considered to be obligatory, as it confirmed status and respectability, conveying to the community their sense of duty and self-sufficiency. Individuals or families who were unable to work were perceived with pity, and those who were unwilling to work were recalled with disdain.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### INFORMAL INCOME:

#### PENNY CAPITALISM, MOONLIGHTING AND CRIME

Despite some assertions to the contrary, families in pre-war Britain did not necessarily acquire their entire income from the waged labour of formal employment. Benson has indicated that relatively few working-class families were solely reliant on the income derived from formal employment; they utilised a wide range of forms of self-employment, both legal and illegal, which may be “easily overlooked” when assessing income and economic status.<sup>1</sup> In the period of post-war affluence it would seem logical to assume that the safety-blanket of welfare provision negated the necessity to supplement wages in this manner. However, this was questioned in 1965 when Abel-Smith and Townsend highlighted various methods of acquiring income, including occasional earnings, money from sold goods or borrowed from relatives, or through rebate from over-paid bills and legacies.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, this chapter will assess the extent to which individuals and families in Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton continued to utilise other means, both legitimate and illegal, in order to augment their wages. It will show that far from being a phenomenon confined to an earlier era, the informal economy remained an important source of income in the 1950s and the subsequent decades. Marginal labour and income derived from the grey economy cannot be adequately measured by official documents as it was not included in census reports, or Department of Employment statistics. It is therefore, as Badger argued, best revealed through the medium of oral interviews.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Informal Income and Penny Capitalism**

The informal economy has long been acknowledged as a means of generating income to supplement the wages gained from formal employment. This income may be acquired through various activities, ranging from penny-capitalist ventures to casual

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<sup>1</sup> Benson, *Working Class*, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Abel-Smith and Townsend, *The Poor*, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Badger, ‘Household Consumption’, p. 100-101. The informal economy was not one of Badger’s research priorities, but she found that it “proved difficult to ignore its importance to working-class households”. She revealed that much of her knowledge of the informal economy was “taken from unexpected asides in oral interviews”.

labour paid ‘cash in hand’ - thereby evading officialdom in its various guises, from tax demands to statistical surveys. Relatively few families were so fortunate as to be “dependent simply upon a single, regular, weekly wage”, but many were able to supplement their seasonal or casual incomes with additional small-scale enterprises.<sup>4</sup>

It has been assumed that the advent of state welfare alleviated the necessity for additional money-making activities. However, whilst state intervention had lessened the likelihood of absolute poverty, the payments were insufficient to provide a real margin of security,<sup>5</sup> resulting in the continuation of traditional patterns of the acquisition of income, from crime to hop-picking.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, in some instances, extraneous activities were deemed to be vital for family survival and to ensure status and respectability within particular localities.

Men, women and children remained to some extent under the spectre of poverty and even in times of relative affluence, took steps to prevent prospective destitution – real or imagined. For example, in the 1950s when physical and mental ill-health affected his family, John Petty resorted to scavenging waste metal to provide an income. He believed that, whilst benefits improved, the position of the incapacitated it was still “very hard”.<sup>7</sup> This was endorsed in the interviews and, whilst it is possible that memories of the deprivation of the 1930s impacted upon perceptions of the older generation, respondents born after 1945 also expressed recollections of financial hardship.

It is therefore unsurprising that weekly incomes were augmented in a variety of customary ways, reflecting traditional gender divisions, whereby women focused upon extensions of their domestic roles and men utilised work-based skills.<sup>8</sup> These penny-capitalist ventures were embarked upon regardless of gender, occupation, or

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<sup>4</sup> Benson, *The Penny Capitalists*, p. 4; Roberts, E., ‘Working-Class Standards of Living in Barrow and Lancaster, 1890-1914’ in *Economic History Review*, 1977; Samuel, R. (ed.), *Village Life and Labour*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975.

<sup>5</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, Chapter 3.

<sup>6</sup> Watkiss, ‘Strategies’; Benson, *The Penny Capitalists*. Benson’s seminal work on working-class entrepreneurial activities focused upon the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; Roberts, ‘Working-Class Standards’. Roberts estimated that over 40% of working-class families were involved in penny capitalism between 1890 and 1914.

<sup>7</sup> Petty, *Five Fags*, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> See Badger, ‘Household Consumption’, chapter 2 part iii), for a comparative study of the informal employment of women in the Black Country and Coventry.

income. Although, these activities appear to have been undertaken by women only after marriage; no single female respondent recalled involvement in these activities. John Beck's reminiscences of 1940s and 50s Sedgley enumerated the methods of supplementing waged work "a penny at a time". The front rooms of terraced houses, en route to schools and factories, contained "tempting arrays" of cheap sweets. Practical skills were utilised, producing "items for sale to supplement the family budget".<sup>9</sup> During the summer, families made ice-cream and fizzy drinks, which they sold from stalls in their front gardens - mother producing the comestibles and father the stalls.<sup>10</sup> In Pensnett, Mrs Hickman's front garden contained a shed, from which reputedly "the best ice cream in the world" was sold, through the 1950s and into the 1960s.<sup>11</sup> Mrs Jones, a resident of the Lost City, purchased cigarettes and matches from the cash and carry, which she separated and re-sold to people who were "short of money".<sup>12</sup> In the late 1950s, young Betty ran up debts for crisps and Vimto at a similar shop. Her mother informed the shop-keeper "if you let her have anything else you'll have to stand the money 'cos I haven't got it".<sup>13</sup> Ginger beer was another commodity which enterprising housewives produced for sale - only rarely was it made in the bathtub.<sup>14</sup> Seasonal produce was put to good use - with women making jars of jam and pickles or "getting kids to pick blackberries for pies and when apples were cheap making toffee apples - the word soon got round the estate and there'd be a queue".<sup>15</sup> Women cooked faggots and peas (which customers collected in jugs and dishes), brewed ale and cooked chips.<sup>16</sup> Fish and chip shops were set up in the front room of terraced houses, particularly if husbands were incapacitated through ill-health or injury at work.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Beck, *Perhaps*, p. 94.

<sup>10</sup> Beck, *Perhaps*, p. 95.

<sup>11</sup> Mr BJ, Mr BT, Mrs IT, Miss YB, Miss VC and others who lived at the 'top end' of Pensnett. She purchased fresh milk from the adjacent farm to produce the ice-cream. Wafers were not available so customers took basins or other containers for their ice cream. Mrs IT who was a friend of Mrs Hickman's daughter used to enjoy helping to serve the customers. She also sold pop and if customers didn't have enough money for a full bottle she would sell them half a bottle in a jug.

<sup>12</sup> Tipton Mrs BT. She sold two cigarettes and ten matches for "a few pennies" as well as cooking and selling a variety of foods - pies, fish, chips and cakes.

<sup>13</sup> Mrs Lakin December 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Hann, *Tell It*, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> Tipton Mrs BT.

<sup>16</sup> Tipton Mrs Lakin, Mrs BT; Hutchinson, M., *A Penny Dip: My Black Country Girlhood*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2005, pp. 60-61.

<sup>17</sup> John Brimble April 1999; Mr Drew 1999; Hutchinson, *Penny Dip*, p. 62.

Penny-capitalist enterprises were not confined to comestibles; with access to sewing machines women fashioned cushion covers, curtains, table cloths and garments from remnants of material and re-sold within the neighbourhood.<sup>18</sup> Second-hand woollen garments bought from the market were washed, unpicked, re-knitted and sold.<sup>19</sup> Cedric Davies's mother "could do anything with a needle and cotton," including making surplus army blankets into coats.<sup>20</sup> Into the 1960s and 70s, women with sewing machines were in demand during the season of Sunday School Anniversaries, making the obligatory white dresses for girls who were 'on the platform'<sup>21</sup> and cheaper versions of school uniforms.<sup>22</sup> A garden shed or veranda was an ideal place for a sideline in the hairdressing trade, but an 'upstairs toilet' would suffice, although the bathrooms in the new council houses were ideal, providing the rent collector remained unenlightened.<sup>23</sup> There was an illicit hair salon in "practically every street", where friends and neighbours obtained cheap 'cuts and sets'.<sup>24</sup> Betty Tolley recalled that "Beattie, who had 13 children and a husband who used to get her pregnant and go back to Ireland, set up a hairdresser's in her veranda. She had two hairdryers and everyone went for a shampoo and set. She did my hair on my wedding day in 1966".<sup>25</sup>

The traditional money-making practice of letting rooms also continued, particularly in Tipton where an influx of foreign workers after 1945 created a ready market – as long as the rent collector remained oblivious to the fact.<sup>26</sup> John Brimble's grandmother earned extra money in the 1950s by taking in lodgers,<sup>27</sup> as did other women, offering

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<sup>18</sup> Beck, *Perhaps*, p. 95; Mrs Lakin December 1998; Mr Drew June 1999.

<sup>19</sup> Mr Tolley December 1998.

<sup>20</sup> Mr Davies December 1998; Mrs Mocroft; Mrs Cartwright June 1999.

<sup>21</sup> Pensnett Mrs PG, Miss YB; Sedgley Mrs PJ, Mr NS.

<sup>22</sup> Mr Tolley. In Tipton Mrs Butler made copies of school uniforms which Mr Tolley sold from his mobile shop.

<sup>23</sup> Hann, *Tell It*, p. 22; Mr Tolley, Mrs Mocroft and Mrs Cartwright. There were strict rules regulating the use of council houses for business purposes. Although Mr Tolley's father was one of those who circumvented the regulations during the 1960s, running several businesses from their rented accommodation.

<sup>24</sup> Mr Tolley December 1998.

<sup>25</sup> Tipton Mrs BT. Phone call on 17th June 2008, the day following her interview, as she recalled additional information.

<sup>26</sup> Mrs Churchman May 1998; Mrs Mocroft and Mrs Cartwright June 1999. Mr Tolley had a mobile shop and was able to list more than 10 families with lodgers, usually the children of the family shared bedrooms in order to accommodate the lodger. Allowing lodgers or additional family members to stay in council houses was strictly against the tenancy agreements.

<sup>27</sup> Mr Brimble April 1999.

rooms to workers needing accommodation.<sup>28</sup> “It was not uncommon for some single men who had left home to find lodgings; after the war Poles, West Indians, Czechs came to the area (Tipton) to work”.<sup>29</sup> “Down the Locarno Road there used to be a firm...and there were people coming from Coventry...and they’d lodge week days in this area and ...people took them in because it was an extra few bob”.<sup>30</sup> Mrs HW’s mother had lodgers during the war and, in 1951, she “offered digs to a man (a stranger in the street) to get extra money”.<sup>31</sup> Large families did not necessarily preclude lodgers – “big families had lodgers as well they’d put all the kids [in bed] together”.<sup>32</sup>

In the nineteenth century part-time laundry work was “always the most common way” for working-class women to earn extra income.<sup>33</sup> This continued after 1945, especially in Tipton, with many respondents recalling the practice.<sup>34</sup> Mrs Cartwright’s “sister did yer (sic) washing and your windows”.<sup>35</sup> Such services were particularly sought by women suffering ill-health or were ‘delicate’.<sup>36</sup> Mrs Lakin washed and ironed shirts to make a few extra shillings. She remarked “I’ve never been short of a penny - not when I could scrub and clean and do washing. It was hard work at the time but when you look back it was something that came naturally”.<sup>37</sup> Remuneration for these tasks was frequently low, but preferable to charity or state assistance.

As discussed previously, despite the National Health Service and state welfare, personal services continued to be performed within the community. In Pensnett, Mrs Archer attended women in childbirth, sat with the sick or dying and then performed the laying out of the corpse - wearing white aprons for births and black for laying-out. Informants recalled her ‘earthen’ (sacking) apron when she undertook laundry; this continued into the late 1960s when Nurse Timmins, the midwife, took over many of

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<sup>28</sup> Mrs Churchman May 1998.

<sup>29</sup> Mr Churchman 1998.

<sup>30</sup> Mr Drew.

<sup>31</sup> Tipton Mrs HW.

<sup>32</sup> Tipton Mr Tolley.

<sup>33</sup> Benson, *Penny Capitalists*, p. 73.

<sup>34</sup> Mrs Kendrick May 1999; Mrs Cartwright and Mrs Mocroft June 1999.

<sup>35</sup> Mrs Kendrick May 1999; Mrs Cartwright June 1999, Tipton Mrs VW.

<sup>36</sup> Mrs Lakin December 1998. Mrs Lakin washed for the wife of her husband’s manager, for an invalid cousin and washed the shirts for the owner of a Great Bridge furniture shop whose wife suffered with asthma and was consequently unable to cope with her domestic duties.

<sup>37</sup> Mrs Lakin December 1998.

her duties.<sup>38</sup> Continuity of the traditional exchange of personal services, in all three locations, was also a means of gaining additional income, in cash or kind. The recipient of the services would, on some occasions, repay the donor with small amounts of money or surplus material goods.

Women who lacked practical skills, or those with limited spare-time, often ran clubs - becoming agents for large mail order houses such as Littlewoods, Great Mills or Grattans. Almost every street or workplace had an agent responsible for the distribution of mail order catalogues, from which the requisite goods were chosen. The agent ordered the goods and collected weekly payments, receiving a small commission on the orders.<sup>39</sup> Virtually all female respondents either ‘ran’ clubs, or utilised the service during the study period. Mrs DB and Miss Plant both purchased linen and china from the catalogue of their next door neighbours.<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, although other respondents recollected purchasing items from a catalogue belonging to Miss Plant, she failed to mention this during her interview.<sup>41</sup> In the 1960s when her children were young, Mrs Adams ran a catalogue “for a few years”; the “little bit of commission” gave her a feeling of independence.<sup>42</sup> Bill Jones’ wife “ran a catalogue for a time – a bit of interest really- a bit of pocket money”.<sup>43</sup> Interviewees indicated that purchases were made to “support” needy friends or work-mates who became agents.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, women organised Christmas, or clubs, to gain income. These clubs hold relevance to discussions on income, consumption and saving and will be discussed in subsequent chapters.<sup>45</sup> Following her husband’s bankruptcy, Mrs Tolley supplemented her family’s income with profits from a catalogue and via a more unusual means - an opera singer, she performed in pubs and clubs; performances took

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<sup>38</sup> Pensnett Miss VC, Miss YB.

<sup>39</sup> Beck, *Perhaps*, p. 94.

<sup>40</sup> Pensnett Mrs DB, Miss NP; Sedgley Mrs PJ; Tipton Mr DA, Mr HT

<sup>41</sup> Pensnett Miss YB.

<sup>42</sup> Pensnett Mrs BA.

<sup>43</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ, MR RE’s aunt also ran a Littlewood’s catalogue.

<sup>44</sup> Beck, *Perhaps*, p. 95; Pensnett Miss VC, Miss YB, Miss NP, Mrs PG; Tipton Mrs Kendrick May 1999.

<sup>45</sup> Chapters Seven and Eight. For a recent and comprehensive discussion of the evolution of mail order industry from jewellery retailers of the 1870s to the leading mail order distributors of today, and a discussion of the changing customer/agent relationships in working-class communities since their inception, see O’Connell, S., ‘Retail Capitalism in the Parlour: mail order catalogues’ *Credit and Community: Working-Class Debt in the UK Since 1880*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, Chapter Three.

place at weekends, when each session earned “one and a half or two guineas which was good you know”.<sup>46</sup>

Recourse to the pawnshop was a customary means of acquiring funds.<sup>47</sup> However, by the end of the Second World War pawning was apparently in decline. As Hudson argued, the “pawning classes...[had] lost the habit of pawning” because “it was different for those reared in the welfare state”.<sup>48</sup> Post-war housing redevelopment removed the working-class from close proximity to local pawnshops and few new businesses were established.<sup>49</sup> Pawnshop numbers declined sharply, the 107 members registered with Birmingham’s National Pawnbrokers Association in 1940 fell to 13 by 1960.<sup>50</sup>

However, oral testimony revealed a number of pawnbrokers operating in the Black Country and their services were utilised in Pensnett and Tipton into the 1960s.<sup>51</sup> Despite increasing affluence, “money would be lent on virtually anything...pretty well nothing was turned away.”<sup>52</sup> The pawnshop remained almost exclusively the province of women and children, men had little involvement.<sup>53</sup> Frequently children were dispatched to pawn or redeem items for their own mother, or on behalf of neighbours who paid the child a few pennies to convey their ‘bundle’. This enabled adults to protect their standing and respectability within the community.<sup>54</sup> In the 1950s, Brenda Bullock recalled the humiliation of pawning her father’s suit on Monday mornings. Her embarrassment was compounded as she attempted to avoid

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<sup>46</sup> Tipton Mr HT. Mrs T was a trained opera singer who won gold medals for her performances as Madam Irene. During the 1950s and 60s her husband was declared bankrupt on at least two occasions so she used her talent to support the family.

<sup>47</sup> See Tebbutt, *Making Ends Meet*.

<sup>48</sup> Hudson, K., *Pawnbroking: An Aspect of British History*, London: Bodley Head, 1982, p. 120. Hudson provides detailed statistics concerning the decline in pawnbroking during the twentieth century and argues that the generation who had attained adult status when war broke out in 1939 was the “last generation for whom the pawn shop was a normal way of life”. p. 101.

<sup>49</sup> Tebbutt, *Making Ends Meet*, p. 196.

<sup>50</sup> Hudson, *Pawnbroking*, p. 121.

<sup>51</sup> Joseph Wiltshire and Son had several pawnbrokers’ shops in the area. In Tipton the Great Bridge branch was open and still functioning in 1986. Williams, N., *Shop in the Black Country*, Wolverhampton: Uralia Press, 1986, p. 53. Virtually all Tipton respondents referred to Wiltshire’s in the course of their interview.

<sup>52</sup> Bullock, *Pocket*, p. 69.

<sup>53</sup> Tebbutt, *Making Ends Meet*, p. 47

<sup>54</sup> Hann, *Tell It*, p. 43.



classmates from her grammar school, but she was aware that the £2.10s. which the suit realised allowed the family to “live through the rest of the week”.<sup>55</sup>

Although few interviewees actually admitted personal patronage of these establishments, many Pensnett respondents recalled “several people from ... [the] estate who used to go”.<sup>56</sup> The proprietor of one grocery store owned an adjacent corner shop where he charged radio batteries. This also operated as a pawnshop, where batteries and other items, particularly “best” suits, could be temporarily exchanged for “a few coppers”. The batteries were usually redeemed by the weekends, enabling families to hear the “Dick Barton Special”.<sup>57</sup> However Bill Jones, whose house was directly opposite to the shop, had no recollection of the dual function of the ‘battery shop’ as a pawnshop.<sup>58</sup> This diversification of pawnshops into other areas was a development which, according to Tebbutt, began in the 1930s, as users declined.<sup>59</sup>

In Tipton respondents recalled pawning as a continuing response to financial difficulties. Wiltshire’s pawnbrokers, with branches around the Midlands, operated in Great Bridge. The stigma associated with the pawnbroker’s shop remained, so it was customary for women to announce a trip to the market, diverting via Wiltshire’s to obtain spending money.<sup>60</sup> On Monday mornings during the 1960s, best suits were taken to Wiltshire’s, Schofield’s or Purnell’s, until the next weekend and “women with bundles” also queued outside the pawnbrokers at Dudley Port.<sup>61</sup> Although some women queued openly, others were more surreptitious, preferring to avoid the neighbours, especially as their husbands were unaware of them utilising this service.<sup>62</sup> None of the Sedgley correspondents admitted recollections of pawn shops in their immediate vicinity, but recalled seeing them in adjacent towns.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Bullock, *Pocket*, p. 69.

<sup>56</sup> Pensnett Miss VC, Miss YB; Tipton Mrs Drew, Mrs Churchman, Mrs Mcroft..

<sup>57</sup> Pensnett Miss VC, Mrs DB, Miss YB.

<sup>58</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ.

<sup>59</sup> Tebbutt, *Making Ends Meet*, p. 58.

<sup>60</sup> Mr Tolley December 1998, Mr and Mrs Churchman May 1998, Mrs Kendrick May 1999, Mr Drew June 1998.

<sup>61</sup> Tipton, HT; Mr Drew, Mrs Kendrick.

<sup>62</sup> Mrs Mcroft and Mrs Cartwright June 1999.

<sup>63</sup> Dudley, Bilston and Wolverhampton.

Men continued to utilise their talents and spare time to gain additional income. Vegetables and flowers from gardens or allotments were sold or exchanged, as they had been in the nineteenth century.<sup>64</sup> This was not confined to the areas of study, but was common until 1970 throughout the Black Country and, as Badger revealed, in Coventry too.<sup>65</sup> Most men in Tipton grew vegetables, selling or swapping the surplus.<sup>66</sup> In Mr Whitehouse's street one family had "a vegetable plot at the back of the house...they'd got a very large garden and they used to sell to help his income".<sup>67</sup> Those who didn't sell their produce used traditional systems of bartering. "Dad used to have a large greenhouse – grow grapes and tomatoes, we tried to sell them, but he give 'em all away... that was his belief, it comes back to you in other ways".<sup>68</sup> Despite the curtailment of rationing, the keeping of livestock continued, as it had in previous generations. Badger indicated that, although "it was expected that much...self-provisioning activity would die out...after the war...the practice of keeping...[animals] persisted".<sup>69</sup> They were used to supplement incomes and, into the 1960s, a number of families kept pigs or chickens, which they fed with kitchen waste, selling surplus eggs and meat.<sup>70</sup> Mr Wesley's family kept pigs and chickens; when he married, in 1954, his wife had an egg round at weekends, selling door-to-door.<sup>71</sup> Ted Gulliver's friend, from Shropshire, kept pigs and sold the meat to his colleagues at a Tipton engineering works; at a large company he had a ready market for the meat and was able to supplement his wages.<sup>72</sup>

Alternatively, hobbies, talents and skills continued to be utilised to accrue additional income. "One bloke at the factory, he was a pigeon fancier and used to breed them. And I always remember him telling me that he used to make a fortune selling these birds. He very rarely flew them himself, he was just breeding the birds to sell them

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<sup>64</sup> Benson, *Penny Capitalists*, Chapter Three; Mr Churchman May 1998; Mr Tolley December 1998; Mrs Cartwright June 1999.

<sup>65</sup> Price, *In My Life*, p. 33; Ann Surmann in Brew, *Wolverhampton*, p. 35; Badger, 'Household Consumption', pp. 122-172.

<sup>66</sup> Mrs Kendrick May 1999.

<sup>67</sup> Tipton Mr BW.

<sup>68</sup> Tipton Mr BW; Mr Drew.

<sup>69</sup> Badger, 'Household Consumption', p. 130.

<sup>70</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ, Miss NP, Mrs DB and Mr SG; Tipton Mr JW, Mr BW, Mr TG; Mr Tolley December 1998.

<sup>71</sup> Sedgley Mr DW.

<sup>72</sup> Sedgley Mr TG; Tipton Mr Tolley.

off.”<sup>73</sup> When Mrs Jones’ husband retired from Aston Villa Football Club, in 1950, he played part-time for Worcester City, in addition to his employment in the family haulage business<sup>74</sup> and throughout the 1950s and 60s Mr Weigh’s employment as a toolmaker was supplemented by an income from semi-professional football.<sup>75</sup>

Second, casual jobs in conjunction with full-time paid employment were prevalent throughout the period, particularly amongst shift-workers. The inconvenience and disruption of shift-work had its compensations, enabling workers to supplement their income in numerous ways. Driving was a lucrative skill, utilised at weekends and evenings. Mr Nixon’s father used his fortnight’s holiday from the steelworks - “Dad did a driving job on the side, coaches and lorries to make ends meet...that was our holidays. Oh yes on more than one occasion I’ve been to Blackpool for three days...very rare there wasn’t a seat for us”.<sup>76</sup> In addition to work as a civil engineer, Mr DW spent his Saturday mornings, in the 1960s, driving a delivery van for Uddal’s butchers in Sedgley. He was paid seven shillings and six pence for three hours work, which contributed towards mortgage payments.<sup>77</sup> The purchase of an old post-office van in the early 1960s allowed Mr Tolley to supplement his income by transporting fellow employees from Palethorpe’s to Rhyl for their annual holidays.<sup>78</sup>

Part-time penny-capitalist ventures, highlighted by Benson, remained an important source of additional income in all three communities, in the post-war period.<sup>79</sup> At least one foundry worker swept chimneys between shifts during the 1950s and 60s.<sup>80</sup> The ownership of basic tools enabled enterprising men to manufacture or repair a variety of items for resale. As Mr Davies conceded, “if you could sell something that was great”.<sup>81</sup> Possession of a cobbler’s ‘last’ facilitated the mending of shoes and boots for family and neighbours.<sup>82</sup> Men travelled the neighbourhood performing odd

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<sup>73</sup> Tipton Mr BW; Pensnett Mr SG; Badger, ‘Household Consumption’, p. 130-134.

<sup>74</sup> Sedgley Mrs PJ.

<sup>75</sup> Tipton Mr JW.

<sup>76</sup> Tipton Mr DN.

<sup>77</sup> Sedgley Mr DW.

<sup>78</sup> Sedgley Mr HT.

<sup>79</sup> Benson, *The Penny Capitalists*.

<sup>80</sup> Mr Churchman May 1998.

<sup>81</sup> Mr Davies December 1998.

<sup>82</sup> Hathorne, *Five Minutes*, p. 76.

jobs - gardening, decorating, or repairing bicycles.<sup>83</sup> In the 1960s and 70s, Mrs Allen's husband "used to do decorating, cleaning windows, all sorts".<sup>84</sup> Despite the fact that during the 1960s Mrs MD's father, a maintenance engineer, had the security and regular wages of "a staff job. Dad and the man next door, who was a painter and decorator, used to...do some painting and decorating, sometimes of an evening to earn some money".<sup>85</sup> The reasons for additional work were clear; in Mr Drew's opinion "spare-time work, before or after a shift, was essential if you wanted to save any money, that's what you had to do".<sup>86</sup>

Those with carpentry skills and the requisite tools made wooden ironing boards and rustic furniture,<sup>87</sup> or constructed Christmas toys in their shed for "a few bob and a pint".<sup>88</sup> Mr Churchman, an engineer by trade, made and sold toys and re-upholstered furniture, before or after shifts in the tube industry, collecting the items on a handcart or repairing them in situ; in his opinion "most men were pretty handy".<sup>89</sup> "Men made things as a hobby and if they could get a few bob by doing it good luck to them".<sup>90</sup> Toys bought for a few pennies from jumble sales, or markets, were renovated and resold for a couple of shillings.<sup>91</sup> In Pensnett, Mr BT made wooden chests and wheelbarrows, selling them in the neighbourhood.<sup>92</sup>

Arthur Jones, a motorman at Round Oak Steelworks, also worked part-time on the farm next door to his home. He rented a farm cottage in exchange for cleaning the cow-sheds, which was completed in the mornings when he worked the 2pm to 10pm shift and in the afternoons when he was "on nights". This continued until the cottages were condemned and the family re-housed in 1954.<sup>93</sup> Teenager Cedric Davies, a moulder during the 1950s, acted as a bookies' runner between shifts, working from the toilets of the Black Horse pub in order to avoid the police. He was employed

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<sup>83</sup> Mr Drew and Mr Churchman May 1998.

<sup>84</sup> Tipton Mrs MA . Her husband undertook these jobs from their marriage in 1958.

<sup>85</sup> Tipton Mrs MD.

<sup>86</sup> Mr Drew May 1998.

<sup>87</sup> Beck, *Perhaps*, p. 95.

<sup>88</sup> Mr Brimble June 1999; Mr Churchman May 1998.

<sup>89</sup> Mr Churchman May 1998.

<sup>90</sup> Mr Drew June 1999.

<sup>91</sup> Mr Churchman May 1998.

<sup>92</sup> Pensnett Mr BT.

<sup>93</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ. The farmer paid him 7s/6d a week which he promptly handed back to the farmer with the rent book as the rent amounted to 7s/6d.

alongside his father who also “took bets” at work *and* collected the coupons for Hill’s football pools.<sup>94</sup> In winter, when he was unable to clean windows, Tom Haywood earned money clearing the snow from pathways and driveways in Sedgley.<sup>95</sup> Mr Parker of Tipton, a clay-miner, did casual work for the Post-Office, usually around Christmas time in order to “earn a few shillings extra”.<sup>96</sup>

‘Moonlighting’<sup>97</sup> was another means of supplementing income. Whilst not necessarily condoned by employers, oral testimony indicates their awareness of the practice. The experience of Mr Wade of Sedgley was fairly typical: “I used to [moonlight] myself when I was – well I’d got to survive (laughs) that’s how we got the money put together in 18 months to buy that little house.”<sup>98</sup> Throughout the period, one electrician believed “that was a perk of the job. Like, there was always someone who wanted a job doing”.<sup>99</sup> Bill Jones, a personnel manager until the 1990s, recalled instances of employees “off doing other jobs elsewhere”, citing glass workers who “used to work six till two and ...they’d go down to Staffordshire Crystal and work a few hours there”. In his opinion, it was “common knowledge...as long as they attended work you know...[employers] didn’t tell what they could and couldn’t do (sic)”.<sup>100</sup> “There was one or two people doing little jobs like. You could always get a little job somewhere...for a few hours paid cash in hand. Doing a little bit of fettling – that was filing castings...or a bit of ‘donkey work’, clearing up the yard on a Sunday morning”.<sup>101</sup>

Men took advantage of spare minutes and materials from paid employment to manufacture ‘foreigners’ (illicit items for personal use or resale) at work. “They did foreigners yes!”<sup>102</sup> “Electricians did. They called them foreigners...they’d probably put in a bit of wiring for somebody you see”.<sup>103</sup> This precarious operation necessitated avoidance of foremen, security men and other figures of authority.

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<sup>94</sup> Mr Davies December 1998.

<sup>95</sup> Gallo, *Tinker*, p. 174.

<sup>96</sup> Parker, *Black Country Boy*, p. 8.

<sup>97</sup> To work outside a person’s official working hours.

<sup>98</sup> Sedgley Mr GW.

<sup>99</sup> Pensnett Mr RE.

<sup>100</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ.

<sup>101</sup> Tipton Mr JW.

<sup>102</sup> Sedgley Mr PR

<sup>103</sup> Sedgley Mr SW.

However, an understanding foreman was not necessarily averse to men ‘making a bit on the side’ and this was viewed as one of the benefits of manual labour. Men working the night-shift at one Tipton engineering factory, during the 1960s, used scrap off-cuts of tubing to manufacture furniture. One man made a tubular television table and was cycling home with it across his shoulders when he was stopped by a policeman at the railway crossing. Because he’d forgotten to get written permission from his charge-hand, he was taken to court and fined five shillings.<sup>104</sup>

Mr Drew was an engineer at Lee Howls, of Tipton, where the workers made cigarette lighters and silver jewellery, with sixpenny pieces or half-crown coins set into them. They were sold or given as gifts - “they used to do all sorts. Make a ring or whatever and then get what they could for it”.<sup>105</sup> Mr Drew justified this behaviour, expressing resentment that, despite prior war-time service with the company, his pay was low and he “had to make up the time I’d lost before I could get engineer’s wages again”.<sup>106</sup>

These activities were not confined to manual workers. Tailors made evening visits to clients, taking sample books of suiting materials and producing suits at reduced rates.<sup>107</sup> Draughtsmen at James Gibbons spent their spare time “doing a few drawings” for houses, extensions and garages, receiving a “couple of quid in return”. One draughtsman, a skilled artist, sold oil paintings which he completed in lunch hours and quiet periods at work.<sup>108</sup> Mr Houlton, a structural engineer, was engaged in private contract work for another firm, designing and drawing machinery in the evenings “on top of my regular job”. This practice continued until his retirement in 1987.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Mr Churchman May 1998. As tubing below a certain length couldn’t be used for manufacturing workers were allowed to utilise it providing they had written permission from the charge-hand or foreman.

<sup>105</sup> Mr Drew June 1998.

<sup>106</sup> Mr Drew June 1998.

<sup>107</sup> Sedgley Mr NS, Mrs PJ.

<sup>108</sup> Pensnett Mr RA.

<sup>109</sup> Tipton Mr OH.

Police Superintendent Mr RB explained a variety of ways in which full-time employment customarily supplemented incomes; in his opinion this was necessary as wages remained low in certain sectors.

“Dad worked as a park gardener he didn’t have a very good wage at all” and worked a good deal of overtime. “At night in summer he would be responsible for running the boats...on the lake...and in winter he would go to the greenhouses to stoke the fires up...so that was overtime for him.”<sup>110</sup>

He believed that those unable to work overtime needed to find an additional income: “oh yes, pubs, pubs, people working behind the bar...a lot of people used to have their full-time job but they’d be part of the special constabulary, they’d be retained firemen, they’d be auxiliary with the ambulance service...they invariably did (collected) the football pools. Dad did at one time”.<sup>111</sup>

The practice of multiple employments, often on a semi-casual basis, was prevalent. Mr MJ of Tipton: “Well I know for a fact my father had three different jobs. ‘Cos he was working full-time on the railways...he’d got a steel stockholder’s business and he was driving for that and then he’d got a driving school. And he also worked nights loading ice-cream lorries...and a lot of people in the area did the same as dad”.<sup>112</sup> Between 1961 and 1981, Mr MJ emulated his father with a secondary occupation, surreptitiously repairing the machines which he had manufactured in his full-time job. “I did engineering down the road... [and] I used to go with one of the fitters at night or in the afternoons when we finished work. Repairing the machines (laughter) we made it at Vono’s and then we’d take it back there [surreptitiously] to repair it”.<sup>113</sup> One moulder at Chatwin’s, also “had three jobs... he used to clean up at the bakery ‘cos we had a bakery opposite. Hurley’s bakery and he used to go over there and clean up...and he had a gardening job. He’d go up and garden for the same (family). Les Hurley...he used to go up there every night.”<sup>114</sup> The respondents sometimes cited financial motives for the additional jobs. For example, from the 1960s to his

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<sup>110</sup> Tipton Mr RB.

<sup>111</sup> Tipton Mr RB.

<sup>112</sup> Tipton Mr MJ.

<sup>113</sup> Tipton Mr MJ.

<sup>114</sup> Tipton Mr TG.

retirement, Mr Green's father was employed as a moulder and also worked as a barman at local pubs, but "it was just financial...I mean he loved having a drink as they all did. But he did that purely and simply to make enough money".<sup>115</sup>

Employees of Round Oak Steelworks were renowned for 'moonlighting', engaged in multiple occupations into the 1970s.<sup>116</sup>

"You ain't gonna believe this. One day, and this man was a top paid roller in the cogging mill...one of the top wages in the steelworks. And somebody's relation dies...and who was one of the carrying the coffin? This chap from Round Oak...worked for the funeral directors, used to drive the car for 'em. There's another one...worked for a double glazing company as a fitter...a bloke off the shift at Round Oak... All types, you name it, if they was at Round Oak they did *any* kind of job. Window cleaning, gardening everything you name it they did it...We had a gaffer at Round Oak...on nights he'd be asleep in his office...he'd got his own window cleaning round. He used to clean nearly every house in Kinver. So when he was on nights he'd go home and then he was cleaning windows all day long... And he was a Foreman."<sup>117</sup>

Again, although respondents cited low income as the main reason for additional employment, motives are rarely clear-cut. Respondents also explained their need for a supplementary income in various ways – the spectre of poverty, a growing family, the purchase of consumer durables and the necessity of earning 'pocket' or 'beer money'. Mr MJ's family were comparatively affluent, he was an only child and both parents were in full-time employment, but his father smoked up to 100 cigarettes a day, which was undoubtedly expensive.<sup>118</sup> Ted Gulliver thought that his father worked every night for "a bit of company" *and* because after finishing his second job he would go to the Foxyard's public house for a drink.<sup>119</sup> Mrs HW's grandfather followed the coal delivery man on his rounds and when the coal was dropped he would offer to "get it in" for a small fee which would be spent in the public house.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Sedgley Mr FG.

<sup>116</sup> Pensnett Mr KD, Mr BJ, Mr RE.

<sup>117</sup> Pensnett Mr KD.

<sup>118</sup> Tipton Mr MJ.

<sup>119</sup> Tipton Mr TG.

<sup>120</sup> Pensnett Mrs HW.



For some men at least, additional work was to earn money for their personal use, “for beer and fags”, without depriving the family.<sup>121</sup>

Despite post-war prosperity, paid, informal employment, entrepreneurial enterprises and penny-capitalist activities continued amongst younger, unmarried males. A surprising number of respondents, in all three areas, contributed to the family income whilst in full-time education - a practice continuing well beyond the study period - and retained additional jobs upon leaving school. From the late 1940s, Mr Tolley and his siblings sold fruit and vegetables: “from the moment we could. I can remember, before we left Princes End when I was five, standing there boxes of peaches round me. Against the wall so I couldn’t get out – four for a shilling.” He also helped his mother, skinning frozen, imported rabbits “until our fingers bled”.<sup>122</sup> During the 1960s, Mr Nixon “had a cycle repair business from the age of eleven onwards” and, by the age of 14, he also worked part-time for the local butcher.<sup>123</sup> Frank Green, who was born in 1952 and his school-friends all worked from an early age:

“from when I was 12. It was illegal but, going on 13. Within a few months ... he give me the keys and I used to open up at 5 o’ clock and put the papers up for the other lads *and* do a paper round. Oh I got extra money for it...I did that seven days a week. I didn’t go to school to be honest with you from when I was 12. It was a job and I was getting paid whereas at school you weren’t getting paid that was the reason ... Certainly all my friends... had paper rounds, worked in shops, helped the milkman was a favourite one, the pop man you know Corona man anything like that they all did. A couple of them had window-cleaning rounds yeah”.<sup>124</sup>

Familial obligation was the *raison d’être*, at least for some, as Mr KD explained: “you knew you’d got to help out”.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Pensnett Mr KD.

<sup>122</sup> Tipton Mr HT.

<sup>123</sup> Tipton Mr DN.

<sup>124</sup> Sedgley Mr FG. Mr FG now owns a number of business concerns and a retail outlet.

<sup>125</sup> Pensnett Mr KD.

Despite welfare payments and increasing affluence, family circumstances were such that the income generated by children was sometimes vital. Mr Tolley of Tipton recalled that during the late 1960s and early 70s:

“There was one little lad, 11 years old, he used to help me [in the mobile]. You know fetch orders for me and tek ‘em (sic) to the houses. His dad never did a day’s work in his life. Oh ar and his brothers and sisters and his missus [all worked]. I used to pay him half a crown a week and his dad would be waiting for him when he got back. So I started buying him things clothes and that you know. I’d say come on Vic and I’d take him and buy him something.”<sup>126</sup>

Again, the motives for such endeavours were not necessarily clear-cut; deprivation and financial necessity were not the sole reasons for enterprise. Custom dictated behaviour, with young people feeling obliged to make financial contributions. Mr SB, born in 1960,

“had window cleaning rounds at weekends and everything...used to take me young brother with me as well...we used Windowlene in them days...used to do a proper job.” He also worked during school hours – “I used to go in [to school] ‘cos I lived quite close to the school so I could go in over the fence. I used to go and get my mark first and then I’d go over to Commonsidge Service Station serving petrol”. He explained - “me dad had got such a good job she [mother] didn’t really want it...I felt obliged to [contribute], it was the way I was brought up”.<sup>127</sup>

Mr KD gave his mom five shillings a week from his paper round; he said that “you knew you’d gotta give your mom some’at. You knew you’d gotta help out...It weren’t my suggestion...again it was me dad...cos he’d done it. Apparently it’s the way it was in the day you know. You ought to give your mother some’at you know”.<sup>128</sup>

The motives for acquiring extra income were not entirely altruistic, a number of young men purchased consumer durables. One seventeen year old had “always been

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<sup>126</sup> Tipton Mr HT.

<sup>127</sup> Pensnett Mr SB.

<sup>128</sup> Pensnett Mr KD.

buying and selling cars” and worked as a D.J. to purchase vehicles for himself.<sup>129</sup> Additional work also financed expensive hobbies - Mr Nixon worked as a waiter during his apprenticeship, to facilitate his hobby as a Speedway rider<sup>130</sup> and Mr MJ undertook outwork from Newey’s so that he could buy a new bike.<sup>131</sup>

Entire families continued to supplement their incomes with traditional, seasonal, agricultural work and, despite the valiant attempts of education authorities to prohibit this, it continued well into the 1950s. Potato, pea, fruit and hop-picking, functioned as employment and recreation and were almost exclusively the preserve of women and children.<sup>132</sup> Despite increased leisure activities, and access to transport, it provided an opportunity to escape the home environment for the rural outskirts of the Black Country. Organised by the matriarch of streets or families, these excursions were eagerly anticipated. Bill Jones’s grandmother, the instigator of hop-picking in one Pensnett community, hired a coach to transport family and neighbours. Lasting six weeks, the family holiday was a means of supplementing income.<sup>133</sup> Mrs Kendrick explained why the custom continued in the 1950s: “We needed the money [but]...it was a holiday, yes it was, yes it was...if you couldn’t afford a holiday that *was* a holiday”.<sup>134</sup> The additional income was sometimes so important that children whose mothers were unable to accompany them were placed under the guardianship of another adult.<sup>135</sup> Mr Drew recalled that “the children used to pick as well as the adults, they’d get a few bob and get paid for their holiday”.<sup>136</sup> Mr Williams’ classmates “disappeared for the odd day for the pay or tayter (sic) or hop picking”.<sup>137</sup> Even teenagers in full-time employment were able to earn money at the weekends.<sup>138</sup> They travelled to the hop-gardens by bus on Friday evenings and returned on Sunday

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<sup>129</sup> Tipton Mrs MD; Pensnett Mr SB.

<sup>130</sup> Tipton Mr DN.

<sup>131</sup> Tipton Mr MJ.

<sup>132</sup> White, *Worst Street*, p. 54.

<sup>133</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ.

<sup>134</sup> Mrs Kendrick May 1999; Hann, *Tell It*, p. 61. Kathleen Hann of Wednesbury had similar experiences of working holidays.

<sup>135</sup> Aunts, grandmothers, friends or neighbours stood guardian of children whose mothers were in full time employment, pregnant or ill.

<sup>136</sup> Mr Drew June 1998; Mrs Cartwright and Mrs Mcroft June 1999.

<sup>137</sup> Williams, J. R., ‘Hop-Picking’ *The Blackcountryman*, vol. 23, Winter 1990, p. 15.

<sup>138</sup> *Black Country Bugle*, 28<sup>th</sup> October 1999, p. 3.

nights, ready for work the next day, with suitcases full of produce which were sold to neighbours or at the markets.<sup>139</sup>

Tipton ‘hoppers’ were conveyed from Great Bridge and Five Ways stations to Worcester, Hereford or Bromsgrove on the “hop-picker’s special”, or crammed onto lorries or charabancs, the rear seats removed to contain the luggage.<sup>140</sup> The excursions attracted the attention of the press, particularly following the Education Act in 1947.<sup>141</sup> Newspapers reminded parents that they would be summoned before the court if children were absent from school for hop-picking.<sup>142</sup> Threats were not necessarily a deterrent and in September 1949 a *Dudley Herald* editorial questioned the wisdom of allowing school-aged children to “remain at farms for weeks at a time”.<sup>143</sup> Edna Smart recalled that fruit-picking in June and July and hop-picking in September meant that “we were never at school”.<sup>144</sup>

Prosecutions and subsequent fines suggested that the income, and the pleasure, derived from such activities outweighed the risk of courtroom censure or public notoriety; locally there were 1,200 prosecutions in 1949.<sup>145</sup> Bill Jones regularly took two weeks from school, in the 1950s, travelling to Burleigh Court in Hertfordshire; his parents were aware that the authorities were “trying to stamp it out”, but were undeterred.<sup>146</sup> In 1950, amongst escalating prosecutions, the *Daily Herald* criticised the “hopping madness which ensued each September”.<sup>147</sup> However, councillors expressed concern at legal intervention, arguing that children traditionally worked in the hop-fields.<sup>148</sup> In 1955, one farmer was so concerned at losing his juvenile work-

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<sup>139</sup> Pensnett, Mr BJ; Tipton Mr Davies, Mr Tolley.

<sup>140</sup> ‘The Hop Pickers Special’, *Black Country Bugle*, March 1997, p.7; Mr Drew 10<sup>th</sup> June 1998.

<sup>141</sup> The departure to the hop-fields in particular was usually front page news and accompanied by photographs. The yearly prosecution figures were also frequently put upon the front page of the newspaper.

<sup>142</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 1945-1955.

<sup>143</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 10<sup>th</sup> September 1949, p 4.

<sup>144</sup> Williams, N., *More Black Country Folk at Werk*, Uralia, 1990, p. 56.

<sup>145</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 31st July 1950, p. 1.

<sup>146</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ.

<sup>147</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 9<sup>th</sup> September 1950, p. 2.

<sup>148</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 4<sup>th</sup> February 1950, p. 5. Parents who were prepared to obtain and complete forms from the local authority were allowed to keep their children away from school for an additional 14 days.

force that he offered to pay any ensuing fines, although the court declined to accept his payments.<sup>149</sup>

Parents sometimes excused their children's prolonged stay in the "hop-country" on health-grounds, but Mr Brown, the prosecuting solicitor for Staffordshire County Council, asked magistrates to remember that the school medical service was specifically instigated to combat ill-health in children.<sup>150</sup> Although parental prosecutions declined, newspapers continued to print reports and photographs of adults and children embarking upon their annual 'holiday'.<sup>151</sup> In 1958 restrictions were tightened, prohibiting children from the hop-fields without parental supervision and insisting upon their return by 29<sup>th</sup> September.<sup>152</sup> By the end of the decade the problem decreased, due to heavy fines and agricultural mechanisation. No hop-picking prosecutions were recorded in the *Dudley Herald* in 1959.<sup>153</sup> Despite legal restrictions, manual picking continued in some hop-yards until the late 1960s.<sup>154</sup> A minority of parents continued to incur penalties for their children's absence from school, although their prosecutions were no longer front-page news.<sup>155</sup>

The line between legal and illegal activities and the 'grey' area which divides the two, is subjective in the extreme. Although the letter of the law dictated the boundaries of crime and punishment, dubious activities were considered permissible under extenuating circumstances, at least in the eyes of the populace. As White asserted of the pre-war era, "the battle for subsistence took place in an arena where the barriers between legal and illegal activities were hard to discern".<sup>156</sup> During six years of war the British people accepted the circumvention of rationing, but the subsequent period of austerity intensified these behavioural patterns, particularly as the longevity of restrictions increased resentment.<sup>157</sup> By 1950, public patience was exhausted - "the

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<sup>149</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1955, p. 5. By 1955 the number of hop-picking prosecutions fell from 475 in the previous year to a mere 10 cases. *Dudley Herald*, 10<sup>th</sup> December 1955, p. 10.

<sup>150</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1950.

<sup>151</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 6<sup>th</sup> July 1957, p. 1; 5<sup>th</sup> September 1957, p. 6.

<sup>152</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 25<sup>th</sup> July 1958, p. 1.

<sup>153</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 31<sup>st</sup> July 1959, p. 1.

<sup>154</sup> *Black Country Bugle*, 7<sup>th</sup> November 1999.

<sup>155</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 17<sup>th</sup> February 1961, p. 8.

<sup>156</sup> White, *Worst Street*, p. 124.

<sup>157</sup> Smithies, E., *The Black Economy in England Since 1914*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1984, p. 85. Smithies indicated that people who expected peace to end the rigours of wartime were "soon disillusioned".

British public... were not prepared to tolerate this kind of economic strait-jacket in peacetime”<sup>158</sup> and these feelings of frustration affected attitudes to, and perceptions of, crime.

## Crime

Data concerning the black, or indeed the grey, market economy is notoriously difficult to discern and quantify and related statistics are reliant upon reports of court cases.<sup>159</sup> Consequently, the extrapolation of statistical evidence produces only a partial record of crime and criminal activities.<sup>160</sup> In the immediate post-war period available data was “fragmented and unsatisfactory” for several reasons.<sup>161</sup> Offences were clandestine in nature, their discovery did not necessarily mean a court appearance<sup>162</sup> and they were open to differing interpretations by the perpetrator, the victim and the authorities.

In 1949 crimes of theft were increasing, with a “growing element in the population that...[remained] willing to purchase through illegal channels without enquiring too closely into the vendor’s title to the goods”.<sup>163</sup> Previously law-abiding citizens became disillusioned with the concept of ‘fair shares’ and less likely to object to Black Market dealings, which legitimated formerly unacceptable behaviour.<sup>164</sup> The *Dudley Herald* observed that “shortages of many things – food, fuel, houses and materials...seem to be clogging industry and affecting the whole life of the community”.<sup>165</sup> Newspaper reports and the perceptions of the respondents corroborate the accuracy of this assertion, but also reflect ambivalent attitudes to petty crime. Respondents condoned crime as a contingency against poverty, citing extenuating circumstances for pilfering and theft. “Years of war and shortages turned so many honest decent people into scroungers and ‘fiddlers’ and made many others

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<sup>158</sup> Smithies, *Black Economy*, p. 111.

<sup>159</sup> Silcock, H., *The Increase in Crimes of Theft, 1938-1949*, Liverpool: University Press of Liverpool, 1949, p. 4; Smithies, *Black Economy*, p. 4.

<sup>160</sup> Smithies, *Black Economy*, p. 5.

<sup>161</sup> Silcock, *Increase in Crimes*, p. 6.

<sup>162</sup> Smithies, *Black Economy*, p. 5.

<sup>163</sup> Silcock, *Increase in Crimes*, p. 10.

<sup>164</sup> Roodhouse, M., ‘Popular Morality and the Black Market in Britain, 1939-1955’ in Trentman, F., and Fleming Just, *Food and Conflict in the Age of Two World Wars*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006, p. 260. Roodhouse argued that this behaviour was deemed increasingly acceptable as “compensation for the many personal sacrifices...made at the behest of central government”. P. 244

<sup>165</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 18<sup>th</sup> January 1947, p. 4.

tolerant of the dubious”.<sup>166</sup> Mr Brimble’s opinion was typical, “if you want anything just go into a pub and ask...it’s a close-knit community and no-one will shop you, good luck to you...everyone makes a bit on the side”.<sup>167</sup>

As restrictions worsened the circumvention of rationing increased, with scant acknowledgment from those involved that it could be construed as criminal activity. Retailers, wholesalers and customers were engaged in varying degrees and respectable members of the localities utilised the black market with increasing regularity as shortages increased.<sup>168</sup> The frustration of the populace was reflected in the *Dudley Herald*, debating for several weeks in 1949 the furore surrounding bread rationing.<sup>169</sup> Previously unobtainable items were frequently explained as having “fallen off the back of a lorry”.<sup>170</sup> Respondents saw this as a minor infraction of petty rules, not a crime. In Pensnett for example, “you could always get stuff on the black market. There was always somebody who knew somebody”.<sup>171</sup> Kynaston indicated that food rationing and the high living-costs were the main inconveniences of 1948.<sup>172</sup>

In the late 1940s, Mrs IT was employed at Gill and Weaver where “under the counter they put three tins of salmon [for] favourite customers and crossed others off [the waiting list]”.<sup>173</sup> Ron Taylor described another illegal exchange of goods and services in 1948: When a customer having ordered a suit lacked the requisite number of coupons, Ron accepted 100cwt of sugar in recompense.<sup>174</sup> In the same year, a travelling salesman came into his tailor’s shop with a broken fly zip; it was repaired and Mr Ron was reimbursed with twelve ¼ lb. packets of tea.<sup>175</sup> “After the war there was still rationing and actually people got things off the Black Market – people in the know”.<sup>176</sup> Similarly, in Sedgley:

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<sup>166</sup> Petty, *Five*, p. 48.

<sup>167</sup> Mr Brimble April 1999.

<sup>168</sup> Kynaston, *Austerity*, p. 111.

<sup>169</sup> *Dudley Herald*, July 1946.

<sup>170</sup> Hutchinson, *Penny Dip*, p. 63.

<sup>171</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ.

<sup>172</sup> Kynaston, *Austerity*, p. 296. At least according to female mass-observation panellists.

<sup>173</sup> Pensnett Mr BT.

<sup>174</sup> Gallo, *Tinker*, p. 156.

<sup>175</sup> Gallo, *Tinker*, p. 161.

<sup>176</sup> Mr Churchman.

“at that particular time there was all sorts of rationing going on and er everybody – most people got what they could, and if they were able to get a little bit more by wheeling and dealing, anything other than stealing. A guy close to us kept a couple of pigs you know and we gave all the scraps for the pigs and in return we got the occasional joint of pork. Rationing at that time was probably the be all and end all of everything”.<sup>177</sup>

Evasion of government regulations concerning pig-keeping was frequently mentioned in interviews; especially when it contravened laws forbidding the sale, or the presentation of meat to friends and family.<sup>178</sup> Until the early 1950s, “we’d always got joints of pork and sides of bacon [hidden] in our cellar”.<sup>179</sup> Mr Weigh explained that after the war “me auntie had pigs in her back garden, at one time and you used to have to give the government some” but not necessarily the requisite amount. The surplus was hidden under floorboards, or sold within the community.<sup>180</sup> The preoccupation with obtaining additional foodstuff and household items by whatever means can be explained as a natural reaction to wartime privation. Respondents argued that they flouted regulations, stockpiling items, to pre-empt future shortages. This “stems back to times when things weren’t available...packets of sugar, and packets and packets of tea and bed-linen. There’s still stuff up [stairs]...now”.<sup>181</sup> The old habits of stockpiling were difficult to break, as Mr Weigh recalled: “The old coal house was just full of food...she was a compulsive buyer...mom, and auntie. *They thought war was going to break out again* (my italics)...in fact she used to fetch food in a pushchair”.<sup>182</sup>

The traditional, but illegal, method of supplementing meals and incomes by poaching also continued into the 1970s, surprisingly recalled by a number of the younger respondents. As Mr Brimble said, “there were lots of rabbits about you never knew

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<sup>177</sup> Sedgley Mr MC.

<sup>178</sup> Sedgley Mrs PJ, Mr NS, Mr DW; Pensnett Mr BT, Mrs PG, Mr BJ; Tipton Mr HT. Badger discusses the 1970 Dudley County Borough bye-laws for the ‘prevention of keeping animals so as to be prejudicial to their health’ in some detail. She believed that this indicated the council’s intention to actively discourage householders from keeping animals. ‘Household Consumption’ p. 133.

<sup>179</sup> Sedgley Mrs IW.

<sup>180</sup> Tipton Mr JW.

<sup>181</sup> Pensnett Miss YB, Mr DM; Sedgley Mrs PJ, Mrs LJ, Mr NS.

<sup>182</sup> Tipton Mr JW, Mr MJ.



where they came from”.<sup>183</sup> The practice was engaged in as much through custom as through poverty. Despite describing a relatively affluent lifestyle, Mr SB and his friends began poaching as youngsters in the late 1960s- “dad bought me a gun when I was ten...down Bromley Lane, there was nothing there – rabbits, pheasants, partridge...used to pinch the odd fowl off the farm [and] have me eggs from there...it was the thing to do”.<sup>184</sup> This was corroborated in 1965 in the *Dudley Herald* which reported “Bromley night-poachers kill[ing] pheasants at Kinver without a gaming licence”.<sup>185</sup> Badger’s respondents also confirmed that this practice continued in the area stretching from Pensnett to Wall Heath, until the 1970s.<sup>186</sup>

Continuing shortages of furniture, household goods and clothing into the 1950s led to resentment and increased reports of crimes connected to rationing and coupons. Respondents felt this was unsurprising as people were “generally fed-up with deprivation”. When they married in the late 1940s, Mr and Mrs Houlton “slept on the floor for a month waiting for the mattress, we didn’t like the bed when it came did we? We liked sleeping on the floor, we got used to it...Then I got my name down for a three-piece suite. We’d got no furniture.” At their wedding the best man surreptitiously, and illegally, gave them a sheet of clothing coupons as a present.<sup>187</sup>

The use of coupons facilitated creative methods of evading the law; if lack of money was a problem, families sold surplus coupons to affluent members of the community. Newspaper reports indicated that males and females were both implicated in these activities.<sup>188</sup> However, the respondents generally recalled their mothers as the main participants. Families with a number of children, who inevitably had less disposable income, sold their coupons to wealthier women with smaller families. Mrs Rudd, born in 1934 remembered - “Well we’d got the coupons it was the money we wanted. (laughter) The butcher had got a lad growing up and mother used to let him have a line of [clothing] coupons, and we did very well for meat.”<sup>189</sup> At this point Mrs Roberts interrupted: “I used to do a bit of flirting” with her butcher for extra meat,

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<sup>183</sup> Tipton Mr Brimble, Mr HT, Mrs HT.

<sup>184</sup> Pensnett Mr SB.

<sup>185</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1965, p. 5.

<sup>186</sup> See Badger, ‘Household Consumption’, pp. 136-140.

<sup>187</sup> Sedgley Mrs OH, Mr OH.

<sup>188</sup> *Dudley Herald* 1945-1955.

<sup>189</sup> Sedgley Mrs DR2. Mrs DR’s mother was widowed when her children were young in the 1940s.

“you see when I got married in 1951 we’d got ration books then...what it was you couldn’t buy if you’d got the money because there was only so much allowed on your ration book.”<sup>190</sup>

As an only child, Mr Weigh “was pretty well looked after... mother used to buy clothing and sweet coupons off everybody”.<sup>191</sup> The mother of another only child possessed funds but lacked coupons – “Things were on rations...therefore a lot of people, because they had such large families, they had excess coupons but minimal... money. So what they did they sold their coupons to someone else... to get money to buy the rest of the stuff”.<sup>192</sup> Olive Houlton’s mother behaved similarly. The enormity of illegal actions in a respectable family were revealed - she whispered that, Mother “used to do deals...people who’d got a lot of kids used to sell their clothing coupons [to mother] because she’d got two girls at home and we never went short of clothes”. When a stranger accosted Mrs Houlton in the street remarking, “I say! You don’t dress like that on your clothing coupons”, her father worried about the repercussions of his wife’s behaviour. Both Olive Houlton and her husband agreed that the continuation of restrictions encouraged such actions, as “it was a long time before you had freedom of choice”.<sup>193</sup>

The line dividing the grey market and ‘spivery’ from serious theft was fine and the practices adopted during rationing continued into the 1950s and 60s. Mr Weigh described a member of his family - “This uncle was a character...he took me to Kidderminster market, they used to sell pushbikes, motorbikes...everything...and he bought live chickens, we took them home on the bus. He was one of these blokes, he had a string of watches on his arms. He day (sic) work... he’d sell everything.<sup>194</sup> He’d got a great big yard and he’d got all sorts”. His wife laughingly interjected “spiv!” and Mr Weigh continued, “He never worked like, and the one time he come

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<sup>190</sup> Sedgley Mrs DR1. Mrs DR1 was the wife of Mr DR’s uncle, therefore an aunt by marriage. This became a joint interview as Mrs DR2 and Mr PR came to visit their aunt at the commencement of the interview and asked to contribute, which was acceptable as they fulfilled the requisite criteria of age and location.

<sup>191</sup> Tipton Mr JW.

<sup>192</sup> Tipton Mr MJ.

<sup>193</sup> Sedgley Mrs OH. The couple were exasperated by the waiting lists for consumer foods, and this will be discussed in detail in the chapter dealing with expenditure, particularly the five year waiting list (from 1947 to 1953) for a new car.

<sup>194</sup> Tipton Mr JW.

back with a monkey...he played the piano...lived on his wits. He was buying and selling all the while...he'd got everything like, he'd got a tatter's yard...he was a bit shady".<sup>195</sup> Similarly, there were "three or four families in Pensnett...there was a whole area of spivs...nobody wanted any work they used to do a bit of thieving and a bit of tatting...they seemed to get on."<sup>196</sup> Despite media reports and the attention of historians, who argued that by 1949 'spivs' were "commonplace",<sup>197</sup> the term 'spiv' was used only infrequently by respondents. Mrs Weigh described her husband's friend as "a proper little spiv. He wore a trilby and he used to have a cigarette in his hand, he was like Humphrey Bogart".<sup>198</sup>

Throughout the period newspapers reported coal theft from railway lines and pit-heads. "Collecting coal" was regularly reported in the local press,<sup>199</sup> but was not viewed as a crime by the respondents. In 1946 the scale of coal picking on a Sedgley building site caused extensive damage.<sup>200</sup> Thefts of wood and coal continued into the 1960s and were condoned within the community, both children and adults 'collecting' fuel.<sup>201</sup> Coal was pilfered from narrow boats moored at Tipton coal-wharf and deemed justifiable "to keep the kids warm – which to...[Mrs Lakin] wasn't crime".<sup>202</sup> Children were despatched with buckets to follow coal deliveries to collect lumps of coal falling from carts and lorries.<sup>203</sup> In 1950, the *Dudley Herald* reported Sedgley parents sending their 13 year-old children to take coal from Baggeridge pit-mounds. The father worked at Baggeridge and claimed that the coal was waste.<sup>204</sup> Dudley magistrates informed the court that, one Pensnett man "had a mania for coal theft".<sup>205</sup> Reports of thefts continued until the end of the period, some on a larger scale continuing for many months.<sup>206</sup> Mitigating circumstances for fuel thefts were explained in court and centred upon ill-health in family members, particularly during

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<sup>195</sup> Tipton Mrs VW, Mr JW.

<sup>196</sup> Pensnett Mr SW.

<sup>197</sup> Sissons and French, *Age of Austerity*, p. 91; Kynaston, *Austerity*.

<sup>198</sup> Tipton Mrs VW.

<sup>199</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 19<sup>th</sup> May 1948; 14<sup>th</sup> August 1948.

<sup>200</sup> *Express and Star*, 19<sup>th</sup> February 1946, p. 2.

<sup>201</sup> Stafford, J., *Light in the Dust*, Trustline Publishing, 1990, p. 107.

<sup>202</sup> Mrs Lakin December 1998.

<sup>203</sup> Mr Davies December 1998.

<sup>204</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1950, p. 2.

<sup>205</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 7<sup>th</sup> May 1950, p. 8.

<sup>206</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 28<sup>th</sup> November 1969, p. 4; *Dudley Herald*, 13<sup>th</sup> January 1967, p. 10.

the years of austerity.<sup>207</sup> A Sedgley teenager stole because “my mother was ill and we had no coal”.<sup>208</sup> Similarly, Mary Boycott stole from her employer because her child was ill and needed to be kept warm.<sup>209</sup> High fuel costs and her husband’s ill-health in the late 1960s, led Mr KD’s mother to join residents of Pensnett in stealing from the local steelworks:

“I don’t know whether I should tell you this - it’s personal. Round Oak Steelworks had a big coal pen on the back here. And of course every night the people from round here used to help themselves to coal and mom was one of those what did it. Never got caught like, but it subsidised the fuel...The people used to watch...and they would go in the dark...they’d go in winter mainly and they knew exactly when the security, dad’s army,...what time they would come round and they’d help their selves to coal”.<sup>210</sup>

The perception that theft of coal was acceptable continued beyond the 1970s - as a means of gaining household fuel and cash. Mr Broome, born in 1960, and his classmates regularly stole coal in the early mornings before school, climbing onto the trains travelling towards Gibbon’s factory and throwing down the coal, which was subsequently wheel-barrowed home “for mom”. The remainder was “bartered, traded or sold”.<sup>211</sup>

Ambiguous attitudes to crime were reflected in perceptions of theft from employers in general or, indeed, from any impersonal institution. Smithies indicated that pilfering from one’s employer was perceived as ‘a perk’ of the job and goods produced by employees were “in part the property of those who made them”.<sup>212</sup> This certainly held resonance for the respondents and those appearing before the courts, who believed that such activities formed a legitimate part of working practices. Employees of a Tipton firm, who had stolen lampshades that they had manufactured, informed the court that “they did not think it was wrong to take them”.<sup>213</sup> Such behaviour was not confined to manual workers; the transport manager of Vono beds

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<sup>207</sup> Several instances of coal theft were recorded almost every week in the *Dudley Herald*. They usually involved small amounts of coal and unless the perpetrator was a regular offender sentences were light.

<sup>208</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1946, p. 4.

<sup>209</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 26<sup>th</sup> April 1947, p. 2.

<sup>210</sup> Pensnett Mr KD.

<sup>211</sup> Pensnett Mr SB.

<sup>212</sup> Smithies, *Black Economy*, p. 124.

<sup>213</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 5<sup>th</sup> December 1969, p. 6.

in Tipton stole goods worth £10 which he consequently sold.<sup>214</sup> In 1965 the *entire staff* of a Pensnett wholesale warehouse were involved in theft.<sup>215</sup> A group of employees of Round Oak Steelworks stole £2,003 of alloy<sup>216</sup> and six Tipton workers were accused of theft from the Conex factory.<sup>217</sup> These are merely three of a wide selection of reported thefts at this time. Pilfering was sometimes the result of grudges or friction between employers and employees.<sup>218</sup> Many respondents endorsed Mr Brimble's sentiments – “the bosses, they are the ogres, if you can get anything over them its good”.<sup>219</sup>

Scrap metal was regularly appropriated from factories, workshops and tips and, as reported instances of fuel theft dropped, newspapers recorded increasing numbers of metal-related crimes.<sup>220</sup> The nature of many Black Country industries facilitated an illegal trade in ‘waste’ metal and opportunities to obtain cash came from a profusion of scrap metal companies. Profits from such thefts were negligible as theft was on a modest scale with workers “shoving metal up their sleeves”, in bags or car boots.<sup>221</sup> Mr Brimble recalled that “with the rise in metal prices stealing [had] become a common practice in the Midlands. Not only that, but everyone became acutely metal-conscious. There were any amount of chaps [in the factories] who had come to regard pilfering as in the natural order of things”.<sup>222</sup> The metal was transported past the security men and “no-one... [saw] it as a crime or anything abnormal”.<sup>223</sup> Employees of one scrap dealer deliberately miscounted bags of metal to make some money.<sup>224</sup> “Oh! The honest working chaps who could be seen riding through the Black Country streets an innocuous haversack clinging fondly to their backs; those little haversacks could hold anything from twenty to forty pounds of metal”.<sup>225</sup> One particularly daring

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<sup>214</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1967, p. 1.

<sup>215</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 9<sup>th</sup> October 1965, p. 1.

<sup>216</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1965, p. 1.

<sup>217</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 14<sup>th</sup> August 1965, p. 5.

<sup>218</sup> Smithies, *Black Economy*, p. 124.

<sup>219</sup> Mr Brimble April 1999. He explained that this attitude was prevalent amongst his workmates and within the wider community.

<sup>220</sup> By the mid 1950s metal-related crimes were regularly reported in the newspapers.

<sup>221</sup> Mr Brimble.

<sup>222</sup> Petty, *Five*, p. 49.

<sup>223</sup> Petty, *Five*, p. 49; Mr Churchman May 1999; Tipton Mr JW; Pensnett Mr NR.

<sup>224</sup> Harding, D., *From the Shadow of Poverty: 300 Years an Englishman, 70 Years a Brummie*, Wigtown: Langford Press, 2002, p. 123.

<sup>225</sup> Petty, *Five*, p. 49. Petty, who made his living from selling scrap metal, claimed that 20lb. of brass could be sold for 30 shillings.

thief stole scrap copper wire from a Tipton firm, later reselling it to the same company.<sup>226</sup>

Smithies concluded that pilfering was predominant amongst male employees and, despite increasing numbers of females entering the labour market after 1945, this remained the case.<sup>227</sup> This was corroborated by the newspapers, with few women appearing in court on charges of theft from their employers. Females appropriating items from work usually took them for personal use, or to “oblige” friends and family in a spirit of reciprocity.<sup>228</sup> Respondents concurred with this, particularly those who were employed by Neweys, where small household items - pins, needles and hair clips were ‘carded’ by out-workers.<sup>229</sup> Through the 1950s and 60s, few homes in Tipton were without a bundle of safety pins “courtesy of Neweys”.<sup>230</sup> Mr Tolley’s customers refused to purchase hair-clips “priced a tanner [as] they said we won’t buy this - we can pinch a load of these from Neweys”.<sup>231</sup> Mrs Cartwright admitted that she “used to pinch a few”, to give to neighbours who assisted her.<sup>232</sup> As a child in the late 1950s, Mrs Kendrick helped her neighbour with carding and was rewarded with “a few bits and pieces”.<sup>233</sup> The purloining of a few small domestic items was not viewed as crime, but a justifiable reward for arduous labour. Inevitably the size of the items and the sheer scale of conveyances loaded with outwork rendered theft difficult to detect.

However, larger items were also appropriated and viewed as legitimate compensation for ‘honest’ workers exploited by employers. Respondents explained methods used to defraud employers with hilarity and amusement. When questioned concerning crime within the workplace, the reactions of Mr and Mrs Weigh were typical - “Crime? No, no malicious [crime]”.<sup>234</sup> “It wasn’t classed as crime like ‘cos you know they’re criminals anyway these bloody works... but it was all the lorry drivers who used to

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<sup>226</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1955, p. 2.

<sup>227</sup> Smithies, *Black Economy*, p. 126.

<sup>228</sup> Kerr, *The People*, p. 125.

<sup>229</sup> Neweys’ hair fasteners were promoted by film stars such as Margaret Lockwood, Valerie Hobson and Glynis Johns and as a consequence were much coveted by local teenagers.

<sup>230</sup> Mrs PJ an aunt by marriage of the author.

<sup>231</sup> Mr Tolley December 1998.

<sup>232</sup> Mrs Cartwright June 1999.

<sup>233</sup> Mrs Kendrick May 1999.

<sup>234</sup> Tipton Mrs VW.

have all the perks when they were loading at the warehouse...they were only making some'at [something] out of rubbish...*it wasn't like stealing if you had it from a company*".<sup>235</sup> They explained the various systems of pilfering operating at local companies. "People from the Vono used to put their vans outside the factory fences and someone would pass the stuff over...Our mother must have been a bit of a character ... her had a gas fire from the Cannon over the wall! And she also had a cooker from the Cannon over the wall and me auntie".<sup>236</sup>

Mrs Weigh recalled the culture of theft from places of employment, including complicity of the management, who appeared to condone, or at least accept, such behaviour. "It was like that when I worked at Palethorpe's ...the steak and kidney pies [secreted] up your jumper and you'd come down the stairs and the works manager would be standing there and he'd know what you'd got".<sup>237</sup> Her husband observed that "Ve's worked at some useful places like. Her worked at Gill's down the road here...at the Servis you know washing machines...her was bringing home all sorts from Goodyear's...they'd got a whole warehouse of presents for employees (long service)...and they used to say here's one for you and one for you and I was gob smacked".<sup>238</sup> The goods gained by these illegal methods were viewed as fringe benefits, particularly for the unskilled and delivery drivers, as "wages were terrible in factories if you hadn't got the skills".<sup>239</sup>

This custom was corroborated by Mr Tolley - "folk who worked *anywhere* they brought stuff home with them...but if there was anything you wanted you could get it

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<sup>235</sup> Tipton Mr JW.

<sup>236</sup> Tipton Mr JW. Vono was established in Tipton primarily as a manufacturer of beds and bedroom furniture. Cannon Foundry was established less than 2 miles away in Coseley in 1826 producing household goods, ironmongery and cooking utensils. Their first gas cooking stove was made in 1895 and by the study period they produced a wide range of gas appliances.

<sup>237</sup> Tipton Mrs VW. Palethorpe's was established in Birmingham in 1850 in response to the pork and bacon products which flooded in from the United States. In 1896 the company set up a production plant in Tipton which claimed to be the largest sausage production plant in the world. Throughout the period the company was a major employer in the area.

<sup>238</sup> Tipton Mr JW. Gills meat processing plant was opened in 1938 in nearby Bilston. Goodyear was established in Wolverhampton, in 1927, manufacturing rubber tyres and mechanical goods. During the study period the company's reputation regarding employee welfare was excellent, providing pensions, insurance, sports and social facilities.

<sup>239</sup> Tipton Mr JW.

if you was in the know.”<sup>240</sup> In 1961 he witnessed scenes of pilfering whilst employed in Palethorpe’s laboratories:

“In the factory one day they were all going on Friday night and they said ‘the commissionaire’s stopping [them]. Cos they’d all got to go through the time office you know...and they’d chucked the stuff everywhere. They’d chucked it out of their pockets and there was a spiral staircase that led into the pie room and at the top they’d chucked the pies. And this one man he had the sack he worked in the stores and he pinched – of all the things to pinch – a case of pig’s tongues – tinned. Well we only had 2 or 3 cases a week. I suppose he had an order for it”.<sup>241</sup>

The husband of one respondent was imprisoned in the early 1970s as he “got into bad company” and sold batteries stolen from his employers, Simon Engineering.<sup>242</sup> His wife implied that men felt an entitlement to goods owned by their employer.<sup>243</sup> Petty theft from employers was, at this time, a reflection of an employees’ assessment of his own worth, jobs frequently “warranted a degree of payment in kind, even if the owner was unaware of this”.<sup>244</sup>

Apparently this behaviour was widespread and some families and individuals stole upon request. Residents of Tipton singled out the Lost City as rife with minor acts of criminality – “I suppose you could all it petty pilfering. It wasn’t, but the estate had got a terrible reputation for thieving...you could buy anything if you went to the right person and it would be pinched to order”.<sup>245</sup> Similarly, in Pensnett where the residents were “rough but honest” it was possible to “ask around (for specific items) and somebody would turn up with one”.<sup>246</sup> Mr HT remembered “one chap on the market and he said I’ve got some Brittool sockets come in. Apparently he’d seen this girl and she said oh I’ll get [steal] what you want, and he had a bag of sockets and when they come they was all the same size. When he complained the girl said well

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<sup>240</sup> Tipton HT.

<sup>241</sup> Tipton Mr HT.

<sup>242</sup> Pensnett Mrs BW.

<sup>243</sup> Pensnett Mrs BW (off tape)

<sup>244</sup> Badger, ‘Household Consumption’, p. 136.

<sup>245</sup> Tipton Mrs BT.

<sup>246</sup> Pensnett Mr SB.



that's the [production] line I work on. There was another family and they'd say we can get you anything you want. They'd say do you want a washing machine or - ?"<sup>247</sup>

Other 'fringe benefits' included opportunities to purchase prototypes from new production ranges of kitchen units and sofas. Although strictly designated for employees "in fact all the family used to have them".<sup>248</sup> Similarly, workers in the automotive industry circumvented the employees' discount. For a fee of around £50, employees obtained cars for friends and neighbours on the pretext that they were relatives. Employees at Beans Engineering were allowed to claim discount on three cars per year and this was common practice.<sup>249</sup> Sedgley miners received an allocation of coal for personal consumption, but sold their coal tokens at reduced prices thus benefiting friends and themselves.<sup>250</sup>

Questioned concerning crime in Pensnett, Mr Davison's response was typical of respondents from all three areas:

"Not really going back to the fifties, sixties and seventies...when you say crime it was all petty crime...nick this and nick that... a saying in the old days 'They (employers) can afford to miss it they've got plenty!' *I think they thought it was part of the job to be honest.* It was the done thing. The blokes that I worked with you know [would say] I'm taking that home with me tonight. It was part of the work so I'm entitled to it, although it was against the law. I remember a bloke at Round Oak...he was light fingered and he built himself a garage and everything that went into that garage come from Round Oak. He didn't see that as nicking, the Earl of Dudley's got plenty he ain't gonna miss it".<sup>251</sup>

Possibly, crimes of this nature were more easily concealed by members of traditional close-knit communities. As Mr Brimble, who served as a J.P., confirmed: "we still have a coal-mining attitude...old fashioned, roots, traditional community...Tipton-born, Tipton-bred, strong in the hands, weak in the head...Everyone makes a bit on

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<sup>247</sup> Tipton Mr HT.

<sup>248</sup> Sedgley Mr NS; Tipton Mrs BT, Mr JW, Mr MJ.

<sup>249</sup> Sedgley Mr NS; Tipton Mr JW; Mr RB. Telephone conversation with Mr BW, an employee of Beans Industries, on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2009.

<sup>250</sup> Sedgley Mr DW (off tape) Baggeridge coal was in operation until 1968 in Sedgley.

<sup>251</sup> Pensnett Mr KD.

the side... we are very parochial – we stick together”.<sup>252</sup> In his opinion, theft from the workplace was condoned and facilitated by the custom of employment through recommendation. Sizeable numbers of relatives were employed by local firms and family members, friends or neighbours were more likely to support or conceal illicit behaviour than ‘outsiders’.<sup>253</sup> Petty crime within the neighbourhood was generally viewed with tolerance. For instance, Mr Tolley expressed amusement that a member of “one of the most criminal families...pinched a bag of sprouts” from his mobile shop. He commented: “you’d have thought he’d have had the Milk Tray”. Earlier in the interview Mr Tolley had stated that he had never experienced problems on his round, “not even late at night when I’d got money on”.<sup>254</sup> Undoubtedly there was an element of loyalty, or possibly intimidation, where people were reluctant to inform on members of their community. Mrs BT was employed at Dudley Zoo in the early 1960s:

“When I worked at the Zoo Ros they needed people to work in the greenhouses...and this chap that lived in our street got a job as a garden labourer. I saw him going out and I thought I should warn them that he was one of the most light-fingered on our estate...anyway I got home that night and he came...it was his first day...and he came up the street and he knocked at the kitchen door and he said I’ve bought you a present for not dropping me in it and you know he’d walked out with a six-foot high plant in a pot and he’d brought it home on his bike and nobody had seen him do it. And on his first day he’d pinched a plant out of the greenhouse for me not telling that he was a thief”.<sup>255</sup>

“Some of them... [stealing from employers] were caught, heavily fined or imprisoned,”<sup>256</sup> but others were treated with some leniency. Detected crime which appeared before the courts did not necessarily result in unemployment; Smithies found a number of employers giving character references for the thieves, allowing

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<sup>252</sup> Mr Brimble April 1999.

<sup>253</sup> Mr Brimble recalled one company which employed 11 members of the same family who were all involved in petty pilfering. In both Pensnett and Tipton it was the custom to ‘speak for’ family and neighbours when they were seeking employment.

<sup>254</sup> Mr Tolley December 1998.

<sup>255</sup> Tipton Mrs BT.

<sup>256</sup> Petty, *Five*, p. 49.

them to retain their jobs.<sup>257</sup> This was replicated in Tipton. In 1957 Palethorpe's employees found guilty of stealing meat and pies were 'kept on' at work<sup>258</sup> and in 1959 a man stealing scrap metal from his employer was given a twelve-month conditional-discharge, "so that he may return to his job".<sup>259</sup> Again in 1966 Palethorpe's employees retained their jobs despite stealing bacon.<sup>260</sup>

At a time of slum clearance and re-housing, building sites were legitimate targets for petty theft, possibly because building materials were in short supply in the post-war period. Pilfering from local sites was one of the perks of living within close-knit communities, where such misdemeanours were viewed as customary. Lead, wood, bricks and scrap metal were deemed communal property and accessible to the general public.<sup>261</sup> A Sedgley resident, whose court appearance was instigated by the theft of bricks from a building site, claimed that he had "only taken them like thousands of others".<sup>262</sup> Four months later another Sedgley inhabitant, accused of stealing timber from an adjacent site, announced that he was "just one of the unlucky ones".<sup>263</sup> In Tipton the courts fined Alfred Griffen £5 for stealing cement from his employer, the magistrate explained that the severity of the fine was "owing to the shortage of building cement, very important building work was being held up".<sup>264</sup>

Magistrates took stringent measures against receivers of stolen goods.<sup>265</sup> Whereas theft was punished with fines, receiving was likely to incur a prison sentence or at least a larger fine. Receiving six dozen bottles of beer resulted in a two-year prison sentence for three Tipton men, while the perpetrators of the theft were merely fined.<sup>266</sup> In 1957, receivers at the Vono factory appeared before the Magistrate's Court accused of receiving stolen Pyrex glassware from Sunderland. The court heard

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<sup>257</sup> Smithies, *Black Economy*, p. 119.

<sup>258</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 6<sup>th</sup> July 1957, p. 5.

<sup>259</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1959, p. 6.

<sup>260</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1966, p. 16

<sup>261</sup> Mr Tolley December 1998.

<sup>262</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1950, 3.

<sup>263</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 26<sup>th</sup> August 1950, p. 5.

<sup>264</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1947, p. 3.

<sup>265</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 30<sup>th</sup> July 1950, p. 9; *Dudley Herald*, 12<sup>th</sup> January 1946, p. 2.

<sup>266</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 28<sup>th</sup> September 1957, p. 1.

that there “was a ready market amongst employees at Vono for this stolen glassware”.<sup>267</sup>

Local newspapers recorded increasing numbers of adolescent males involved in criminal activities,<sup>268</sup> reinforcing claims that “British juvenile-crime figures...[had] risen against a background of steadily expanding welfare services”.<sup>269</sup> These rates, particularly in the 1960s, were blamed upon juvenile delinquency in the “unhappy generation” of young men born between 1935 and 1942 whose lives had been “disrupted by the war”,<sup>270</sup> and living on new, isolated housing estates “miles from anywhere”, which were described as “graveyards with lights”.<sup>271</sup> However, boys born outside this period also engaged in petty crime. In 1965 an exasperated newspaper editorial suggested corporal punishment, stating that young thieves and vandals should have their “backsides smacked”.<sup>272</sup> In 1968 a Tipton Grammar School pupil stole a gross of contraceptives worth £9 from his part time job at Boots the Chemists!<sup>273</sup>

By 1965 the *Dudley Herald* editorial focused on the rise of the comparatively new crime of shoplifting,<sup>274</sup> which had become prevalent over the past decade.<sup>275</sup> Increasing numbers of traditional shops were replaced by supermarkets and other types of ‘self-service’ retailers, which were referred to as “help-yourself-stores”.<sup>276</sup> Customers were tempted to ‘help themselves’ to goods arranged in accessible and inviting displays. Perpetrators of such crimes, recorded in the local newspaper,

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<sup>267</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 25<sup>th</sup> May 1947, p 1.

<sup>268</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 1945-1970.

<sup>269</sup> Fyvel, T.R., *The Insecure Offenders: Rebellious Youth in the Welfare State*, Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1963, p. 14. First published in 1961 Fyvel’s examination of juvenile delinquency in Britain focused initially upon a small group of London Teddy Boys seeking to understand why in a time of economic progress and welfare provision British juvenile-crime figures were rising more steeply than in other countries. He argued that this new social phenomenon could be caused by childhood insecurity and other contributory factors and concluded that within a welfare society it was necessary to correct defects in the educational system, particularly the ‘perpetuation of outworn class distinctions’. p. 239.

<sup>270</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 20<sup>th</sup> January 1961, p. 6.

<sup>271</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 17<sup>th</sup> March 1961, p. 6.

<sup>272</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 8<sup>th</sup> May 1965, p. 6.

<sup>273</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1968, p. 14.

<sup>274</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 27<sup>th</sup> March, 1965, p. 8

<sup>275</sup> By the early 1950s shoplifting was an offence which was frequently mentioned in most editions of the local newspaper.

<sup>276</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1955, p. 7.

tended to be adolescent boys and women,<sup>277</sup> who proffered a variety of ingenious excuses to explain behaviour. One woman's "lapse was [alleged to be] due to strain" as her house was shortly to be demolished,<sup>278</sup> another woman blamed diabetes for her thefts,<sup>279</sup> whilst others were "in a hurry",<sup>280</sup> or food was "too dear".<sup>281</sup> But for most of the women appearing before the courts, theft was excused as part of the on-going struggle against poverty. In November 1948, a 35 year old woman informed the quarter sessions that "during her married life she had had a constant struggle against poverty" and that she "did wrong to get my kiddies clothing and food".<sup>282</sup> Despite high levels of employment, women excused theft because their husbands were unemployed.<sup>283</sup> Mrs Lakin acknowledged that shop-lifting occurred amongst teenagers, but stated that "to me it wasn't a crime because them kids never had apples".<sup>284</sup> Interestingly, proprietors of a Pensnett grocery shop from 1962 to 1975 vehemently denied the existence of shop lifting. When questioned concerning theft from the shop they replied "no, never!" in unison.<sup>285</sup> If newspaper reports are indicative of general trends, local cooperative stores appear to have been frequently targeted by shoplifters.<sup>286</sup>

Despite rising numbers of court cases and convictions, sentences were lenient and newspapers suggested magisterial sympathy for the accused, who were tempted by the array of goods in easy reach.<sup>287</sup> Mr Churchman, a magistrate and J.P. during the 1950s-80s, recalled that "there was a lot of shoplifting", which was not necessarily perpetrated through lack of money. He blamed "the stores to some degree", particularly the supermarkets and chain-stores, making "it so easy for people to do it. It (the goods) was there exposed right in front of you - see?" He conceded that not all magistrates agreed with his "very strong feelings" on this matter.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> See for example *Dudley Herald*, 1955-60 when women and boys from Tipton and Pensnett (although less frequently from Sedgley) were in court for stealing from 'self-service stores'.

<sup>278</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1968, p. 18.

<sup>279</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 30<sup>th</sup> January 1965, p. 1.

<sup>280</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1969, p. 12.

<sup>281</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 25<sup>th</sup> August 1967, p. 1.

<sup>282</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1948, p. 3.

<sup>283</sup> For example one Tipton woman, who was bringing up 7 children in a 3 bed-roomed council house, stole food because her husband was unemployed due to ill health. *Dudley Herald*, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1966, p. 3.

<sup>284</sup> Mrs Lakin December 1998.

<sup>285</sup> Pensnett Mr BT and Mrs IT.

<sup>286</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 18<sup>th</sup> April 1969, p. 7.

<sup>287</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 1955-1970.

<sup>288</sup> Mr Churchman May 1998.

Responses to petty crime, or more serious crime were ambivalent in the post-war period, confirming Smithies' findings.<sup>289</sup> Security guards, policemen and other representatives of authority may well have demonstrated some laxity in preventing crime and were sometimes complicit in illegal activities. Guards, employed to protect factory owners' interests, were sometimes involved in crimes. When the Crestwood estate in Pensnett was under construction "one of the lads was a security guard when they was building the new estate, so basically you could get anything for the house you wanted...when the stainless steel sinks came out we had one straight away...you could have whatever you wanted when they was building the new houses".<sup>290</sup>

The profits accrued by one of Palethorpe's guards were such that he "ended up with bloody caravans all the way down the coast", financed by bribes to ignore racketeering. "Then we had another chap on security ...and the first day he kept his eye on the delivery drivers and this driver took some stuff into the shop and when he come out he said you haven't charged him for that ham...give me half [of the profit]. All these chaps was on the fiddle and they was frightened to say no".<sup>291</sup>

Similarly, some members of the police force ignored petty crime. In 1947, when Mr Southall's mother lost her purse whilst out shopping it was returned to her by the local policeman, who had noticed loose clothing-coupons inside, which she had purchased from a neighbour. He merely warned her to be careful with her money, but took no action regarding the coupons.<sup>292</sup> In the early 1950s, during rationing, one haulage company owner took advantage of his journeys into the countryside to purchase meat and eggs. The local policeman "was always on the doorstep asking whether granddad had arrived home" so that he could obtain his share.<sup>293</sup> In 1960s Pensnett the local "copper [was] as bent as they come", requesting that Mr Broome's father trap wild bullfinches for him. He paid for them and subsequently "grassed us up".<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Smithies, *The Black Economy*, p. 65.

<sup>290</sup> Pensnett Mr SB.

<sup>291</sup> Tipton Mr HT.

<sup>292</sup> Sedgley Mr NS.

<sup>293</sup> Sedgley Mrs PJ

<sup>294</sup> Pensnett Mr SB; Badger, 'Household Consumption', p. 137.

Evidently, a number of residents of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton supplemented their income with illegal activities and petty crime, from minor circumvention of the rationing system to stealing household goods to order. These communities were aware of individuals engaged in law-breaking and located them in specific areas. “We knew who the rogues and vagabonds were”; “We used to call the top end of Pensnett Nanny Goat’s Farm – it was roughish”.<sup>295</sup> It was accepted that such activities were widespread, but few respondents admitted direct involvement in crime despite recollections that they, or close family members, had benefited from illegal activities.

Although ‘fiddling’ the company and employers was perceived as acceptable, theft from neighbours was not tolerated. When one house was burgled the neighbours, who had been “had for breaking and entering” on previous occasions, called to say “It isn’t us Mrs Smith we only do clubs”.<sup>296</sup> Those involved in crime made clear distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, based upon community norms and tolerance. The perpetrators were loyally sheltered within the neighbourhood when the crime was committed outside the area – “Bit of thieving and a bit of tatting, there were some rogues around but they’d never touch nothing of ours...you knew that they was thieving but they’d never do it on the doorstep”.<sup>297</sup>

Criminal acts were excused and accepted when undertaken to assist the family. Mr MJ of Tipton recalled that two of his “mates...went to Borstal...petty thieving as we call it...it was just something you accepted. They went away for 18 months to two years, came back and carried on playing as if they hadn’t been anywhere... Half the time they’d pinch some money for their mothers...pinch something for their parents”.<sup>298</sup> “My mother’s neighbours’ son was a bit of a naughty boy but he went to Borstal...it wouldn’t have been for anything major”.<sup>299</sup> A Borstal sentence was not necessarily a stigma, producing benefits in education and clothing – “The next door neighbours were pretty er criminalised, the kids after 11 or 12 all went to Borstal yeah. The first

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<sup>295</sup> Pensnett Mr SG; Mrs PG.

<sup>296</sup> Sedgley Mrs DR2, Mr PR.

<sup>297</sup> Pensnett Mr SB.

<sup>298</sup> Tipton Mr MJ. In his opinion this behaviour was acceptable as the boys “was very poor because of the size of their families.

<sup>299</sup> Sedgley Mrs VR.

time they had any decent clothes.”<sup>300</sup> “When me mates come home their voices had altered - they were speaking Oxford English”.<sup>301</sup>

Traditional means of supplementing income by a variety of illegal practices continued well into the 1970s, despite increasing affluence and state benefits. The extension of activities involving the Black Market, spivs and the evasion of rationing were translated into the condoning of petty crime by the 1960s and 70s. In general, memories of evading and thwarting the authorities, both at work and in society, were related with tolerance, humour and a certain fondness for the characters involved.<sup>302</sup> Criminal activities were permissible, even acceptable, provided they were undertaken in order to supplement the family income *and* were directed against wealthy employers who “could easily afford to lose it”.<sup>303</sup> There was a clear perception that workers were entitled to a share of the goods which they manufactured and a clear distinction between ‘us’(workers) and ‘them’ (employers).

### **Income and Social Welfare**

Undoubtedly welfare payments, which provided a “comprehensive system of social insurance” from July 1948, were a welcome means of supplementing the income of some families.<sup>304</sup> However, the oral testimony revealed that income from the state was rejected as ‘charity’,<sup>305</sup> despite a “whole range of health, education and social service measures [allegedly] free from the stigma of the poor law”.<sup>306</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to examine the extent to which welfare payments were considered to be a bone fide source of income.

Initial questions regarding income and benefits elicited vague responses from the interviewees, although memoirs and autobiographies were less reticent.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Tipton Mr HT.

<sup>301</sup> Tipton Mr MJ

<sup>302</sup> Without exception the respondents recalled these events with a certain degree of pride and revelations were interspersed with a great deal of laughter.

<sup>303</sup> Tipton Mr Drew.

<sup>304</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1949, Editorial.

<sup>305</sup> See chapter three.

<sup>306</sup> Taylor, B., and B. Regaly, ‘Mrs Fairly is a Dirty, Lazy Type: Unsatisfactory Households and the Problem Families in Norwich, 1942-1963’, *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 18, no. 4, 2007, p. 432. This article examines reports from Norwich Health Committee into what were deemed to be ‘problem families’, in terms of economics and behaviour.

<sup>307</sup> For example, see Hathorne, *Slurry and Strawberries*; Petty, *Five*.



Respondents claimed that state welfare impacted only minimally on their lives<sup>308</sup> and agreed with Marion Allen's view that "people we knew didn't [make claims], it was looked down on".<sup>309</sup> Mr Drew was one of only two respondents to voluntarily introduce the topic. He praised access to health-care, school milk and dinners for "those in the lower income bracket", but dismissed sick pay as "it wasn't a lot and only lasted for a few weeks".<sup>310</sup> Mr Tolley believed that the income from benefits was inadequate – "It wasn't okay. If they lived on egg and chips and bread I suppose they could have managed, but there were no extras for them at all".<sup>311</sup> Similar views were held by Roy Evans, who felt that "people struggled, especially with dole money and that kind of thing. There was nobody on the dole who was rich".<sup>312</sup> The consensual opinion was that income should be *earned* and that respectable members of the community were defined by their willingness to eschew state aid. Mr KD's response was typical: "Some of 'em were too proud. I think that although they hadn't got anything they'd rather have nothing than rely on charity".<sup>313</sup>

The Welfare State, and its perceived inadequacies, was frequently mentioned by defendants in court. The difficulties of claiming National Assistance, the paucity of unemployment benefits, and deficiencies in the system were cited by those seeking to excuse their crimes.<sup>314</sup> Local newspapers recorded instances where disparities or inefficiencies resulted in crimes of theft or fraud. For instance, in 1955 a Sedgley woman confessed to claiming £161 in National Assistance because her husband had abandoned her and three children. It was subsequently revealed in court that he was living at home and earning £11 per week.<sup>315</sup> In 1961, an unemployed father was paid £14.9s.6d. in family allowance, national assistance and unemployment pay, the court was informed that he "had not worked since the war and did not mean to work again".<sup>316</sup> In the same year, an unemployed Tipton man who stole foodstuff worth 12s.11d. stated that, £11.11s.6d. in benefits was insufficient for his needs.<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Pensnett Miss VC, Miss YB, Mr BJ; Sedgley Mr NS, Mrs CB, Mrs VR; Tipton Mrs Kendrick, Mr MJ, Mrs JB.

<sup>309</sup> Sedgley Mrs MA.

<sup>310</sup> Mr Drew.

<sup>311</sup> Mr Tolley.

<sup>312</sup> Pensnett Mr RE.

<sup>313</sup> Pensnett Mr KD.

<sup>314</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 1945-1970.

<sup>315</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1955, p. 1.

<sup>316</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1961, p. 11.

<sup>317</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1961.

Other offences were also blamed on the inadequacies of the system, and perpetrators frequently criticised welfare provisions. One moulder stole metal from his employer after he had been refused National Assistance whilst absent from work with spinal arthritis, and he “did not want to see his child go without anything to eat”.<sup>318</sup> Another father who stole food pleaded for clemency, justifying his actions as “social security did not want to know”.<sup>319</sup> In 1968, an unemployed Tipton father stole because “he was not able to manage on the amount of unemployment benefit he was getting”.<sup>320</sup> The court dealt leniently with a Tipton shop-lifter caught whilst her husband was receiving sick pay. She was informed that “in view of your difficulties you need help”.<sup>321</sup>

Between 1945 and 1970, the income provided by welfare schemes had only minimal impact upon the psyche of the respondents. Acceptance of governmental help was viewed as an admission of failure to provide for the family and held connotations of lost respectability and status. Despite claims that the compulsory contributory insurance payments of Beveridge’s scheme were a means of “formal, institutionalised self-help”,<sup>322</sup> recourse to most forms of benefit were circumvented wherever it was possible. The animosity towards the scheme resulted from its representation, by the government, as “the first great chance to get something for nothing”, as opposed to a recompense for labour.<sup>323</sup> Claimants of benefits were stigmatised and either pitied for their misfortune or censured for their shiftlessness – the ‘safety net’ was largely rejected as a form of income by the majority of the respondents. It is, as Rose argued, through the revelations of autobiography and oral history that attitudes to state provision, as well as the continued reliance on self-help are disclosed.<sup>324</sup>

## Conclusion

Despite the system of state benefits, the period between 1945 and 1970 was one of continuity, as formal, full-time employment was supplemented by a variety of

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<sup>318</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1957, p. 5.

<sup>319</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 1<sup>st</sup> September 1967, p. 2.

<sup>320</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 13<sup>th</sup> December 1968, p. 9.

<sup>321</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1966, p. 3.

<sup>322</sup> Rose, M.E., ‘Poverty and Self-Help: Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries’, Digby, A., C. Feinstein, and D. Jenkins, (eds.), *New Directions in Economic and Social History*, Volume II, Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1992, p. 159.

<sup>323</sup> Sissons and French, *Age of Austerity*, p. 103

<sup>324</sup> Rose, ‘Poverty’, p.159.

informal activities and petty crime. Despite escalating incomes received from full-time paid employment and increased job opportunities, men, women and youths used a combination of traditional methods to increase their income and living standards. Pawning, poaching, bartering and a wide range of penny-capitalist enterprises, from an earlier era, highlighted by Benson and endorsed by Roberts, remained part of lower-middle and working-class lifestyles throughout the period, regardless of full-time occupations.<sup>325</sup>

Moonlighting, additional or multiple employments were common amongst manual and white-collar workers, as individuals utilised talents and skills to accrue additional income. The reasons for the continuation of customary patterns of behaviour are not entirely clear-cut, with the respondents citing a whole gamut of reasons from poverty, (comparatively) low pay and the ill-health of the main breadwinner to 'pocket money' or the acquisition of consumer durables. Certainly, the stigma attached to state benefit was slow to dissipate, with the respondents revealing that they preferred the 'safety-net' of self-reliance to that of government intervention. The spectre of the 1930s and the recent war-time deprivation also affected attitudes to the acquisition of additional income. The oral testimony suggests that, despite post-war prosperity, a fear of poverty continued to influence attitudes and lifestyles. In the affluence of the 1950s and 60s the respondents indicated that customary behavioural patterns changed very little. Families and individuals eschewed financial assistance from the state, in favour of legitimate means of self-help and a wide range of criminal activities, which were sheltered within close-knit communities.

No discernable differences were revealed in lower-middle or working-class attitudes to crime and illegal enterprises were condoned as long as they were directed towards employers, shop-keepers, or figures of authority. Regardless of post-war prosperity, the appropriation of goods and time from the work-place was seen a legitimate recompense of full-time paid employment and this was recognised by some employers. The oral testimony confirmed that involvement in the manufacture, or production, of specific items facilitated theft, as a fringe benefit of that particular employment. As Smithies found, "theft from the employer was thus a feature of

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<sup>325</sup> Benson, *The Penny Capitalists, Working-Class*; Roberts, 'Working Class Standards'.

British industrial life whatever the general economic circumstances”.<sup>326</sup> In a number of instances low rates of state benefits were blamed for illegal acts and delinquent behaviour was condoned as a contingency against impoverishment. However, respondents clearly demonstrated that the pre-war stigma to the acceptance of state aid remained. Although state intervention theoretically lessened the likelihood of absolute poverty, the fear of poverty lingered throughout the period. Nevertheless, additional means of achieving an adequate income, in a myriad of guises from penny capitalism to crime, was deemed preferable to the perceived humiliation of seeking that aid. Therefore, from the recollections of the respondents, it is evident that communities of Pensnett, Tipton and Sedgley were willing to utilise and endorse a wide range of activities in order to augment their ‘official’ wages and that the informal economy retained its importance as a source of income into the 1970s.

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<sup>326</sup> Smithies, *The Black Economy*, p. 113.

## CHAPTER SIX:

### BUDGETING AND HOUSHOLD EXPENDITURE

The literature concerning the post-war expenditure of the British population concurs that changes occurred, however, there is dissent over the extent of such changes and their effect upon individuals within the family economy. Although many people benefited from the economic improvements and state welfare of the post-war period, some families remained in poverty, or fear of poverty, utilising traditional patterns of behaviour and consumption in order to mitigate their circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter will focus on some of the means and methods of expenditure in Pensnett, Sedgley, and Tipton in order to attempt to ascertain the extent of change in budgeting and spending in these localities after the war. Firstly, it will examine the extent to which the traditional gender division of economic duties altered after 1945, focusing primarily upon the complex relationships between budgeting and spending priorities. It will suggest that budgeting remained problematic for some families and, despite assertions of the devaluation of their former skills, that the majority of women retained responsibility for the allocation of household funds. Secondly, it will consider continuity and change surrounding food consumption in the light of modern self-service shopping venues. It will examine the rationale for the continuing patronage of local shops and the utilisation of traditional means of financing consumption. Inevitably, some methods of consumption i.e. the purchasing of items via a variety clubs and ‘diddlums’ could be classified as mediums of saving and will be discussed in chapter eight. Finally, given new developments in credit opportunities, attention will focus upon methods of financing consumption in the age of affluence, arguing that despite innovations in financial practices, “working-class consumer credit is a subject where it is difficult to separate the social from the economic”<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Coates and Silburn, *Poverty*; Moorhouse, *Britain*; Kerr, *The People*; Mays, *Growing Up*; Vincent *Poor Citizens*.

<sup>2</sup> O’Connell, *Credit and Community*, p. 3.

An adequate income has always been considered essential to the material well-being of any family. However, the expenditure of that income remains a crucial aspect of economic subsistence, as acquisition of sufficient funds is futile unless it is effectively utilised. In the past, feckless expenditure was perceived to be the root cause of much poverty, as social surveys revealed that the apportioning of earned income was crucial to the comfort and well-being of the family.<sup>3</sup> In the early twentieth century, the Fabian Women's Group's survey demonstrated that even amongst "decent" and "respectable" families the ways in which income was expended had a major impact upon the health, comfort and dynamics of family groups.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the ability to budget effectively was an attribute which was greatly admired and appreciated - particularly as the disposal of available resources had a defining impact upon living standards.<sup>5</sup>

For families in the lower-middle and working classes, the duties and responsibilities of men and women have traditionally been allocated upon strictly gendered lines. The duty of the husband and father was one of 'provider' - someone whose labour provided an income, which was relinquished to the wife and mother for efficient and effective disposal.<sup>6</sup> In the twentieth century distinctions between male and female lives were challenged, as women gained more political and legal rights over their public and private affairs, particularly with regards to employment and welfare.<sup>7</sup> However, as Lewis claimed, by 1945 the sexual division of labour within the home had changed very little, with most women relying upon husbands for "economic support".<sup>8</sup> A 'good' husband fulfilled his "financial obligations", whilst the ability to manage her budget defined a 'good' wife.<sup>9</sup>

It is widely accepted that women's household management skills were greatly valued, historically providing a buffer between family comfort and the prospect of penury and

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<sup>3</sup> Pember-Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, The survey refuted previous accusations that poverty was caused by the feckless and extravagance of the working-class, concluding that "experience shows how fatally easy it is for people to label all poverty as the result of drink, extravagance or laziness." p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Pember-Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> Pember-Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> Roberts, E., 'Women, the Family Economy'; Chinn, *They Worked*; Lewis, *Women in England*.

<sup>7</sup> Lewis, *Women in England*. Lewis assesses the legislative changes affecting women in the period between 1870 and 1950 and their impact upon gender divisions in British society.

<sup>8</sup> Lewis, *Women in England*, p. 11

<sup>9</sup> Lewis, *Women in England*, p. 11; Chinn, *They Worked*; Benson, *The Working Class*, p. 103.

destitution.<sup>10</sup> Undoubtedly changes occurred during the twentieth century. However the extent of that change is by no means clear-cut. Roberts' evidence from the north-west of England suggested that working-class women's power, traditionally derived from her budgeting abilities, was gradually eroded as their role in the family economy changed.<sup>11</sup> The historiography has claimed that a combination of state benefits, higher wages and low unemployment resulted in increased prosperity which, to some extent, negated the necessity to 'make do and mend' or 'make something out of nothing', thus rendering women's former skills redundant.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, "by 1950, in spite of austerity, the heroic age, in which women as household managers and men as earners had waged war against poverty was largely past".<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Benson claimed that women "relinquished some of the autonomy that they had exercised when life had been harder, and time and money were in shorter supply".<sup>14</sup> The oral evidence from Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton suggests that the erosion of women's responsibility for household budgeting was protracted over a longer period than previously suggested by Roberts, Benson and others.<sup>15</sup>

### **Budgeting**

It is undeniable that the management of household finances has traditionally been perceived as 'woman's work'<sup>16</sup> and budgeting for the family's needs was the sole province of the wife and mother. Vincent asserted that, "Husbands played little part in the daily strategies of consumption".<sup>17</sup> Consequently, it was from their control of the family economy that lower-middle and working-class women derived power and status.<sup>18</sup> "A wife soon takes it for granted – assumes with marriage – that she will have to 'fadge' to make ends meet".<sup>19</sup> From their weekly 'wages', acquired from their husband's earnings, women apportioned sufficient money to pay the rent, feed and clothe the family and, if possible, retained a small sum for emergencies.

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<sup>10</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*; Roberts, *Women and Families*; Benson, *The Working Class*; Chinn, *They Worked*.

<sup>11</sup> Roberts, 'Women, the Family Economy', p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> Roberts, 'Women, the Family Economy', p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Benson, *The Rise of Consumer*, p. 183; Bruley, *Women*, p. 134.

<sup>15</sup> Roberts, 'Women, the Family Economy', p. 16, *Women and Families*, p. 11; Benson, *The Rise of Consumer*, p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> Johnson, *Spending and Saving*, p. 87; Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 39.

<sup>17</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 89; Chinn, *They Worked*; Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society*, p. 23.

<sup>19</sup> Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 39; Hathorne, *Five Minutes*; Tipton Mrs Tolley, Mrs Lakin, Sedgley Mrs JB.

Budgeting ability was highly valued and a “well managed family budget could mean the difference between...being adequately fed and housed... [or] sinking below the poverty line”.<sup>20</sup>

Much has been written of the devaluation of women’s ‘housewifely’ skills in the period of affluence and the consequent loss of status and power.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, for many middle and working-class women their traditional skills retained importance and the management of income remained crucial to the family’s well-being, status and standard of living. This is reflected in contemporary journals. In 1953, *The Economist* indicated that women’s magazines were a source of guidance to housewives in matters of finance and budgeting. *Woman* and *Woman’s Own* were cited as “having altered their characteristics... [making them] widely read ...by women of all income groups from the middle classes downwards”. Catering to this wider audience, they provided free knitting and sewing patterns, recipes and advice concerning effective ways “to lay out their money [and] how to make do and mend”.<sup>22</sup> 1955 advertisements for the National Provincial Bank acknowledged that women’s role in household budgeting was a crucial aspect of “house management”.<sup>23</sup> As late as the 1970s, Peter Gurney recollected that “women commonly carried the responsibility for making ends meet, making sure children were clothed, rent paid and Christmas presents bought”.<sup>24</sup>

However, if the female role was becoming less important in some families, it was the acquisition and ownership of material goods or consumer durables which helped to restore a woman’s power and prestige<sup>25</sup> - the ownership of televisions, radiograms, washing machines and other domestic items were signs of respectability and social status.<sup>26</sup> Acquisition of such items was important amongst the families of respondents. For instance, when Mrs Wilson recalled her mother’s purchase of a television for the

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<sup>20</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 139; Johnson, *Spending and Saving*, p. 3. Women’s struggles to maintain their families have been documented by the Fabian Women’s group and the Women’s Co-operative Guild. Pember-Reeves, *Round About*; Llewelyn-Davies, M., (ed.), *Life as We Have Known It*, London: Virago Press Ltd., 1977 [First published in 1931]; Llewelyn-Davies, M., (ed.), *Maternity: Letters from Working Women, collected by the Women’s Co-operative Guild*, New York: Garland Publishing, 1981, [First published in 1915].

<sup>21</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*; Bruley, *Women*, p. 134; Benson, *Affluence and Authority*, p. 183.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Modes and Morals’ *The Economist*, 28<sup>th</sup> November 1953, pp. 642-644.

<sup>23</sup> Lake, F., *Daily Mail Ideal Home Book*, London: Daily Mail Publishing, 1955, p. 126

<sup>24</sup> Gurney, P., Review of O’Connell, S., ‘Credit and Community’ *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 21, No.1 January 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Bourke, *Working-Class*, p. 161; Tebbutt, *Gossip*, p. 161.

<sup>26</sup> Hathorne, *Five Minutes, Slurry and Strawberries*.



Coronation in 1953, Mr Wilson commented that “your mom was one of those that if anything new came out she’d got to have it – she had it before that!”<sup>27</sup> Betty Detheridge’s mother changed from a black and white television to a colour set in 1970 – “of course she’d got to do that to keep up with the Joneses”.<sup>28</sup> Mrs Sheldon’s “eyes opened wide with wonder and instinctive envy” at the sight of her neighbours’ verandah. She subsequently purchased one by mail order, causing her husband to describe the purchase as “a bit o’keepin’ up with the Joneses”.<sup>29</sup> Working-class women increasingly embraced conspicuous consumption believing that ownership of certain items enhanced both self-image and social identity.<sup>30</sup>

But, even in times of affluence, particularly amongst poorer families, the housewives’ task remained “in essence...the same as her grandmother’s”.<sup>31</sup> The timing of bill payment remained crucial, requiring a great deal of planning and mental effort. “If a bill was paid too soon, the budget might not survive until the next pay packet”.<sup>32</sup> Female respondents intimated that, despite post-war prosperity, during the 1950s and 60s they were expected to ‘manage’ on their house-keeping, and indeed it was a source of great pride that they did so. Mrs Lakin described managing money throughout the study period as “a bit like a jigsaw puzzle – everything slotted together”.<sup>33</sup> In Pensnett, “all women were given their housekeeping money on a Thursday and that was it”. Mrs Beaman claimed that “sometimes on a Tuesday I’d only got two shillings left”.<sup>34</sup> This was endorsed by Mr Tolley, the proprietor of a mobile shop, who clarified the difficulties of his customers, demonstrating the intricate relationship between consumption, methods of payment and credit, as well as the complex interdependence between shopkeeper and consumer, which continued until his retirement in the 1990s.

“People would come in on a Friday night and pay up. And then they’d have all the stuff for the next week...and then they’d come and say I’ve got me

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<sup>27</sup> Sedgley Mr SW.

<sup>28</sup> Pensnett Mrs BD.

<sup>29</sup> Hathorne, *Five Minutes*, pp. 78, 86.

<sup>30</sup> Benson, *Consumer Society*, p. 220. However, Blackwell and Seabrook believed that consumer durables were proffered to the working-class as consolation for their continuing deprivation in other areas of life. P. 51.

<sup>31</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 186.

<sup>32</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 186.

<sup>33</sup> Mrs Lakin December 1998.

<sup>34</sup> Pensnett Mrs JB.

electric bill or me gas, you know. Electric bill mainly and so they'd leave the bill to pay the electric bill and they'd clear it off over the next few weeks. Say if they owed [me] – they'd leave it for one week and then over the next few weeks they'd clear it off...it was an interest free loan to them you know".<sup>35</sup>

His father, who owned a grocery business, had a similar relationship with his customers, allowing them goods at reduced prices, or deferring payments in times of hardship when "they had a bill coming or they'd got to get something for the kids".<sup>36</sup>

Undoubtedly food, shelter and clothing were paramount considerations within the family's budget. However, when apportioning income rent or mortgage payments were perceived to be of prime importance. As Tebbutt indicated, "Rent accounted for a substantial proportion of any family's income, and was the most inelastic of all the financial burdens which had to be faced".<sup>37</sup> Respondents confirmed that rent money was invariably set aside first, "it was your main debt [and] you'd gotta see that your rent was paid because if you owed so much rent you was (sic) thrown out".<sup>38</sup> Mr BT recollected: "We made sure we kept a roof over our heads, then food", adding that his wife "kept a book with all our payments".<sup>39</sup> Mr and Mrs Greenaway considered mortgage and food as main priorities, joking that she maintained responsibility for budgeting - "I used to leave everything to Pat 'cos I was no good...I'd say oh that looks nice and her'd say no [we can't afford it]".<sup>40</sup> The newly-constructed council houses, discussed earlier, were expensive to rent, and in October 1955 the *Tipton Herald* expressed concern that government housing subsidies rendered it "economically impossible for the average working man to live in a council house". It claimed that rents had risen by nine shillings per week during the past year and examined the typical family's budget, stating that average income plus child allowances totalled approximately £7. 18 shillings per week. The editorial indicated that £6. 6 shillings (or 80% of their income) was likely to be expended on food and essentials, concluding "that this means that the working man has not enough left to pay his rent. In other words, he is 10 shillings in debt without having had any

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<sup>35</sup> Tipton Mr HT.

<sup>36</sup> Tipton Mr HT.

<sup>37</sup> Tebbutt, *Making Ends Meet*, p. 15.

<sup>38</sup> Tipton Mrs Lakin.

<sup>39</sup> Pensnett Mr BT. Mr and Mrs BT are now pensioners and throughout their married life Mrs T has continued to record all their outgoings in a book.

<sup>40</sup> Pensnett Mr SG.

pleasure such as a visit to the cinema or a football match”.<sup>41</sup> It is hardly surprising that families who transferred from slums into modern, more expensive housing were deeply concerned about their commitment to paying rent as the transition from old to new properties exacerbated budgeting difficulties.

However, as in the pre-war period, it remained customary to “hold back” a week’s rent in times of emergency.<sup>42</sup> Rental arrears were fairly commonplace, amongst some families; Mrs Lakin revealed the extenuating circumstances under which rent was withheld. When her daughters required new shoes she missed that week’s rent to “get some money in my purse”. “By owing a week’s rent we knew we could buy the kids another pair of shoes.”<sup>43</sup> This was corroborated by her daughter who recalled numerous instances of hiding behind the sofa when the rent payments were due.<sup>44</sup> This practice was comparatively commonplace and acceptable even in times of comparative affluence, with mothers frequently “owing a week’s rent” to purchase other items.<sup>45</sup> Fridays were often spent avoiding the rent-man and other representatives, who were “tiresomely intrepid in tracking down those who were reluctant to pay”.<sup>46</sup> Through the 1960s when their children were of school-age, Mrs Cartwright remembered locking the door and “pretending to be out” on Fridays and Mrs Mocroft “hid from the little rent man [in order to retain cash] to pay the electric bill”.<sup>47</sup> Some families were more blatant concerning rent arrears, using well-worn, clichéd responses. Val Cartwright laughingly recalled her neighbours in the 1950s - when the rent collector knocked on the door, shouting ‘rent!’ through the letterbox, their customary reply was spent!<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Tipton Herald*, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1955 (no page number, newspaper cuttings concerning the state of Tipton Housing at Tipton Central Library).

<sup>42</sup> Mrs Lakin 1998.

<sup>43</sup> Mrs Lakin 1998. Interestingly her daughter remarked that she wore second-hand shoes until 1958, when she recalled both the type of shoes and the shop where they were purchased in some detail. Tipton Mrs BT.

<sup>44</sup> Mrs Tolley April 1999.

<sup>45</sup> Hathorne, *Five Minutes*, p. 96; Tipton Mrs HT; Mrs Cartwright.

<sup>46</sup> Bullock, *A Pocket*, p. 71. Much of her autobiography deals with the difficulties which her mother experienced in balancing her inadequate house-keeping budget and the humiliations of poverty in the 1940s and 50s.

<sup>47</sup> Mrs Mocroft and Mrs Cartwright June 1999.

<sup>48</sup> Pensnett Miss VC informal telephone conversation of 1<sup>st</sup> October 2007.

Budgeting remained difficult for a number of the respondents, even in the 1960s some families were forced to use candlelight when utility meters ran out of money.<sup>49</sup> “Mom used to get £12 a week [housekeeping]...she used to do all the shopping...and very often we used to run out of money on a Thursday, so we used to have to search for pennies for the electric and we used to have to light candles”.<sup>50</sup> If Mr Tolley’s customers were short of money they asked him if they could “borrow a shilling for the meter”.<sup>51</sup> The opening of the meters when the ‘gas man’ called provided an additional income in the form of rebate and customers “used to love it when the bloke came to empty the meters – for the discount you know!”<sup>52</sup>

A number of husbands issued set sums for weekly housekeeping and wives were expected to manage. Mrs PB, who was born in 1942, recalled her mother’s budgeting dilemmas:

“Dad was ever so good...the only thing was that he was a little bit mean with his money. I mean he gave me mom so much...and she’d got to sort it all out and she did get a job later...That was his one fault really, yet he wasn’t mean...He used to say to my mom whatever I give you you’ll spend, so I’ll save it...he used to think that the housekeeping was the housekeeping...I mean he never used to turn up all his money like. But my dad used to think he was keeper of the money”.<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, younger respondents indicated that attitudes to budgeting *were* gradually changing. Although they recalled that fathers allocated mothers with a fixed sum of housekeeping, for couples marrying during the 1960s expenditure decisions were likely to be made jointly.<sup>54</sup> Changing attitudes reflected the increasing number of women continuing to work after marriage (and motherhood), who contributed financially to the household. They also resulted from the friction witnessed as parents argued over money worries. Following parental arguments over financial matters Mr RB and his wife, who married in 1964, “had an agreement from the very word go that nobody’s the boss and all our money would be put

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<sup>49</sup> Hathorne, *Five Minutes*, p.69.

<sup>50</sup> Tipton Rev. CH.

<sup>51</sup> Mr Tolley December 1998.

<sup>52</sup> Mr Tolley December 1998.

<sup>53</sup> Tipton Mrs PB.

<sup>54</sup> Sedgley Mrs RW

together...we had joint accounts...everything we did was discussed”.<sup>55</sup> Bill Jones (whose parents had experienced financial problems) and his wife apportioned their income on Friday evenings; sitting on the bed they calculated their weekly budget, setting aside mortgage payments and spending money.<sup>56</sup> Other younger couples also made all spending decisions jointly, as “everything in our life has been joint”; Mr and Mrs Adams never made major purchases without prior discussion.<sup>57</sup> As Marion Allen declared, “it was joint really...we paid together, we just put everything together”.<sup>58</sup>

For couples marrying before 1960 financial decisions were more ambiguous. Customarily husbands provided money for the basic necessities of rent and food which wives expended as they saw fit. However, the purchase of larger items was subject to negotiation – “Mom would have to make a case for it [if she wanted to buy something]”.<sup>59</sup> Mr RB’s father was exceptionally harsh – “absolute control he had to have over everything”. His son’s recollections are repeated verbatim in order to illustrate continuing masculine dominance regarding finance and budgeting, into the 1960s.

“Talk about items for the home, Woodhouses was a furniture shop in Owen Street...and my mom ordered a kitchen cabinet and had it delivered. And when my dad came home from work ...he said ‘Sally what’s that? Did you pay for it?’...And she got the little card out. She’s had it on what they call the knock...He hit her...He made her empty it and threw it outside into the front garden... The next morning he went up and saw the manager and told him you’d better go down our house and get it before it rains...He bought her one a bit later”.<sup>60</sup>

Later in the interview Mr RB recollected that “mom would buy what she wanted, what she knew would be accepted. But if it was anything out of the ordinary she’d have a chat with dad ...She did all the payments...They discussed big purchases”.<sup>61</sup> Evidently his father’s wrath was caused by disapproval of the use of credit - the

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<sup>55</sup> Tipton Mr RB.

<sup>56</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ. Any private conversations were always held in the bedroom as for several years following their marriage, in 1964, they lived with Mrs BJ’s parents.

<sup>57</sup> Pensnett Mr RA, Mrs BA, Mrs JB.

<sup>58</sup> Tipton Mrs MA, Mr MJ; Pensnett Mrs BW, Mr NR.

<sup>59</sup> Tipton Mr RB.

<sup>60</sup> Tipton Mr RB.

<sup>61</sup> Tipton Mr RB.

payment method not the purchases. Mr Greathead also maintained responsibility for the household budget, apportioning the family income for rent, food and other purchases, “Dad budgeted... [he] took all the financial decisions”.<sup>62</sup>

Autobiographies corroborated that many husbands of the post-war period upheld the traditional stereotypical gender roles concerning the ‘keeping’ of the house.<sup>63</sup> John Beck grew up knowing that his mother “was the chancellor of the family exchequer”.<sup>64</sup> In the 1950s, one family frequently lacked money for necessities, but mother’s ability to manage was “quite awesome”,<sup>65</sup> although she was frequently “robbing Peter to pay Paul”. Brenda Bullock’s father “never knew, or cared, about our money worries. He simply handed over the housekeeping...and believed that his duty was done”.<sup>66</sup> Many men retained the belief that financial provision was the limit of their responsibility within the household.<sup>67</sup> Although her father saved to finance the family holiday, Mrs Woolley, born in 1940, recalled that “Mom used to do everything to do with money”.<sup>68</sup> According to Mrs PB, born in 1942, “[Dad] was a little bit mean with his money...I mean he gave Mom so much...and she’d got to sort it all out...he used to think that the housekeeping was the housekeeping...I mean he never used to turn up all his money”.<sup>69</sup>

Disagreements over the allocation of finances almost inevitably resulted in budgeting difficulties and marital disharmony. The recollection of Mr Nixon of Tipton is indicative.

“Unfortunately dad liked a drink and particularly a game of cards; he was a *serious* card player. Well when I was 17 or 18 I used to have to pick him up. He worked till Sunday lunch, he used to work continental shifts so Sunday was a normal working day. So I’d pick him up and...we’d go to his

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<sup>62</sup> Sedgley Mrs DG.

<sup>63</sup> Barnes, *Coronation Cups*, p. 180. When Ron Barnes married in Bethnall Green after the war he slowly began to perceive the difficulties faced by women managing on a limited budget. “I had no idea how hard it was for a woman to manage on the wages of an unskilled husband.” “I did not realise just how much money it took to keep body and soul together from day to day. I got my pay packet and gave Doll what I thought was reasonable”. Hathorne, *Five Minutes*; Price, *In My Life*; Parker, *Black Country Boy*.

<sup>64</sup> Beck, *Perhaps*, pp. 93-94.

<sup>65</sup> Bullock, *A Pocket*, p. 91.

<sup>66</sup> Bullock, *A Pocket*, p. 71.

<sup>67</sup> Bullock, *A Pocket*, p. 90.

<sup>68</sup> Pensnett Mrs BW.

<sup>69</sup> Tipton Mrs PB.

local...and he'd have a drink before lunch...I've seen a week's wages in the pot, me dad and three mates would play solo. I've seen that on a regular basis. I'm not exaggerating I've seen dad win it and I've seen him lose it".<sup>70</sup>

The same was true for other couples:

"They [mom and dad] used to argue constantly about money or the lack of it I should say. And it's no secret my dad used to love his pint and cigarettes and if he'd got enough money in his pocket for his next pint and his next packet of Woodbines he was the king...Well, when mom started working full-time she used to buy things for the house. Things we'd never had before like a TV and a three piece suite. *It was so precious to her she wouldn't let anybody sit on it* and she used to say things – you know, like I bought that, I bought this and it used to really get on dad's nerves. And he said to her once 'right' he said 'if you've bought everything you don't need my money do you?' And his wages packet for that week - they had a terrible row about it and he wouldn't give her his wage packet - And when he died...the wage packet was there and he hadn't opened it".<sup>71</sup>

Other respondents also indicated that their father's insistence on beer and cigarettes, or gambling were the cause of both financial problems and family arguments – "He had to have a drink and a smoke...he'd got to have it irrespective of whether mother was short...money was mother's big worry".<sup>72</sup> The father of Mrs Wise "always went to the pub for a pint, even when they opened on Christmas day", which was a constant source of friction for the family, as "mom always wanted to improve [their material circumstances] but was held back [as] father wasn't interested".<sup>73</sup> At Hinton, Perry and Davenhill of Pensnett "Lots of employees would spend all their wages on dog-racing and they would ask my father [the managing director] to lend them money", so that they could feed their families.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Tipton Mr DN.

<sup>71</sup> Tipton Mrs BT, Mrs PB, Mr DN.

<sup>72</sup> Tipton Mrs VW, Mr HT.

<sup>73</sup> Pensnett Mrs HW.

<sup>74</sup> Miss Yvonne Motteram – letter dated 9<sup>th</sup> September 2007.

Mrs Kendrick recalled seeing “some hardship”, in the 1960s, in her own family until she was earning. She also knew “one man and his wife...he used to gamble and they hadn’t got any money to buy coal so they had to stay in bed to keep warm.”<sup>75</sup> Despite not directly categorising people as poor, Muriel Brown felt that “we were conscious that some people were not quite as well off as we were. But this seems an awful thing to say but generally speaking it was when their dads were in the pub every night”.<sup>76</sup>

During the 1940s and 50s the father of one respondent:

“made two fortunes and lost them”, as a result of his addiction to alcohol and gambling. “He’d never been in a pub in his life until he was 27. Never had a drink or a bet or anything...and one day [someone said] ‘come and have a glass of stout’ and ...somebody said to him ‘do you want a go on the tote?’ ...and he won 300 and odd quid. That was his downfall he just couldn’t resist it”.<sup>77</sup>

Alternatively, even amongst those couples who married in the 1940s and 50s, in a number of instances wives appeared to have complete control. Despite assertions that budgeting decisions were jointly made, Mrs PJ’s ambiguous response articulated the experiences of several respondents. “Oh they were joint...*What I wanted*...Well I made the suggestion and then he agreed”.<sup>78</sup> As Olive Houlton declared, “I held the purse strings...I saved all my money when we got married, all my earnings, and we lived on one salary, Oliver’s. I never spent mine”.<sup>79</sup> The parents of other respondents maintained similar arrangements where expenditure decisions were ostensibly jointly made, but in reality the wives and mothers were the dominant force, initiating the purchase of major items.<sup>80</sup> In 1954 when she married, Mrs Detheridge followed her mother’s example - “Mother was the dominant one very much so...she made all the decisions...mother was fiercely independent and I was fiercely independent ...I wanted the upper hand”.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Mrs Kendrick 1998.

<sup>76</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB.

<sup>77</sup> Tipton Mr HT.

<sup>78</sup> Sedgley Mrs PJ.

<sup>79</sup> Tipton Mrs OH.

<sup>80</sup> Sedgley Mr NS, Tipton Mr DN, Mrs PB. When Mrs PB, whose father had kept strict control over the family budget, married she always controlled the family finances.

<sup>81</sup> Pensnett Mrs BD.



Mr MJ's mother was exceptionally strong-willed and self-determining; in full-time employment throughout her life - "never gid (sic) up working for nobody...my mother wanted her own independence and her's always been an independent woman...and unlike a lot of families...*there was always two purses*, mother's and dad's and one paid for one thing and one for another". Mom had total financial autonomy over her earnings, "The food and furniture was paid out of her own money...dad paid all the rent, rates gas and electric and bought his cars...and still turned up money for housekeeping as they called it. That's how it was, he put his housekeeping money on the table and she hadn't got a clue what was in his pocket".<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Mrs HW's mother, also in full-time employment, "didn't want to be beholden to anybody...she was the driving force, looking after the money. Father was quite willing to hand his money over. She was the one in charge of the bills and everything else". In this instance the father was only allowed to have pocket money!<sup>83</sup>

After her marriage in 1959, June Box followed her mother's example, making all financial decisions, "I took over where me mother left off". "Me dad earned the money but me mother budgeted the finances [she was] very good, yes very good".<sup>84</sup> Mr Gulliver's wife continues to control expenditure, he remains unconcerned, arguing that "her gives me what I wanted each week and I'm happy with it...yes her's always been the banker".<sup>85</sup> In the 1960s, Mr Nixon's mother divided her housekeeping into separate purses and tins for rent, gas, electricity etc. Her husband's "pet phrase" was that women were "the best accountants in the world – keep a house going on nothing". However, their son recalled constant friction as Mrs Nixon resented the amount of pocket money which her husband retained for beer and gambling, but following her husband's death she was frequently heard to remark "I'll say that for your dad he came in and gave me his money".<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Tipton Mr MJ.

<sup>83</sup> Pensnett Mrs HW.

<sup>84</sup> Tipton Mrs JB.

<sup>85</sup> Tipton Mr TG.

<sup>86</sup> Tipton Mr DN. Mr DN described his father as a man who "liked a drink and particularly a game of cards, he was a serious card player". This was a source of resentment for his wife but after her husband's death she was frequently heard to remark "I'll say that for your dad he came in and gave me the money".

However, budgeting problems were sometimes caused by external circumstances, beyond the control of husbands and wives. The oral testimony confirmed Vincent's assertions that, despite state benefits, the ill-health of the main breadwinner continued to be a cause of financial insecurity and budgeting difficulties.<sup>87</sup> The family of Mr PD were "not very well off from 1950 to 1973 as ...father was in and out of hospital".<sup>88</sup> Stan Greenaway's father died in 1942 leaving his widowed mother with seven children and severe financial problems, which did not end with the inception of the Welfare State.<sup>89</sup> The ill-health and subsequent death of Mr KD's father, in the 1960s, resulted in the family's poverty. We were "poor, very poor" because father "was a general labourer [who]...was always ill from the day I remember...and he died when he was 53".<sup>90</sup> Another respondent recollected that "dad was ill a lot and very often he couldn't work and I know that money was extremely tight all the time - it was a really hard life" for mother.<sup>91</sup> Again, respondents implying that the health problems were caused by their employment in heavy industry resided in Pensnett and Tipton. No-one from Sedgley drew conclusions that ill-health might exacerbate financial problems.

The oral testimony indicated that women's budgeting abilities remained important to the welfare of the family and a source of pride within the respondents' reminiscences. Evidently the transition from women's responsibilities for the allocation of finances to a shared accountability is not as clear-cut, in the immediate post-war period as Roberts and others have previously suggested.<sup>92</sup> Whilst in a minority of families husbands controlled expenditure, in others the wife retained sole responsibility.

### **Food Shopping**

Despite some modification of traditional mores and behavioural patterns, generally the provision of food, both purchasing and cooking, remained the sole responsibility of wives and mothers. As Benson indicated, women retained control of "those aspects of consumption that were regarded as 'feminine', routine and unappealing."<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, pp. 160-171.

<sup>88</sup> Tipton Mr PD

<sup>89</sup> Pensnett Mr SG.

<sup>90</sup> Pensnett Mr KD.

<sup>91</sup> Tipton Mrs BT.

<sup>92</sup> Roberts, 'Women and the Family Economy', p. 16; Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 11; Benson, *Consumer Society*, p. 183; Bruley, *Women*, p.134

<sup>93</sup> Benson, *Affluence and Authority*, p. 17; Benson, *Consumer Society*, p. 66.

Indeed, the mundane decisions over what to eat, when and where to purchase comestibles and their financing remained (with few exceptions) divided along gender lines for most of the period. In 1974, Oakley asserted that “‘shopping’ ... [remained] one of the housewife’s main work activities”.<sup>94</sup> Traditionally, for the working and lower-middle class, food shopping was a task performed by women on a virtually daily basis, at corner shops or local markets. The advent of supermarkets, combined with the accessibility of refrigerators and increasing numbers of married women in full-time employment are credited with changing consumption patterns – affecting the retailer and customer relationship, frequency of purchasing foodstuff and the length of the shopping journey.<sup>95</sup>

Indeed, Roberts intimated that by 1970 many women had “all but deserted the corner shop in favour of the new and cheaper supermarkets...visited perhaps only once or twice a week”.<sup>96</sup> Undoubtedly, bulk-buying of certain items was efficient and purchasing from supermarkets could be cost-effective, but for those on limited incomes buying *smaller* amounts of food at these modern outlets was rendered virtually impossible by pre-packaging. For a variety of reasons the transition to supermarket shopping was slow, and old habits and allegiances were difficult to break.<sup>97</sup> As late as the 1960s, the retention of credit facilities at local shops remained desirable and customers were unembarrassed to request from the proprietors “a slice”, a “link”, or a “rasher”.<sup>98</sup> Mr Tolley remembered that “even then [in the early 1970s] a lot of them hadn’t got...fridges” and it was difficult to store large amounts of perishable goods.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Oakley, A., *Housewife*, Penguin, 1974, p. 3. Oakley traced the historical development of the role of the housewife from pre-industrial society to the early 1970s from a feminist perspective and analysed the gender distinctions between the unpaid role of women in the home and the ‘masculine’ activity of work.

<sup>95</sup> Nell, D., A. Alexander, G. Shaw and A. Bailey, ‘Investigating Shopper Narratives of the Supermarket in Early Post-War England, 1945-1975’, *Oral History*, Vol. 37, No. 1, Spring 2009, p. 62. This article utilises 122 semi-structured oral interviews in order to shed light on customer reactions to self-service and supermarket retailing. It examines the ways in which previous academics have ‘characterised the reactions of consumers’ in an age of increasing mass-consumption and traces the developments in research themes within the realms of social sciences since the 1950s. The authors focus upon the strengths of oral history interviews as a means of reconstructing customer experiences within a changing retail market and a challenge to the dominant narratives.

<sup>96</sup> Roberts, ‘Neighbours’, p. 42.

<sup>97</sup> This is endorsed by Kynaston who indicated continuing adherence to local shops. Kynaston, *Austerity*, p. 528-532.

<sup>98</sup> Mrs Mocroft; Mrs Cartwright; Hathorne, *Slurry*.

<sup>99</sup> Mr Tolley December 1998.

Therefore, in Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton the change in shopping habits was not necessarily so marked or extensive as some have claimed. Surveys indicated that approximately 2% of households' favoured bulk buying at the supermarkets, whilst more than 50% of them "did some form of shopping at least four days a week".<sup>100</sup> The misapprehensions are, at least partially, due to the fact that much of the debate concerning consumption has focused upon the habits of affluent, skilled working-class families and the lower-middle class, whilst the practices of the less prosperous have received only limited attention.<sup>101</sup>

Many women adhered to the traditional retail outlets of local shops and markets, partly for convenience and loyalty, but also because they provided flexibility concerning payment. Less affluent families, who would have benefited most from reduced supermarket prices, were sometimes unwilling and frequently unable, to relinquish purchasing food on credit, 'on the knock', or 'in the book'. Even those who *could* afford to settle the bill immediately habitually adhered to 'paying something off' or 'carrying something over' indicating the importance of maintaining customary "arrangements" with local shop keepers.<sup>102</sup> In Hoggart's opinion, neither full employment nor the Welfare State completely obliterated traditional means of food shopping, he believed that "old habits persist", with women preferring to "leave five shillings till next week" as was customary.<sup>103</sup>

However, in 1966, Davis concluded that by the 1960s consumers transferred allegiance from local shops to large-scale multiple outlets.<sup>104</sup> She estimated that by 1970 approximately half of total food purchases would be made at self-service shops.<sup>105</sup> This view was not confirmed within the oral testimony. In Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton consumption patterns changed slowly, with many families

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<sup>100</sup> Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, p. 32.

<sup>101</sup> Hennessy, P., *Having It So Good: Britain in the Fifties*, London: Allen Lane, 2006, p. 539.

<sup>102</sup> Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 40.

<sup>103</sup> Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 40.

<sup>104</sup> Davis, D., *A History of Shopping*, London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul Ltd., 1966, p. 278. This volume traced changes in retailing and shopping since medieval times through to the 1960s. She charted the origin and development of four main systems of shop keeping: co-operatives, multiple stores, department stores and 'bazaar-type' stores, and examined their impact upon the small independent retailers and specialist food shops.

<sup>105</sup> Davies, *Shopping*, p. 288. She does not, however, include any basis or cite of reference for this estimation.

utilising corner shops, on an almost daily basis for the majority of their purchases.<sup>106</sup> Several possible explanations may be cited for this: custom - they ‘knew’ the shopkeeper and were familiar with their surroundings; convenience - the shops were situated within their immediate vicinity and they could either leave a weekly order, ‘pop in’ or send the children;<sup>107</sup> financial reasons - it was possible to buy small amounts of a particular item<sup>108</sup> and most corner shops ‘ran a book’ meaning that immediate payment was unnecessary.<sup>109</sup> As Brenda Bullock asserted in her memoirs “food would have been more of a problem had it not been for that blessing of the poor – local credit”, in her opinion, local shops would have been bereft of customers during the week if they had refused to offer credit.<sup>110</sup>

Supermarkets *were* arriving in areas of the Black Country. However, as Williams has already indicated, “A future academic enquiry will probably find it very difficult to establish who opened the first supermarket in the Black Country”<sup>111</sup> and it is certainly difficult to ascertain when they arrived in individual towns. Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton were largely reliant upon small independent retailers and co-operatives stores until the 1960s. When Mrs James moved from Tipton to Sedgley in 1959: “there were no supermarkets – only the Co-op”.<sup>112</sup> It was 1965 before a new shopping centre opened in Tipton;<sup>113</sup> until this juncture smaller shops tended to “follow the lines of the main road rather than to be grouped at focal points in residential areas”.<sup>114</sup> Co-operative stores existed in all three areas by the early twentieth century<sup>115</sup> and were

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<sup>106</sup> Sedgley Mr NS.

<sup>107</sup> Pensnett Mrs IT. Mr BT and Mrs IT ran a small shop in Pensnett High Street from the mid 1960s to the mid 1980s; Benson, *Consumer Society*, p. 66.

<sup>108</sup> Benson, *Consumer Society*, p. 66.

<sup>109</sup> Benson, *Consumer Society*, p. 182; Johnson, *Spending and Saving*, p. 140. Johnson cited Margaret Llewellyn Davies’ assertion that the poor traditionally purchased food items in places where they bought small quantities of inferior goods at low prices.

<sup>110</sup> Bullock, *A Pocket*, p. 68. Goods were placed ‘on the slate’ during the week and bills were settled on Fridays when customers received their pay packets.

<sup>111</sup> Williams, N., *Shop in The Black Country*, Wolverhampton: Uralia Press, p. 9.

<sup>112</sup> Tipton Mrs LJ.

<sup>113</sup> *Tipton Handbook*, 1965, p. 23.

<sup>114</sup> *Conurbation*, p. 184. Sedgley’s first shopping centre was opened at around the same time but the shops in Pensnett still follow the traditional pattern.

<sup>115</sup> The Tipton Society’s first shop, in Owen Street, was opened in the late 1870s; Sedgley in the Bull Ring in 1900, Pensnett High Street in 1929. For an extremely comprehensive history of co-operation in the area, including interviews with customers and staff members see Williams, N., *The Co-op in Birmingham and the Black Country: 150 Years of Co-operation, 1844-1944*, Wolverhampton: Uralia Press, 1994.

customarily utilised in the manner of corner shops, with respondents visiting several times a week.<sup>116</sup>

In Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton consumption patterns changed slowly. Despite increasing prosperity, the advent of self-service and supermarkets, many shopkeepers and customers adhered to traditional methods of retailing and purchasing provisions throughout the period. Shopping daily remained a regular occurrence, even women who were working full-time called into shops at lunch time or on their journey home and food was still purchased in small amounts.<sup>117</sup> Mrs IT followed her mother's shopping routine, sending regular weekly orders to the local shops and then "popping in for fresh things – milk, cakes and bread".<sup>118</sup> When she and her husband became proprietors of a general store in the mid 1960s, local families continued to patronise the shop, following similar consumption patterns.<sup>119</sup> The High Street contained several similar outlets, "little grocery shops, butchers and cake shops" and these were patronised "for the bulk of the weekly shopping".<sup>120</sup> Individual shops ran delivery services – "The lady used to come from the shop and take your orders for groceries...and deliver them".<sup>121</sup> Long-established family firms were familiar, maintained mutual trust with customers and were slow to change the shop facades and types of goods purveyed. In Tipton during the 1950s and 60s, the mother of Barry Whitehouse shopped daily, making purchases from "George Mason's, Moule and Adams, the Co-op, and Wood's".<sup>122</sup> Mr Green, one of the youngest respondents, born in 1952, indicated that "mom only ever used the corner shop...shopped every day...in the week you used to go and they'd put in on the book and pay on Friday or Saturday night...they used to open a packet of cigarettes and sell them as singles".<sup>123</sup>

There are, however, signs of generational differences, as some younger couples, marrying in the mid 1960s, were more inclined to perceive food shopping as a joint enterprise, but only when shopping in supermarkets some distance from their homes.

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<sup>116</sup> Pensnett Mrs JB; Sedgley Mrs DG.

<sup>117</sup> Pensnett Mrs BA, Mrs BW; Sedgley Mr DG, Mrs CB, Mrs IW, Mrs DG; Tipton Mrs BT, Mrs JL.

<sup>118</sup> Pensnett Mrs IT, Mrs PG.

<sup>119</sup> Pensnett Mrs IT. They purchased the newsagents and general store situated on Pensnett High Street in 1965.

<sup>120</sup> Pensnett Mrs PG.

<sup>121</sup> Sedgley Mrs PJ, Mrs IW.

<sup>122</sup> Tipton Mr BW.

<sup>123</sup> Sedgley Mr FG, Mr NS, Mrs CB; Tipton Mr HT, Mr DN, Pensnett Mr BT, Mrs JB, Miss VC.

Mr Ashfield, who married in 1968, shopped with his wife: “we both did [shopped] basically...a big shop once a week, where mom went every day”.<sup>124</sup> Nevertheless, the majority of young women combined supermarket shopping with patronage of the traditional shops utilised by their mothers. “We would go together occasionally...I couldn’t drive at that stage so Graham would come with me to get the bulk of the shopping and then I would...go and get bits on my own”.<sup>125</sup> Following her wedding in 1965, Mrs Greathead, who was employed full-time in James Beattie’s accounts department, “used to take my little trolley into Sedgley” and make purchases at all the local, independent stores.<sup>126</sup>

Supermarkets and self-service stores were inconvenient without access to transport.<sup>127</sup> Bulk buying from the supermarket, although ultimately more cost effective, required a larger initial cash outlay, access to a refrigerator and assistance with transportation of goods. Consequently, the poorer families who were most in need of cheaper food were those who were least likely to utilise them. Mr and Mrs Jones were the only Pensnett couple taking joint responsibility for their weekly grocery purchases at a supermarket; they both worked full-time throughout the period and were childless meaning that their joint income was comparatively high, and they had more free time.<sup>128</sup> Mrs Adams, who married in 1964, initially described purchasing food on a weekly basis from the local co-operative store, subsequently stating that she bought food daily in her lunch hour and “wouldn’t do a big shop, not once a week”.<sup>129</sup>

Some men, emulating their fathers, remained resolutely detached from the procedure. “He only gave me the housekeeping money - that was his involvement and I’d go and spend it”. Mr Beaman’s sole contribution to the process was that he “made a nice box for under the pram to carry the shopping from the Co-op”.<sup>130</sup> The husband of Mrs DB, who married in 1953, was the notable exception, as “Frank did most of the shopping he went out into the country and brought it back”. He purchased fruit,

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<sup>124</sup> Tipton Mr DA.

<sup>125</sup> Sedgley Mrs CB who was married in 1964; Mr DG; Pensnett Mr BJ; Tipton Mrs PB.

<sup>126</sup> Sedgley Mrs DG.

<sup>127</sup> All the female respondents who had a driving licence and owned a car during this period were unmarried and living at home with their parents. Pensnett Miss YB, Miss NP.

<sup>128</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ. They also purchased both a fridge and a freezer in the early years of their marriage.

<sup>129</sup> Pensnett Mrs BA. The discrepancy arose as her children were born in the late 1960s and it was after this time, in the early 1970s, when they acquired a freezer and began to shop on a weekly basis.

<sup>130</sup> Pensnett Mrs JB.

vegetables and meat, although his source of supply was not revealed. The family supplemented these items with regular, virtually daily, purchases from the local shops.<sup>131</sup>

Shopping locally, customers were often neighbours of the proprietor, who was familiar with the extended family. The maintaining of friendly relationships making it possible to purchase outside normal opening hours, as Mr Nixon recalled. On many evenings “when Dad would be going out on a horrible winter’s night... [I] used to knock on Mr Myer’s window to buy one ‘Seven O’clock’ razor blade” for father’s use. Mr Myers was “happy to serve me that way” and was always ready to open “in emergencies”.<sup>132</sup> Shopkeepers were ‘obliging’ hoping to maintain both customer loyalty and profits. Mrs Wills’ shop was “open all hours...even Christmas day if anyone wanted anything”.<sup>133</sup> Mr Tolley’s mobile-shop opened late “most nights and weekends...and Christmas eve. Well, someone came for a packet of fakes (sic) at 3 o’clock on Christmas morning”. At the end of the round, “after I locked the back up...many a time someone’s come tapping on the windows and said ‘got a Spanish onion?’”. The relationship between patron and customer was ambivalent but justified, as customers were regarded as friends and “we provided a service”. “You took a lot of interest in it [the customer-relationship], it wasn’t a case of if they dow (sic) come sod ‘em...I remember one Christmas at a quarter-past three in the morning I’d sold out of stuffing and someone wanted a pack of Norfolk stuffing and before I went home I went back down to Tipton to push it through the letterbox. ‘Cos (sic) they depended on us”.<sup>134</sup>

Local shops were sometimes patronised because payment was not necessary at the time of purchase. Respondents all mentioned the cash or ‘tick’ book, or spoke of ‘buying on the strap’, ‘the never never’, ‘on the nail’, or the ‘knock’. But very few admitted personal recourse to that method of payment, instead recalling that ‘other people’ purchased goods on the slate.<sup>135</sup> However, when his mother was admitted to hospital Mr Jones found that his mother was in debt. She “always had a book running

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<sup>131</sup> Pensnett Mrs DB.

<sup>132</sup> Tipton Mr DN.

<sup>133</sup> Pensnett Mrs DB, Miss NP.

<sup>134</sup> Mr Tolley December 1998.

<sup>135</sup> Pensnett Miss VC, Miss YB, Mr BJ; Tipton Rev. CH.



somewhere” and his father’s week’s wages for the subsequent week were expended entirely on his mother’s debts. He recalled that, “Mother was very susceptible...and she’d buy things we didn’t really need” and, as most of the shops in Pensnett and Brockmore ran tick books, she utilised her housekeeping to purchase clothes and shoes in addition to food.<sup>136</sup> The mother of one respondent paid in cash as “once or twice she had it on the book and got herself into trouble”.<sup>137</sup> Customers of Tolley’s mobile-shop bought goods “on the knock when... [we] were short of money. He used to come round late at night and we bought one slice of everything and used to put it on the book”.<sup>138</sup> Although Mr MJ’s mother always paid in cash his less affluent aunt used tick –

“Uncle Dick got his wages once a week ...and her’d go across to Sheldon’s to get groceries and stuff what they wanted, regular as clockwork. On Friday night when they got paid – ‘go and give this to Mrs Sheldon and thank you very much’. Then Saturday morning they’d start another bill...They could pay for that one load and then afterwards they couldn’t and there was lots and lots of families that did that. There were very few that paid cash.”<sup>139</sup>

One Sedgley shopkeeper recollected that “they’d come every day and fetch the bread and milk and ‘give me half a pound of butter and cheese’ and on Fridays they used to pay me and kick off right away again”.<sup>140</sup> Many families prided themselves upon their ability to ‘pay their way’ and frowned upon ‘strap’.<sup>141</sup> Carol Hathorne’s mother opened a ‘strap account’ at the local grocery shop “unknown to Granny”, as the old lady abhorred such practices.<sup>142</sup>

Although convenient for the customers, credit was problematic for shopkeepers when customers were unable - or reluctant - to settle the bill. The family of Mrs Jones’s husband owned several shops in Coseley: “there was one lady who gave Aunt Annie trouble with payments. She used to walk all the way round the estate to avoid the passing the shop. She didn’t go past the shop when she hadn’t paid up for the week

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<sup>136</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ. When his mother left hospital she resumed purchasing ‘on tick’.

<sup>137</sup> Tipton Rev. CH.

<sup>138</sup> Mrs Mcroft and Mrs Cartwright June 1999.

<sup>139</sup> Tipton Mr MJ.

<sup>140</sup> Sedgley Mrs IW.

<sup>141</sup> Pensnett Mrs BA, Miss YB; Sedgley Mrs PJ, Mr NS; Tipton Mrs PB.

<sup>142</sup> Hathorne, *Slurry and Strawberries*, p. 42.

before...and she (the aunt) used to run after her (laughs). There was a lot of that going on".<sup>143</sup> Mrs Wesley recalled allowing customers to owe two weeks on the tick book, then visiting them at home to "say is anything wrong as you haven't been to pay me". She estimated that large amounts of money were owed until the shop closed in the 1990s- "the strap book, hundreds of pounds a week went in it".<sup>144</sup> Tolley's mobile shops had similar problems:

"No doubt they took advantage...no two ways about it. You'd get the odd one that wouldn't pay...Well I mean we just kept knocking the door like you know. Some of 'em did [pay] and some of 'em set the dog on yer. (laughs) But it's true what they say the old wives. You knock the door and the radio went off and the lights went out. And the kids would come to the door and say me mother ay in (laughter)".<sup>145</sup> The family experienced problems with debt-collection - "at the time it was a lot of money. Now let me think, it doesn't sound much...it was about £600-£650 a week -all credit".<sup>146</sup>

In Pensnett "they all did them [tick books]. There was one shop in particular...people drove him [the proprietor] into the lunatic asylum. They would never pay, they'd run up a bill and go to the next shop...It was the same ones that did it five or six families, well known for it".<sup>147</sup>

Despite the apparent affluence and prosperity of the post-war years, budgeting and 'stretching' allotted housekeeping money remained problematic, and expenditure on specific items would, in some instances, preclude the purchase of others. Consequently, during this period, consumption decisions necessitated that families and individuals give careful consideration to their requirements, budgeting and shopping practices. Carol Hathorne's mother was concerned that expenditure on coal would prevent her "keeping up payments" for the local party to celebrate the coronation of Elizabeth II.<sup>148</sup> Despite assertions to the contrary, the ability to 'stretch' the housekeeping in order to keep the family housed, fed and to 'make ends meet' remained a constant source of anxiety well into the 1960s, at least for some families

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<sup>143</sup> Sedgley Mrs PJ. They owned a fish and chip shop, a florists, and a greengrocery shop all situated in one street in Wallbrook.

<sup>144</sup> Sedgley Mrs IW, Mr DW.

<sup>145</sup> Tipton Mr HT.

<sup>146</sup> Tipton Mr HT.

<sup>147</sup> Pensnett Mr KD.

<sup>148</sup> Hathorne, *Five Minutes*, p. 33.

and individuals, and the requisite skills were recalled with pride. As late as the 1960s some husbands remained unaware of the financial difficulties facing their wives, who continued to struggle with budgeting in order to fulfil the needs and requirements of the family. A minority of men, particularly amongst the older generation, continued to perceive their sole duty in terms of financial provision.

### **Financing Consumption**

The period between 1945 and 1970 saw a number of innovative changes in methods of financing purchases. The emergence of the credit unions during the 1960s were “championed as an alternative to expensive commercial credit and a panacea to the money problems of the poor”, in which the thrift of members was rewarded with annual dividends.<sup>149</sup> Britain’s first credit card, the Barclaycard, was issued in 1966, enabling customers to access credit, up to an agreed limit, virtually ‘on demand’.<sup>150</sup> By the same year one tenth of all consumer-spending was based on credit and 40% of cars and furniture was purchased on some form of credit.<sup>151</sup> However, the oral evidence demonstrated that cash purchases, the result of saving for specific items, remained the most popular method of consumption.

As earlier in the century, chosen methods of payment were affected by the amount of income and its regularity, and by traditional notions of respectability and propriety, with families desiring to confirm their status and affluence within the neighbourhood.<sup>152</sup> These choices became more difficult in the period of affluence as an inherent dislike of debt was to be balanced against aspirations, the acquisition of consumer goods and the necessity of ‘keeping up with the neighbours’. Many families simply refused to go into debt, and preferred to save for coveted goods. The oral interviews elicited a variety of responses to the prospect of purchasing on credit, with the majority viewing the debt of a mortgage as ‘respectable’ and a means of improving status, whilst preferring to save for cars and other expensive items.

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<sup>149</sup> O’Connell, *Credit and Community*, p. 238. In chapter seven, entitled ‘New Hope for Mutuality: Credit Unions’, O’Connell outlines the history of the British credit union movement and compares their progress with others in America and Europe.

<sup>150</sup> Sandbrook, *Never Had It*, p. 183.

<sup>151</sup> Sandbrook, *Never Had It*, p. 183.

<sup>152</sup> Roberts, *Classic*, pp. 16-18.

Most respondents from all three areas reiterated the views of Mr BT - that debt incurred with a mortgage was acceptable, whilst other forms were to be meticulously avoided.<sup>153</sup> This was inextricably linked to the concept of respectability and the upholding of parental values, with virtually all respondents justifying their attitudes to consumption, and in particular its financing, as accepted familial ethics. Stan Greenaway, for example, quoted his father – “My dad used to say it you can’t afford it forget it”<sup>154</sup> and Miss Cartwright explained that “you’d got to wait, my dad always made us wait for whatever we wanted”.<sup>155</sup> If Bill Jones and his wife “wanted something then we would save for it”, as instilled by their parents.<sup>156</sup> Again in Sedgley and Tipton, respondents were influenced by traditional family values and customs. The view of Mrs Allen is typical: “I didn’t know anybody that did [use credit] and the family wouldn’t be allowed to ‘cos the matriarch wouldn’t let ‘em...that would be [unacceptable].<sup>157</sup> Mr Tolley recollected that, “If we hadn’t got the money we didn’t have it. My mom and dad weren’t like that they always paid in cash.”<sup>158</sup> Mr Cripps and his wife “always paid cash, never believed in having what I couldn’t afford because that was the situation – how I’d been brought up. My parents were the same”.<sup>159</sup> A number of respondents reiterated Mrs Leddy’s view that “we wouldn’t buy anything if we didn’t have the money”,<sup>160</sup> “you use what money you’ve got and you know if you hadn’t got you do without”.<sup>161</sup> Others continued to be influenced by parental guidance: “My dad used to have a saying, unless you can pay cash, unless you can afford it, *don’t have it*”.<sup>162</sup> The mother of Mrs Wise “paid cash for everything...we was always brought up – if you didn’t need it, or couldn’t afford it, you didn’t have it”. Her daughter explained that as a result of mother’s exhortations “we always lived very much within our means”.<sup>163</sup>

Respondents who initially rejected parental advice and homilies were generally consumed by guilt and endeavoured to reimburse the loan as quickly as possible. Mr

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<sup>153</sup> Pensnett Mr BT, Mrs IT, Mr BJ Miss VC, Miss YB, Mr DM.

<sup>154</sup> Pensnett Mr SG.

<sup>155</sup> Pensnett Miss VC. Miss YB and Mr DM also upheld this view.

<sup>156</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ.

<sup>157</sup> Tipton Mrs MA.

<sup>158</sup> Tipton Mrs LJ.

<sup>159</sup> Sedgley MR MC.

<sup>160</sup> Tipton Mrs JL, Mr BW; Sedgley Mrs VR.

<sup>161</sup> Sedgley Mrs VR.

<sup>162</sup> Tipton Mr RB.

<sup>163</sup> Pensnett Mrs HW.

Tolley bought a Wolsey 1500 on HP, but “it [the debt] drove me barmy and I rang up and said ‘how much to pay it off’. But anyway I paid it off”. He was influenced by his father’s belief that “If you wanted anything you saved for it and that was it”.<sup>164</sup> Exceptional purchases were made on credit, but mitigating circumstances were cited, such as being unable to afford furniture due to mortgage payments; one couple purchased ‘basic’ dining and bedroom suites “on tick and paid it off in a few months”.<sup>165</sup> Those succumbing to credit, such as Mrs Bennett, were careful not to over-extend their budgets - “We did buy a three piece suite on HP but you wouldn’t dream of purchasing anything else until you’d finished paying for the one item. But that’s how it was then”.<sup>166</sup> A small minority of respondents utilised credit as the only means of purchasing large items. “Mom did the choosing and she would have paid weekly. I can’t imagine mom ever having enough money to pay anything outright.”<sup>167</sup> All of the Gulliver family purchases were on credit - “We’d have it on the so much a week”, or “If it was a big piece of furniture they’d pay for it over a period”.<sup>168</sup>

As a schoolgirl Mrs MD was employed in a hairdresser’s on Saturdays and wanted to purchase a sewing machine costing £15. Her parents signed an HP agreement, on her behalf, on the understanding that she was solely responsible for the payments.<sup>169</sup> Nonetheless, this behaviour was extremely unusual amongst the respondents as credit agreements were deemed to be less respectable than cash payments, particularly for the young. Mr Nixon used hire purchase surreptitiously, “not often ‘cos dad had a thing against HP”.<sup>170</sup> When one couple purchased a television on HP they returned “to the shop and paid it off [as they] couldn’t bear it...absolutely. I thought my mother would go mad if she knew about it”.<sup>171</sup> Hopkins asserted that many housewives enjoyed the kudos of the Hire Purchase delivery vehicle outside their home, demonstrating the viability of their credit and advertising their latest purchases.<sup>172</sup> However, in Johnson’s estimation, resorting to HP remained a stigma

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<sup>164</sup> Tipton Mr HT.

<sup>165</sup> Pensnett Mrs JB.

<sup>166</sup> Sedgley Mrs CB.

<sup>167</sup> Tipton Mrs BT.

<sup>168</sup> Tipton Mr TG; Sedgley Mr TG, Mrs DG.

<sup>169</sup> Tipton Mrs MD.

<sup>170</sup> Tipton Mr DN.

<sup>171</sup> Pensnett Mrs BD.

<sup>172</sup> Hopkins, *New Look*, p. 37.

for many people; therefore careful considerations were necessary before consumption took place.<sup>173</sup> This was undoubtedly confirmed by the majority of the respondents who recalled the anxiety engendered by consumption decisions and the potential shame incurred by debt.

Ambivalent attitudes were displayed in Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton, and again generational differences are demonstrated. These differences appear to be inextricably linked to the abhorrence of debt and notions of respectability inherited from the older generation. The Sheldons purchased a gramophone on HP, which was soon repossessed when the payments were late. Grandmother's reaction was typical of an older generation - "Shouldn't 'ave 'ad it if yow couldn't afford it! – Never bin so ashamed as when that van come to the door – an' all the neighbours gawpin' – knowin' we business (sic)".<sup>174</sup> Nevertheless Mrs Sheldon ignored her mother's aversion to debt in order to acquire the status symbol of a veranda from a mail order catalogue.<sup>175</sup> One husband brought home a red Jaguar, when his wife enquired "Wheer'd the money come from?" she was informed - "Ask no questions, hear no lies. Told yer we'd have a red Jag-waar, day I? It's easy on the never never!" His mother-in-law subsequently informed the family that "having things on tick... [was] the road to ruin"<sup>176</sup>

Despite the new boutiques and fashionable clothing stores appearing in the 1960s, memoirs and autobiographies, as well as the respondents in Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton, confirm that people still employed traditional methods of purchasing clothing. Garments bought from boutiques and department stores customarily necessitated payment in cash or - for the fortunate few - by cheque. Benson claimed that working-class consumers were aware that they would be declined credit at large department stores, preferred to obtain it within their locality, either from door-to door salesmen neighbourhood shops, or mail order catalogues.<sup>177</sup> However, this continuing preference for traditional purchasing methods also applied to lower-middle class families. Women were usually responsible for purchasing items of clothing and

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<sup>173</sup> Johnson, *Spending*, p. 159.

<sup>174</sup> Hathorne, *Five Minutes*, p. 13.

<sup>175</sup> Hathorne, *Five Minutes*, pp. 78-91.

<sup>176</sup> Hathorne, *All Shook Up*, p. 13.

<sup>177</sup> Benson, *Affluence and Authority*, p. 211.

household linen and access to newer forms of credit remained limited for them. Regardless of their earned income, women still found it difficult to obtain credit agreements with major stores; retailers' reluctance to allow them independent credit facilities continued into the 1970s.<sup>178</sup>

Increasing affluence and disposable incomes, notwithstanding, many families and individuals continued to buy clothes, household linen and goods from shops which ran 'clubs', by Provident check, or from mail order catalogues. Hoggart claimed that in the affluence of the post-war period, purchasing by check trading, house-to-house agents or from any type of club was habitual, particularly as local shop-keepers and agents were "adept at persuading clients to keep [their former] accounts open".<sup>179</sup> In Tipton Mr Whitehouse confirmed Hoggart's illustration: "If you wanted clothes and were a bit short of cash [then] Guest and Perry's was the place to go... They ran a club and you paid whatever you could afford each week".<sup>180</sup>

Undoubtedly some individuals maintained links with local stores through a virtually inextricable combination of custom, family tradition and habit, what O'Connell described as the "ritualized and routine nature of credit trading", in which the families of established customers also became clients.<sup>181</sup> In Tipton, Potter's - drapers, gentleman's outfitters and school uniform specialists - allowed customers from favoured families to take purchases and make weekly payments into the 1970s and beyond. This practice continued amongst a number of financially secure middle-class families for several generations as the relationship between purveyors and customers was of long standing, consisting of reciprocal knowledge, trust and familiarity and to sever this connection was deemed unthinkable.<sup>182</sup>

Of course there were many reasons for patronising such stores - and shortage of disposable income remained an issue for some consumers. Mrs Mocroft and Mrs

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<sup>178</sup> Badger, 'Consumption', pp. 29-30.

<sup>179</sup> Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 40.

<sup>180</sup> Tipton Mr BW.

<sup>181</sup> O'Connell, *Credit and Community*, p. 40.

<sup>182</sup> O'Connell, *Credit and Community*, Chapter One. Potter's was frequented by the author's grandparents, parents and by the newly married author, in addition to aunts, cousins and the wider family, in the 1970s. Household linen and clothes were usually more expensive than department stores but somehow one felt obliged to patronise the store, as it was 'customary'. Sedgley Mr NS, Mrs PJ; Tipton Mr RB.

Cartwright both made purchases from Potter's because they could "have it on the knock – buy stuff and then pay".<sup>183</sup> During the 1950s and early 60s, Mrs Lakin possessed a 'club card' for several shops enabling her to "dress her [two] girls up more"; although she subsequently mentioned that she frequently had cardboard covering the holes in her own shoes.<sup>184</sup> In Owen Street, customers bought clothing from Frank Jones, who operated a similar system into the 1960s. He also introduced 'club cards' for use at Christmas, "quite a lot of Tipton shops did".<sup>185</sup>

Similarly, shops in Pensnett from grocers to clothiers advertised Christmas clubs and stationers and newsagents announced new stocks of children's Christmas Annuals, inviting prospective purchasers to "join our club".<sup>186</sup> David Mountford's mother paid her next-door neighbour 2/6d a week and was rewarded in due course with a voucher to be exchanged at Bunce's in Dudley, for tea towels, bed linen and curtains.<sup>187</sup> Mrs Tolley recalled that: "There was one woman, I don't know how she got the nickname but she was called Tin Hat. For years and years she ran this club...and when I got married [in 1966] most of my bottom drawer was bought off her...towels, linen and bedding, everything like that".<sup>188</sup>

In Tipton, as in O'Connell's analysis of Belfast,<sup>189</sup> the 'tallyman' continued to call, facilitating the purchase of miscellaneous articles on credit. Again, the familiarity of the salesman made rendered customers loyal, even in times of affluence, as there was some perception of obligation and loyalty to familiar figures within the community.<sup>190</sup> Door-to door salesmen hawked a variety of goods throughout the period. Mrs Tolley described "Different people coming round selling things in cases. The tic-tac man...used to sell everything. They used to sell clothes, bedding, towels, all paid weekly."<sup>191</sup> Carol Hathorne's new "'rigout' – a red, white and blue cotton dress [was

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<sup>183</sup> Mrs Mcroft and Mrs Cartwright June 1999; Sedgley Mrs PJ, Mr NS.

<sup>184</sup> Mrs Lakin December 1998. She was employed as a cleaner at one such shop but her wages were not paid in cash but entered on her club card.

<sup>185</sup> Tipton Mr BW.

<sup>186</sup> *St. James' Methodist Church Autumn Fair Programme*, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1954, p. 3, p. 20.

<sup>187</sup> Pensnett Mr DM.

<sup>188</sup> Tipton Mrs BT.

<sup>189</sup> O'Connell, *Credit and Community*.

<sup>190</sup> O'Connell, *Credit and Community*, pp. 28-30. Sedgley Mrs PJ, Mr NS.

<sup>191</sup> Tipton Mrs BT.



purchased] from the Friday night tallyman's suitcase", as were the almost identical dresses of her school friends.<sup>192</sup>

One clothing company representative called weekly to Brenda Bullock's estate, enticing women, in particular, to purchase beyond their means with the tantalizing prospect of acquiring up to £20 worth of goods to be repaid at 5/- per week. One customer "dazzled by the prospect of having new clothes instantly available at such a little cost, fell into the trap...and ran up debts she couldn't hope to pay off".<sup>193</sup> A number of families utilised this method of consumption out of financial necessity. Throughout the period Mr Tolley recalled the "tally or club mon (sic)" calling on Friday nights to collect 2 or 3 shillings a week. In his estimation it "was the only way they could cope".<sup>194</sup> Mrs Kendrick, born in 1946, admitted that "there were a lot [of clothing clubs] in my day. That's the only way we could have new clothes".<sup>195</sup> In the 1950s, Mr DA's grandfather was an agent for a shop at Oldbury. "He went round people and if they were buying pillows, bed linen, overalls, that kind of thing...and he would deliver goods and collect it [the money] like a club every week....It was a big round...granny's parlour was full of these brown paper parcels which were delivered or collected by the people and then he would go round and get the money."<sup>196</sup> Mr Whitehouse explained that "a man came to our house and you had a suit off him. Paid so much a week and when you'd paid so much over to him you'd have a suit or whatever".<sup>197</sup> For more affluent families the familiarity of the agent's weekly visits ensured customer loyalty; obligatory purchases continued despite improving financial circumstances.

Respondents also purchased items from what Gurney termed "an important icon of post-war consumer culture"<sup>198</sup> in the form of mail order catalogues, which "boomed between the 1950s and the late 1970s....particularly amongst those on limited

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<sup>192</sup> Hathorne, *Slurry and Strawberries*, p. 37. Originally this term denoted the fact that a tally of instalments paid by each customer was marked upon a stick so that payments could be easily calculated.

<sup>193</sup> Bullock, *A Pocket*, p. 71.

<sup>194</sup> Mr Tolley December 1998. Mr Tolley and his brother were the proprietors of mobile grocery shops in the Tipton area and had an intimate insight into the finances of their customers.

<sup>195</sup> Mrs Kendrick May 1999.

<sup>196</sup> Tipton Mr DA.

<sup>197</sup> Tipton Mr BW.

<sup>198</sup> Gurney, Review of O'Connell, *Credit and Community*.

income”.<sup>199</sup> Oral testimony generally endorsed Tebbutt’s assertion that “many users do not see it as a form of credit as cash prices are not quoted and there is no discount for making a cash payment”.<sup>200</sup> In this form of consumption the influence of the matriarchal system was evident, as a number of customers purchased surreptitiously in order to avoid the ire of mothers and grandmothers; alternatively others purchased from catalogues emulating the habits of the older generation. Mrs Wise’s experiences reflected those of a number of respondents: “Well I did [make catalogue purchases] but not let her [mother] know. She didn’t like it...I remember buying a coat once out of a friend’s catalogue and she always said that it was rubbish. [She] didn’t go in shops that had checks neither”.<sup>201</sup> Again, mail order purchases were frequently explained as a means of supporting the agent, a familiar figure within the neighbourhood who was accorded loyalty – “Mrs Scholey [the next-door neighbour] had one at that time [the 1960s]...and Graham’s niece...I just bought a couple of items...to encourage them”.<sup>202</sup>

Lack of disposable income, even in the post-war era, resulted in intricate patterns of borrowing and repayment, from checks, to clubs or mail order.<sup>203</sup> Provident checks<sup>204</sup> allowed customers to pay regular weekly instalments in return for checks which could be exchanged for goods at specific stores, thus allowing the purchaser a small measure of autonomy and choice.<sup>205</sup> The portability of the checks was advantageous to customers and locally, by the mid 1930s, customers had access to a wide variety of outlets.<sup>206</sup> Despite post-war affluence, as O’Connell indicated, “to the surprise of their critics”, the use of this type of doorstep credit remained an integral part of the affluent society of the 1950s and 60s and this is certainly endorsed within the interviews.<sup>207</sup> Out of a combination of loyalty, custom and necessity and despite the

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<sup>199</sup> O’Connell, *Credit and Community*, p. 11.

<sup>200</sup> Tebbutt, *Making Ends Meet*, p. 198.

<sup>201</sup> Pensnett Mrs HW.

<sup>202</sup> Sedgley Mrs CB.

<sup>203</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 186.

<sup>204</sup> The Provident Clothing and Supply Company was established in 1881. For a detailed account of the provident system of check trading see O’Connell, *Credit and Community*, Chapter 2, The Rise of the Provident System: Check Trading. Through an examination of Provident records O’Connell demonstrated the popularity of the system throughout the period from 1945 to the late 1960s when it had 1.5 million customers.

<sup>205</sup> Johnson, *Spending*, p. 152; Tebbutt, *Making Ends Meet*, pp. 186 – 190.

<sup>206</sup> O’Connell, *Credit and Community*, p. 62. For example, in nearby Wolverhampton, O’Connell revealed that customers could patronise 19 shops selling, shoes and boots, 13 furniture shops, 12 clothiers, 9 tailors, 11 opticians, 9 purveyors of wireless sets, 4 jewellers, 3 wallpaper retailers, and a number of second-hand stores.

<sup>207</sup> O’Connell, *Credit and Community*, p. 27.

higher cost of purchases, many families resorted to this type of credit. It was particularly useful to defray the expense of clothing for Grammar School, thus avoiding the potential “anguish of not having the proper uniform”.<sup>208</sup> Jo Stafford’s new uniform was bought with a Provident check to be repaid at ten shillings a week over a considerable period.<sup>209</sup> They were “a simple way...for poor people to save for what they needed without using a bank”.<sup>210</sup> Nevertheless, some consumers felt a degree of embarrassment at the use of checks. In the summer of 1971, Peter Gurney and his mother visited the Worcester branch of Foster Menswear to buy his new grammar school uniform – “In the slightly awkward exchange, mum paid the shop assistant with a Provident cheque. ‘It’s the same as money’ she had told me, though we both knew that was not the case”.<sup>211</sup>

Most respondents were clearly aware of the system, but few were prepared to admit personal use, feeling that the family would be stigmatised by recourse to these checks. When questioned Mr Drew merely said “no, no, no”.<sup>212</sup> Mrs Wise said that “mother didn’t like it, didn’t like Provident checks...and you didn’t argue with mother”.<sup>213</sup> Mrs Jukes’ response was typical - “We didn’t but we knew people who did...some families overdid it and got into a right pickle”.<sup>214</sup> The Sheldon family used a variety of means to finance purchases, but were adamant that Carol could not buy her net underskirt by the means of Provident check, because “Yo cor just goo into debt just like that (sic)”; although, this decision may have been influenced by grandmother’s proximity when the conversation was taking place.<sup>215</sup> Her grandmother’s abhorrence of debt impacted upon the family’s methods of consumption; as did the influence of Petty’s father when poverty combined with reluctance to accept state aid left them without adequate clothing. Petty was aware that a ‘clothing club’ would have resolved this problem, but “agreed with my father that purchase by instalments was

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<sup>208</sup> Bullock, *A Pocket*, p. 106; Tipton Rev CH.

<sup>209</sup> Stafford, *Light in the Dust*, p. 87. The debt was to be paid back at 10s per week; Tipton Mr DN; Mrs Lakin, December 1998.

<sup>210</sup> Bullock, *A Pocket*, p. 70.

<sup>211</sup> Gurney, Review of O’Connell, *Credit and Community*.

<sup>212</sup> Mr Drew June 1999.

<sup>213</sup> Pensnett Mrs HW. Her interview indicated that her mother was extremely domineering and several times during her testimony she reiterated the phrase “you didn’t argue with mother”.

<sup>214</sup> Mrs Jukes May 1998; Pensnett Mrs HW, Mrs BD.

<sup>215</sup> Hathorne, *Slurry and Strawberries*, p. 134.

crazy for people without an assured income”.<sup>216</sup> The minority of respondents using Provident checks often expressed an aversion to debt which was demonstrated by pre-payment. Marion Allen declared that “We had Provident checks ... but they had to be paid for by the time we went for the clothes”.<sup>217</sup>

Despite new ways of financing expenditure, traditional methods of obtaining money were still in evidence, although less prevalent than in the pre-war era. Money-lending was in decline during this period, with only two respondents recalling the practice. Miss Bennett’s grandmother was a money-lender, operating in a small area of Pensnett during the 1950s and 60s; her clientele were neighbours and people from the immediate locality.<sup>218</sup> In other areas of Pensnett the “local loan shark came round every Friday for his money...there used to be shops who would give you credit as well... Ivy Taylor was a very rich woman” who also gave credit at exorbitant rates.<sup>219</sup>

Parental opinions and customary behaviour continued to affect habitual consumption and payment methods between 1945 and 1970. Respondents claimed that the greatest influence on their purchasing arrangements were family practices and concepts of respectable behaviour. Clothing and smaller household items continued to be purchased from small shops which allowed credit, and from tallymen - despite the existence of chain stores and boutiques. The loyalty engendered by the familiar agents, who were known to the entire community, ensured that despite increasing disposable incomes, mail order catalogues and Provident checks remained part of post-war consumption patterns into the 1970s. Most respondents utilised a mixture of old and newer methods of consumption and payment, through custom and convenience; although a minority insisted that it was poverty which regulated their shopping habits. Regardless of Sandbrook’s assertions that they were “ideally suited to the aspirational nature of post-war consumerism, appealing to materialistic daydreams...rather than values of respectability”, hire purchase arrangements were eschewed by the majority of respondents and their families.<sup>220</sup> Small-scale credit was perceived as preferable to hire purchase, and the vast majority of respondents adhered

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<sup>216</sup> Petty, *Five Fags*, p. 169

<sup>217</sup> Tipton Mrs MA.

<sup>218</sup> Pensnett Miss YB.

<sup>219</sup> Pensnett Mr SB.

<sup>220</sup> Sandbrook, *Never Had It*, p. 107.

to the tenet “if you couldn’t afford it you didn’t have it. That was the way we were brought up”.<sup>221</sup>

## Conclusion

Despite the increasing affluence of the post-war era, the oral testimony suggests that changes in the methods of household expenditure, for both the working and lower-middle classes, occurred only gradually. As Benson has indicated “it is easy to exaggerate the scale of the change”.<sup>222</sup> In contrast to the claims of Roberts, in the communities of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton women’s power and status, derived through their management of the family budget, although diminishing slowly, retained some importance beyond the 1950s and into the late 1960s.<sup>223</sup> A woman’s ability to ‘make ends meet’ remained an important factor of family life and her managerial skills were of considerable significance within some families. Her task, as Vincent claimed, remained the same as that of earlier generations.<sup>224</sup> In the majority of families, the wife and mother retained responsibility for the day-to-day allocation of finances and liability for bill payment and budgeting. Gradual changes were evident between generations, with couples marrying in the late 1950s and early 1960s more likely to discuss expenditure and make joint decisions. As Mrs James, who married in 1954 explained – “I was responsible for managing, but we talked about it...together, it was different generations”.<sup>225</sup> Nevertheless, according to the oral evidence, the majority of women remained accountable for the allocation of funds to individual creditors, making crucial choices as to the timing of bill-payment and the placation of tradesmen. Despite full employment and the Welfare State, the evidence suggests that “women’s traditional role as a buffer in the family economy” was necessary until at least 1970 and in some families well beyond that date.<sup>226</sup>

Consumption habits were slow to alter; there were few supermarkets in the area until the 1960s and, even when they were accessible, respondents adhered loyally to the local shops. Despite the accessibility of larger food-outlets, refrigerators and freezers, food shopping was undertaken on an almost daily basis, refuting the conclusions of

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<sup>221</sup> Sedgley Mr NS.

<sup>222</sup> Benson, *Affluence and Authority*, p. 39.

<sup>223</sup> Roberts, ‘Women, the family economy’, p. 16; Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 11.

<sup>224</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 186.

<sup>225</sup> Sedgley Mrs LJ.

<sup>226</sup> Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, p. 126.

Davis that by the 1960s shoppers' allegiance transferred to larger outlets.<sup>227</sup> The gendered division of household responsibilities continued, with purchase of food and household necessities remaining the sole province of women, although by the 1960s changes were slowly becoming evident amongst the younger generation of consumers. The familiarity of the corner shop and the facility of the 'tick book' retained importance, allowing the deferment of payment, should the necessity arise.

Regardless of the opening of chain stores and boutiques, household goods, clothes and provisions were obtained in the traditional fashion and consumption was largely financed by cash, the clubs, check systems and customary means of earlier generations. To some extent the adherence to traditional consumption patterns may be explained by the fact that the spectre of poverty, real or perceived continued to influence behaviour into the 1970s.

The oral evidence reveals that individuals and families were reluctant to use the new systems of credit, equating Hire Purchase and credit cards with a loss of respectability. The availability of credit to the working-class consumer impacted only marginally at this time. Respondents from both working and lower-middle-class backgrounds believed that, although house purchase necessitated incurring debt, the acquisition of a mortgage was acceptable. However, they rejected other forms of debt whenever possible, preferring to save until the items could be purchased outright. These decisions were generally influenced by parental opinion, traditional values and custom. The individuals who rejected parental advice, in favour of 'going into debt', usually expressed deep feelings of guilt at the use of credit, despite the numerous small purchases which were regularly purchased by other more traditional credit systems. The tallyman, Provident checks, clubs and catalogues were not necessarily equated with the respondents' notions of borrowing or credit. However, the majority of respondents expressed ambivalent attitudes to the purchase of luxury goods, as they all tended to aspire to improving their lives and living conditions through conspicuous consumption.

In these comparatively small, close-knit communities of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton, despite the increasing prosperity of the post-war period, some families

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<sup>227</sup> Davies, *Shopping*, p. 92.

continued to struggle, for a variety of reasons, to 'make ends meet'. Even for the beneficiaries of the affluent society the spectre of poverty had not completely faded from the psyche and, despite the possibility of state assistance, this fostered a culture in which traditional behavioural patterns continued to flourish with regards to household consumption.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: LEISURE, CONSUMPTION AND STATUS

According to James, it was the 1950s consumer boom that “extended beyond the middle to the working classes”, which transformed lives.<sup>1</sup> This chapter seeks to chart the continuity and changes in post-war consumption, with reference to the ways in which consumption and the ownership of goods impacted upon family status and perceptions of poverty. Firstly, it will investigate attitudes and aspirations to the purchase of consumer durables, particularly the advent of television ownership as an indicator of post-war affluence. Secondly, it will focus on the growing importance of car ownership, including the attendant gender disparities. This will be followed by an examination of the changes in holidaymaking in the post-war period, refuting suggestions that foreign holidays remained the province of the upper and middle classes.<sup>2</sup> Fourthly, it will explore the rise of the teenage consumer, challenging suggestions that teenage consumption was a largely working-class phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> Finally, attention will be given to an examination of status and spending, which will suggest that although some class differences were evident in the disposal of income, the greatest disparities in consumption were between ‘rough’ and ‘respectable’ members of the community.

It was 1953 when the treasury revealed “sharply increased expenditure on food, clothes, shoes, household goods and new cars”, which heralded a time of affluence delineated by consumer spending.<sup>4</sup> By the late 1950s, the amount of “consumer spending devoted to ‘necessities’ such as food and clothing” declined, as the sums designated to luxury items such as consumer durables, holidays and cars proportionately increased.<sup>5</sup> At this time, as Offer claimed, the “old luxuries became affordable, while new ones arrived at an increasing pace”.<sup>6</sup> If post-war affluence and

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<sup>1</sup> James, *The Middle Class*, p. 434.

<sup>2</sup> Walton, J. K., *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> Abrams, *The Teenage Consumer*.

<sup>4</sup> Kynaston, *Family Britain*, p. 317.

<sup>5</sup> Benson, *Affluence*, p. 32.

<sup>6</sup> Offer, A., ‘British Manual Workers: From Producers to Consumers, c. 1950-2000’, *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 22, No. 4, December 2008, p. 5. Offer described the range of goods from transistor radios to overseas travel as ‘arousal goods’ which “provided an immediate surge of



increasing opportunities for consumption arguably diminished women's control of the family budget, (chapter six) then it also provided other family members with increasing influence.<sup>7</sup> Shopping, at least for the more interesting and expensive purchases, gradually became a family affair.<sup>8</sup> Although, as Benson indicated shopping for the dull necessities of life, "baking powder, scouring pads and toilet cleaner", remained the woman's province,<sup>9</sup> the consumption of more exciting and expensive items aroused the interest of other family members.

Undoubtedly, expensive purchases of consumer durables required a masculine input.<sup>10</sup> In 1954 when the family moved to a new council house Bill Jones' father "went to buy a washing machine" and other household goods. Several years later he purchased a new television without prior discussion, highlighting how his wife was excluded from important financial decisions. His motives are difficult to disentangle, his son was uncertain whether this was due to his mother's susceptibility to debt, which was discussed in an earlier chapter, or because the father wanted to surprise the family.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Mrs Greenaway's father made major spending decisions, including holidays: "he would just go out and book the holiday and tell her where they were going" and this practice continued until his death in the late 1980s.<sup>12</sup> Conversely, Mrs Greenaway's husband left *all* budgeting decisions to his wife, from food to household items (see chapter six).

The post-war baby boom provided an expanding market with 800,000 more teenagers in 1963 than in 1953.<sup>13</sup> The explosion of teenage consumers is well-documented with Laurie,<sup>14</sup> Akhtar and Humphries<sup>15</sup>, Benson,<sup>16</sup> Sandbrook, and others discussing changes in teenage spending habits.<sup>17</sup> Teenage purchases were a major part of the consumer boom, spending £830 million in 1957 "on the things that they particularly

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satisfaction". This article argued that by the end of the twentieth century the rhetoric of consumerism had weakened working-class autonomy and contributed to class division.

<sup>7</sup> Marwick, *British Society*, p. 43.

<sup>8</sup> Benson, *Consumer Society*, pp. 70-73.

<sup>9</sup> Benson, *Affluence*, p. 39.

<sup>10</sup> Benson, *Affluence*.

<sup>11</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ.

<sup>12</sup> Pensnett Mrs PG.

<sup>13</sup> Green, *All Dressed Up*, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Laurie, *Teenage Revolution*.

<sup>15</sup> Akhtar and Humphries, *The Fifties*, chapter 2.

<sup>16</sup> Benson, *Affluence and Authority*, p. 12; Benson, *The Rise of Consumer*.

<sup>17</sup> Sandbrook, *Never Had It*, chapter 12; *White Heat*, chapters 6 and 12.

liked”.<sup>18</sup> They were the “outstanding financial beneficiaries of the post-war situation”, purchasing an increasing variety of goods and consumer durables, which were designed specifically for the adolescent market<sup>19</sup>.

Between 1945 and c1970, the entire family took increasing interest in consumption, with “masculine’, more costly and less overtly “domestic’ products” such as cars, televisions and electrical equipment usually purchased by males.<sup>20</sup> Mrs Greathead, who was born in 1945, explained that “mom used to go along with dad, but dad took all the decisions on what was bought”.<sup>21</sup> Although much of the technology for within the home was designed for female use, advertising was aimed largely at male consumers. For example, Morphy Richard’s auto-control electric iron was marketed as ‘A Perfect Gift: What a Blessing for a Wife’.<sup>22</sup> The November 1952 edition of *Good Housekeeping* carried an advertisement advising husbands to: “Give her a Hoover she knows it’s the best – This year give her something she really wants” for Christmas.<sup>23</sup> These marketing devices imply that women had neither autonomy, finances, nor the technical expertise to make such purchases independently, supporting Badger’s claim that advertisements for household technology “were not aimed primarily or solely at women ... [due to] their perceived economic and social status”,<sup>24</sup> as low earners and ‘mere’ housewives.

In the pre-war period the purchase of consumer goods was largely the province of middle-class males, but by the 1950s purchasing power was extended into the working class,<sup>25</sup> who “not only made things; they bought them”.<sup>26</sup> As the Amalgamated Engineering Union claimed in 1966 – “our people can plan to shape their lives without the ever-pressing fear of unemployment and poverty [which] has released in them an acquisitive urge – a trait previously capable of expression by only

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<sup>18</sup> Laurie, *Teenage Revolution*, p. 10; Green, *All Dressed Up*.

<sup>19</sup> Hopkins, *New Look*, p. 424

<sup>20</sup> Benson, *Affluence and Authority*, p. 41.

<sup>21</sup> Sedgley Mrs DG.

<sup>22</sup> Weaver, R., and R. Dale, *Machines in the Home*, The British Library, 1992, p. 42.

<sup>23</sup> *Good Housekeeping*, November 1952, no. 11, p. 41.

<sup>24</sup> Badger, *Consumption*, p. 24.

<sup>25</sup> Badger, *Consumption*, p. 24.

<sup>26</sup> Judd cited in Whiting, R., ‘Affluence and Industrial Relations in Post-War Britain’, *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 22, No. 4, December 2008, p. 2.

a section of the community”.<sup>27</sup> According to Benson, consumption became increasingly important to both the middle and working classes with increasing, but unequal, resources being devoted to it.<sup>28</sup> From 1952 to 1964 consumer expenditure rose in real terms by 45%,<sup>29</sup> but between 1951 and 1961 the personal consumption of manual workers alone increased by approximately 25%.<sup>30</sup> The “spending power” of many families escalated during this period, as wages rose faster than prices.<sup>31</sup> The autobiographical evidence indicated that working-class aspirations increased, with husbands and fathers working long hours of overtime to facilitate escalating consumption and provide families with consumer durables.<sup>32</sup> Moorhouse’s observations of the Black Country corroborate this; according to his observations, the producers of cars and car-parts were “among the highest-priced manual labour in the land” purchasing “all the latest domestic gadgets” and paraphernalia which was available in the post-war era.<sup>33</sup> The changing trends in consumption and the correspondent changes in lifestyle are clearly reflected in the content and advertisements of local newspapers, after the mid 1950s. From 1960 both the *Dudley* and *Tipton Herald* contain whole-page advertisements for holidays and cars and a wide variety of articles advising consumers of all ages in the purchase of the latest clothing, gadgets and consumer durables.

### **Consumption and Consumer Durables**

During the affluence of the late 1950s the family became increasingly important as a centre of consumption.<sup>34</sup> Rising real wages combined with the accessibility of consumer goods led to increased aspirations to indulge in conspicuous consumption<sup>35</sup> and, in the estimation of Moorhouse, the consumer boom “transformed” the lives of all classes.<sup>36</sup> There is some consensus that by the mid-1950s most middle-class families could “readily afford a record player, a camera, a vacuum cleaner or a new

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<sup>27</sup> Whiting, ‘Affluence and Industrial Relations’, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Benson, *Affluence and Authority*, p. 48.

<sup>29</sup> Clarke, *Hope*, p. 254.

<sup>30</sup> New Society Survey no. 13, 1962 cited in Bourke, *Working-Class*, p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> Abbott, *A History of Family*, p. 125

<sup>32</sup> Collins, *The Likes of Us*, p. 168; Hill, *British Economic*, p. 35; Gallo, *Tinker*, p. 174.

<sup>33</sup> Moorhouse, *Britain*, p. 107; Clarke, *Hope*, p. 254.

<sup>34</sup> Marwick, *British Society*, p. 43.

<sup>35</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 11.

<sup>36</sup> James, *Middle Class*, p. 434. Although James was concerned with the middle class he admitted that the consumer boom of the 1950s “extended beyond the middle to the working classes whose lives were transformed”.

settee and chairs” and that prosperity was rapidly extending to the working class, “especially in the ... Midlands, where unemployment was minimal”.<sup>37</sup> Increasing numbers of West Midlands’ car worker’s homes contained “fitted carpets and all the latest domestic gadgets”.<sup>38</sup> However, this is not confirmed by all respondents. In the 1970s, a number of Mr Tolley’s customers “hadn’t got fridges and a lot still hadn’t got tellies”.<sup>39</sup> Mr MJ, the only child of two parents in full-time employment, recalled “that after the war furniture got changed like some folk changed their shoes....They [the Coopers] was forever changing all their furniture...they’d buy new stuff”. He indicated that these unprecedented levels of consumption induced a competitive element within some communities. For example, his mother’s view was that “I’m as good as the Coopers” which necessitated his mother’s emulation of their consumption, to the extent that her house was “a bloody museum”.<sup>40</sup>

Ownership of consumer durables and electrical appliances was rising rapidly during this period and featured increasingly in the aspirations of many families. Despite Ogersby’s claims that domestic appliances were “necessary tools of domestic labour rather than bench-marks of a prosperous lifestyle,”<sup>41</sup> autobiographical evidence and oral testimony indicates that ownership of these items enhanced both status and perceptions of respectability.<sup>42</sup> However, despite the surrounding debates, the unprecedented rise in the consumption of all manner of personal possessions, furniture and electrical equipment is beyond the scope of this work and, consequently, this section will focus upon the purchase of specific items - television sets, cars and holidays, as indicators of affluence.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Sandbrook, *Never Had It*, p. 102; Benson, *Affluence and Authority*, p. 49 ; Clarke, *Hope*, p. 254; Hobsbawm, *Age*, p. 264; Abbott, *History of Family*, p. 89; Hennessy, *Having It*, p. 538; Moorhouse, *Britain*, p. 107.

<sup>38</sup> Moorhouse, *Britain*, p. 107.

<sup>39</sup> Mr Tolley December 1998.

<sup>40</sup> Tipton Mr MJ.

<sup>41</sup> Ogerby, ‘One for the Money, Two for the Show’, p. 258.

<sup>42</sup> Hathorne, *Five Minutes, Surry and Strawberries*, Pensnett Mrs RA, Miss YB, Mrs PG; Sedgley Mr NS, Mrs DG; Tipton Mrs Lakin, Mrs OH, Mrs BT.

<sup>43</sup> The basic necessities required to furnish a room in her in-laws’ house cost newly-wed Mrs PJ £94. 16shillings in 1947. The invoice from FW Cooke of Dudley was for: a sideboard, dining table, 6 chairs, an occasional table, kitchen dresser, carpet and underlay. Sedgley Mrs PJ.

From 1950 the prevalence of advertisements for electrical goods and electrical engineers in the local press indicated growing consumer interest.<sup>44</sup> As one diarist confirmed in 1954, they provided endorsement of affluence: “Refrigerators are becoming a sign of status and success”.<sup>45</sup> With increasing frequency, after 1955, the *Dudley Herald* advised its readership concerning the consumption of electrical goods, household equipment, cars and holidays.<sup>46</sup> The widespread availability of these goods is confirmed in the 1954 Autumn Fair Programme for one Pensnett Church, which contained an advert for Jones Bros claiming that:

**“If It’s...**      Radio – Television – Radiograms  
                         Refrigerators – Lamps  
                         Record Players – Light Fittings  
                         Vacuum Cleaners – Washing Machines  
                         Domestic Appliances – Sound Equipment  
**ANYTHING ELECTRICAL      \*      JONES BROS.      Can Supply IT!!!”**<sup>47</sup>

### *Television Sets*

In the immediate post-war period the purchase of a television set was viewed as a life-enhancing experience; as the *Daily Mirror* claimed in 1950, “if you let a television set through your front door, life can never be the same”.<sup>48</sup> One electrical retailer, Geoff Hill, recalled that black and white televisions were by far the most popular electrical purchase; whilst, he was customarily obliged to demonstrate vacuum cleaners, as “most people had never seen one working”.<sup>49</sup> Evidently, ownership of a television, a more visible sign of consumption, conferred status more than mundane items of domesticity. The possession of a television set was deemed increasingly essential and owned by families, such as Carol Hathorne’s, who described themselves as ‘poor’.<sup>50</sup> Increases in ownership peaked in 1964, with thirteen million sets in use, heralding the

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<sup>44</sup> *St. James’ Methodist Church Magazine*, 1950, 1951; *Tipton Handbook*, 1950; *Dudley Herald*, 1950.

<sup>45</sup> Cited in Kynaston, *Family Britain*, p. 199.

<sup>46</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 1955. There is a noticeable increase in features and advertisements from this year onwards.

<sup>47</sup> *St James Methodist Church, An...Autumn Fayre*, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1954, p. 18. Jones Bros. were one of a number of similar outlets in the area; other electrical suppliers also advertised in the edition.

<sup>48</sup> Akhtar and Humphries, *The Fifties and Sixties*, p. 133.

<sup>49</sup> Hill, R., *From Riches to Rags: The Life of a Black Country Entrepreneur and Charity Fund-Raiser*, Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2000, pp. 35-36.

<sup>50</sup> Hathorne, *Five Minutes*.

acquisition of a set as “a social necessity”,<sup>51</sup> one which was, consequently, utilised by historians as confirmation of an increasingly affluent society.<sup>52</sup> During the 1950s, the landlord of the Hop Pole public house noted that customers tended to frequent the outdoor window, rather than the bar, as “the people in the council houses across the road were *fascinated* by their black and white TVs” (my italics) and were reluctant to relinquish viewing time to drink in the pub.<sup>53</sup> The decision to acquire a television set may well have been taken jointly or at least after family discussion, but the actual purchase of a set was frequently a male preserve, with a number of fathers becoming unusually involved in the consumption process.<sup>54</sup> Bill Jones’s father purchased a television without prior consultation as a surprise for the family, but the element of surprise and complete lack of discussion prior to consumption of such expensive items, appears to be unusual amongst the respondents.<sup>55</sup>

Most households in the country possessed a television by the 1960s.<sup>56</sup> Between 1955 and 1975 the number of households owning a set rose from 35% to 96%.<sup>57</sup> Respondents indicated that ownership was important, recollecting its acquisition precisely and their favourite programmes.<sup>58</sup> The coronation of Elizabeth II was a catalyst for the purchase of television sets;<sup>59</sup> some obtained for that specific occasion and others as a result of viewing the event on a neighbour’s set. As Kynaston indicated there “is little disputing the conventional wisdom that the Coronation ‘made’ television in Britain”.<sup>60</sup> This was confirmed by the Gould family: “we had a TV for the coronation; when most people did [possess one] you know”.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Sandbrook, *Never Had It*, p. 361, chapter 11, ‘Tea With Auntie.’

<sup>52</sup> Marwick, *British Society*, p. 91; Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 13.

<sup>53</sup> Hill, *From Riches*, p. 42. As a consequence customers used the “outdoor window” so that they could purchase beer and return home to watch television.

<sup>54</sup> Benson, *Affluence and Authority*, p. 41. Pensnett Mr BJ; Sedgley Mr NS; Tipton Mr RB, Mr TG, Mr DN.

<sup>55</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ. Mr BJ’s mother was mentioned above when she ‘ran up’ several ‘tick accounts’ at a number of Pensnett shops. Mr BJ’s father bought the set after the family had asked for a television “for some time and got (sic) no response”. The set was purchased with cash.

<sup>56</sup> Fyvel, *The Insecure Offenders*, p. 111. Although Donnelly asserts that it was likely to be the 1970s before television ownership was so widespread. Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, p. 30; Obelkevich and Catterall, *Understanding*, p. 146.

<sup>57</sup> Obelkevich and Catterall, *Understanding*, p. 145.

<sup>58</sup> Pensnett Miss VC, Mr DM, Miss YB; Sedgley Mrs RW.

<sup>59</sup> Pensnett Mrs JB; Sedgley Mr TG.

<sup>60</sup> Kynaston, *Family Britain*, p. 301.

<sup>61</sup> Sedgley Mr DG.

Television ownership was so prevalent that tenants of new three-bedroom flats, in Tipton, had to pay an additional 6d rent per week during their first 5 years of tenancy to “defray the cost of installing radio and TV aerials”.<sup>62</sup> Although, according to Mr Tolley a minority of families in Tipton’s ‘Lost City’ remained “so poor that they didn’t have a telly”.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, virtually all respondents owned a set by 1965,<sup>64</sup> lending credence to Donnelly’s claims that by the 1970s “virtually every household in the country had a television”.<sup>65</sup> Acquiring a television set before the neighbours was a source of intense rivalry and pride.<sup>66</sup> Ron Baker and his wife bought “one of the first sets in Sedgley”.<sup>67</sup> Mrs Wilson, also of Sedgley, “had a television, one of the first that came out for the Queen’s wedding”;<sup>68</sup> with another respondent claiming that her family were “the second in Sedgley to have a tele” in 1950.<sup>69</sup> Mrs Beaman’s television was purchased “for the festival of Britain in 1951... Not many people had them then” and another family was “one of the first” to own a colour TV in 1967.<sup>70</sup>

If television ownership swiftly became a sign of affluence then, conversely, the inability to afford one denoted poverty. Respondents were adamant that it was solely poverty that precluded television ownership, in some instances, until the mid 1960s. The lack of television was, for some families, a stigma – “Everyone had got a television in our street, we hadn’t. Mom said to Dad about having a telly and he said we can’t we’ve got no electric. So the first thing we had to put in was electric, then we had a Bush 9 inch in 1954. The Harrises were the toffs of the street; they had a hurdy gurdy, a radio and a television”.<sup>71</sup> It was 1965 before the Gulliver family obtained a set, but friends “had tele’s a long time before we had a tele. Well they could afford it, we couldn’t”.<sup>72</sup> “When you went into someone’s house who’d got a tele you’d say [to yourself] why haven’t we got one of them? But I knew really, I’ve

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<sup>62</sup> *Tipton Herald*, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1956.

<sup>63</sup> Mr Tolley.

<sup>64</sup> Pensnett Mr SG. Mr SG purchased a set in the early 1962 when he and his wife moved into a house with electricity. His parental home was without a television, although they possessed a radio, as his mother was widowed during the early years of the war and had 7 children to support.

<sup>65</sup> Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, p. 30.

<sup>66</sup> Pensnett Mr DM, Mrs IT, Miss NP; Tipton Mr DN; Sedgley Mr SW, Mrs IW, Mrs VR.

<sup>67</sup> Gallo, *Tinker*, p. 163. It was a Bush television with 9 inch screen, purchased in the late 1940s, which cost Mr Baker £49.

<sup>68</sup> Sedgley Mrs RW.

<sup>69</sup> Sedgley Mrs DG.

<sup>70</sup> Tipton Mrs JB, Mr DN; Pensnett Mr RE.

<sup>71</sup> Tipton Mr RB.

<sup>72</sup> Tipton Mr TG.

always been logical, I understood why we didn't have one".<sup>73</sup> It was 1964 before Mrs Tolley's family could afford a television, although her friend's family were "the first in the street to have a TV and a car...because they won £300 and odd pounds on the pools...I suppose I was aware that we hadn't got one".<sup>74</sup> Memoirs also endorsed the views of the respondents, as the absence of a television "rapidly became a sign of poverty" and originated feelings of pity towards "those children whose families "lagged behind".<sup>75</sup>

Ownership swiftly became a marker of affluence and respectability to the extent that "a lot of people had them when they couldn't afford them". It was, as Sedgley resident Muriel Brown said, "*a sort of luxury that you'd got to have*".<sup>76</sup> By the 1960s social conditioning was such that the inability to afford a television was construed as a clear indicator of poverty, by respondents, commentators and observers alike.<sup>77</sup> Oral testimony confirmed that ownership of a television set, and other material possessions, became a clear gauge of prosperity for working and lower-middle class respondents and demonstrated a clear post-war transformation in perceptions and definitions of poverty.

### *Cars*

Since the 1950s car ownership was deemed an additional indicator of affluence and utilised as a means of measuring prosperity.<sup>78</sup> Increasing numbers of cars were purchased, with Clarke suggesting that "car ownership remained a middle-class status symbol in a way that television ownership no longer was".<sup>79</sup> It was the "crowning glory" of the affluent household,<sup>80</sup> which the Vicar of St Luke's Church endorsed, as "owning a car gives a man a sense of status, and above all, of power".<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Pensnett Mr KD. When the family did obtain a television set it was one which was given to them by family members who could afford a new set.

<sup>74</sup> Tipton Mrs BT. Her mother was Mrs Lakin, who was interviewed by the author in 1998, recalled that financial instability due to her husband's ill-health deprived the family of many requirements of modern life.

<sup>75</sup> Heron, L., 'Dear Green Place' in Heron (ed.) *True, Dare*, p. 162.

<sup>76</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB.

<sup>77</sup> Clarke, *Hope*, p. 303.

<sup>78</sup> Akhtar and Humphries, *The Fifties*, pp. 149-154.

<sup>79</sup> Clarke, *Hope*, p. 255; Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, p. 31.

<sup>80</sup> Sandbrook, *Never Had It*, p. 113.

<sup>81</sup> Parish Magazine of St Luke's Church, Dudley cited in Sykes, 'Popular Religion', p. 336.



Although the 1966 census indicated that 44% of the entire British population owned one or more cars,<sup>82</sup> with ownership at 75% within the professional and managerial classes,<sup>83</sup> it seems unlikely that, as Donnelly stated, the escalating numbers were purchased solely by the upper and middle classes. It is possible that the class demarcation line lies in the fact that new cars were probably acquisitions of these classes,<sup>84</sup> whilst working-class owners were more likely to buy “cheap second-hand cars and drift in and out of ownership according to their ability to finance running costs”.<sup>85</sup> By the 1960s, two out of every three households which possessed a television also owned a car,<sup>86</sup> with lower income groups also aspiring to this previously middle-class status symbol.<sup>87</sup>

According to the contemporary observations of Moorhouse, the Midlands, particularly the Black Country, possessed exceptionally high levels of car ownership between 1950 and 1970.<sup>88</sup> However, as late as 1970, the Black Country Planning Committee dissented, claiming that car ownership was low in comparison with other areas of the West Midlands.<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, the oral evidence suggests that this middle-class status indicator was being purchased by increasing numbers of lower-middle and working-class consumers. Petty’s recollections, of a working-class estate in the 1950s, were that “there were more cars in our street than in many a middle-class avenue”.<sup>90</sup> Advertisements for ‘Automobile Engineers’, offering overhauls, repairs and services, proliferated within the local press from the early 1950s, suggesting increased car ownership in all three localities; although, in Pensnett they were still juxtaposed beside the services of a horse-smith.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Anonymous member of the Black Country Planning Committee ‘Car Ownership in the Black Country’, *The Blackcountryman*, Spring 1970, p. 20.

<sup>83</sup> Halsley cited in Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, p. 31. Between 1960 and 1970 the number of car owners in Britain doubled from 5,650,000 to 11,802,000: Bogdanor and Skidelsky, *The Age*, p. 56.

<sup>84</sup> Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, p. 31; Akhtar and Humphries, *The Fifties*, pp. 155-157.

<sup>85</sup> O’Connell, *The Car*, p. 36. O’Connell examines the class and gender balance of driving and car ownership and, despite the dates in the book title, also comments upon changes in the post-war period.

<sup>86</sup> Clarke, *Hope*, p. 255.

<sup>87</sup> Pollard, *The Development*, p. 274; Akhtar and Humphries, *The Fifties*, p. 149.

<sup>88</sup> Moorhouse, *Britain*.

<sup>89</sup> Anon., ‘Car Ownership’, p. 19. In the distinctly middle-class areas such as Sutton Coldfield and Solihull over 70% of families owned 1 or more cars, whilst in the Black Country the figure was less than 50%.

<sup>90</sup> Petty, *Five Fags*, p. 63.

<sup>91</sup> *St. James’ Methodist Church Magazine*, April 1950; *St. James Methodist Church Autumn Fair Programme*, 1954, p. 21

Virtually all male respondents were drivers, regardless of occupation or background, and indicated that car ownership was an important consumption priority and symbol of status. Ted Gulliver was the sole exception who had “never driven” - although “nearly all me friends did”.<sup>92</sup> In the immediate post-war period, despite shortages and waiting lists, potential owners were anxious to purchase new cars, as Mrs Houlton explained. “In 1947 Oliver read that they were going to build a new Standard and we knew the price as well. We had our name down for a car... and he said I’m going to put my name down for one of those cars. And we had a Standard Vanguard and you know when they delivered it? 1953 and the price had gone up to £953 on the road...Five years we waited for a car which went up from £400”.<sup>93</sup> Mrs Jones’ husband purchased his first new car, in 1950, for £100, but had previously driven his father’s car<sup>94</sup> and Stan Greenaway bought a car for £90 in 1951.<sup>95</sup> Mr Southall, the son of an accountant, born in 1954, recalled that “all the men in the family had cars. I don’t remember a time when we didn’t. Although, at school [in Gornal] no-one else’s dad drove, only the headmaster”.<sup>96</sup>

Indeed, for men of the ‘baby boom’ generation a car, or motor bike was their prime aspirational purchase; it was, despite occasional parental disapproval, deemed as a necessity.<sup>97</sup> Dave Nixon commenced with a motorcycle, progressing to a car which, afraid to inform his parents, he concealed at his uncle’s house - “driving was my priority then. That *was* my priority”.<sup>98</sup> Bill Jones’s father bought him a car whilst he undertook National Service in 1960,<sup>99</sup> in the same year as Mr Adams received his new car as a birthday gift.<sup>100</sup>

Keen rivalry was in evidence with young male drivers gaining prestige from car ownership. Mr PD’s car was coveted by his friends when he purchased a Spider, in

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<sup>92</sup> Tipton Mr TG.

<sup>93</sup> Tipton Mr OH, Mrs OH. The manufacture of a new model Standard was announced in 1947.

<sup>94</sup> Sedgley Mrs PJ. The car was an Austin Standard – 10 horsepower from Cox’s motors. Mrs PJ had retained receipts for all their major expenditure since 1947, including cars, furniture, holidays etc.

<sup>95</sup> Pensnett Mr SG.

<sup>96</sup> Sedgley Mr NS.

<sup>97</sup> Pensnett Mr DM; Sedgley Mr FG; Tipton, Mr DN.

<sup>98</sup> Tipton Mr DN; Pensnett Mr NR.

<sup>99</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ.

<sup>100</sup> Pensnett Mr RA.

1958, in preference to the Austins of his peers<sup>101</sup> - “a car of course was a status symbol”.<sup>102</sup> 20 year-old Roy Evans had “a new...Vauxhall Viva” in 1967 – an acquisition that was a source of pride when “most of the people at college had got second-hand cars”. He “used to change his car every year”.<sup>103</sup> Owning a MG1100 was “very important” to Mick Cripps.<sup>104</sup> Another respondent, who purchased the same model in 1967, explained that “when you’re that age you want something that’s you know...a bit above the ordinary, most of them [friends] did. I think it was an aspirational thing...I suppose its one of those things you do. You’ve got to pose around haven’t you?” Mr Gould continued his explanation of the aspirational element of car ownership of the 1960s, stating: “Learn to drive, get yourself a girlfriend, get married....I mean you always have this sort of dream. I got an MGB after that”.<sup>105</sup> In the early 1970, 17 year-old Mr SB was the envy of his friends, owning a 3 litre Capri whilst they drove A40s; although, exceptionally, he admitted driving and trading in cars before he was of legal age.<sup>106</sup> Despite living in what she perceived as poverty and deprivation, at least in comparison with her peers, Carol Hathorne’s father possessed a car from the early 1950s, as did *his* father,<sup>107</sup> his employment at Austin Motors facilitating these purchases. A boyfriend with a car provided kudos for teenage girls – I’d got a boyfriend then who’d got a car...it was important...I was quite the talk of the [Lost City] estate because it was an enormous American car”.<sup>108</sup>

A distinct gender disparity surrounded both driving and car ownership; as late as 1960 only one driver in ten was female.<sup>109</sup> Most women interviewed were dependent on male drivers for much of the period, but motherhood appeared to be one catalyst for their learning to drive.<sup>110</sup> It was the late 1960s before most female respondents drove or acquired cars. They were less likely to derive status from car ownership, but usually referred to cars as a “convenience”.<sup>111</sup> Mrs Brown, married in 1952, learnt to

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<sup>101</sup> Tipton Mr PD.

<sup>102</sup> Sedgley Mr PR.

<sup>103</sup> Pensnett Mr RE. Working seven days a week as an electrical contractor he was easily able to afford to change the cars on a yearly basis.

<sup>104</sup> Sedgley Mr MC.

<sup>105</sup> Sedgley Mr DG. His father, a scrap metal merchant, had “always had a car”.

<sup>106</sup> Pensnett Mr SB.

<sup>107</sup> Hathorne, *Five Minutes*, p. 78.

<sup>108</sup> Tipton Mrs BT, Mrs JL, Mrs VW.

<sup>109</sup> Akhtar and Humphries, *The Fifties*, p. 159.

<sup>110</sup> Pensnett Mrs JB.

<sup>111</sup> Pensnett Mrs BA, Mrs JB; Sedgley Mrs RW.

drive eleven years later, as she returned to work when her children reached school-age.<sup>112</sup> Mrs Jones passed her driving test in 1961 and Mrs Greathead's mother learned to drive in 1966, "when she was 45... nothing daunted my mother".<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless, there were exceptions. Mrs RW was driving in 1948, working as a milk-maid for the Co-operative Society<sup>114</sup> and teenage Pat Bagley was driving by 1965; she claimed that "all of my friends drove" at that time.<sup>115</sup>

Inevitably, perhaps, single women expressed earlier interest in car ownership, driving before their married counter-parts, particularly those who remained single into their late twenties and early thirties.<sup>116</sup> Miss Bennett passed her test in 1961, purchasing a Ford Anglia and "crying buckets" when it was exchanged.<sup>117</sup> Twenty four year-old Norma Plant purchased a second-hand A40 in 1960 "as soon as" she passed her driving test.<sup>118</sup> In 1962, Mrs MD's unmarried twin passed her driving test and purchased an A30.<sup>119</sup> However, manufacturers *were* beginning to target a new female customer-base as early as the 1950s, with magazines for women containing advertisements of bikini-clad women riding Lambretta scooters, or posing upon a "scintillating" BSR Sunbeam. In the 1960s, car manufacturers gradually began to target female consumers in a similar fashion.<sup>120</sup> This was especially true following the launch of the Mini car in 1959, which was the "first car to be marketed for the independent woman".<sup>121</sup>

The gender divide in incomes, and restrictions placed on women's access to credit, undoubtedly impacted upon female car ownership. Attitudes to hire purchase were discussed in some detail in chapter six; but even relatively well-paid females were discouraged from signing credit agreements, with retailers reluctant to countenance credit without male endorsement.<sup>122</sup> However, even in the 1970s choosing "a car was

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<sup>112</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB, Mrs CB, Mr TB; Tipton Mrs PB.

<sup>113</sup> Sedgley Mrs PJ, Mrs DG.

<sup>114</sup> Sedgley Mrs RW.

<sup>115</sup> Tipton Mrs PB.

<sup>116</sup> Pensnett Miss YB, Miss VC, Miss NP.

<sup>117</sup> Pensnett Miss YB.

<sup>118</sup> Pensnett Miss NP.

<sup>119</sup> Tipton Mrs MD.

<sup>120</sup> *Housewife*, February 1958, p. 80; Pressley, A., *The Fifties and Sixties, The Best of Times: Growing up and Being Young in Britain*, London: Michael O'Mara Books, 2003, p.201.

<sup>121</sup> Akhtar and Humphries, *The Fifties and Sixties*, p. 160.

<sup>122</sup> Badger, *Consumption*, pp. 28-30: May, *Economic and Social*, p. 399.

likely to be very much a male prerogative”.<sup>123</sup> Expenditure priorities were gender specific, at this time, especially, as one interview revealed, with reference to cars. Mr MJ was explaining his experiences of car ownership - “ I had a car in about 1958, an A30, there weren’t many [cars] about, nobody bothered and I had a Mini in 1961 when we got married”. At this point his wife interrupted, claiming that “I was very much against it...I didn’t think we could afford it, we hadn’t got a house of our own and I thought a car was unnecessary and I thought we needed a house... you wanted a car because everybody else had one. A status thing”. Mr MJ replied “I suppose it was then...I was proud of the Mini”.<sup>124</sup> Evidently this debate, and subsequent decision, remained a source of friction 47 years later. However, it does demonstrate one of the advantages of joint interviews, as it is less likely that Mr MJ would have recalled the subsequent friction, deeming it of little importance, compared with his acquisition of the car.

### ***Holidays***

A further innovation which distinguished between pre and post-war spending was increased opportunities for holidays and travel.<sup>125</sup> Extended holidays were no longer perceived as luxuries confined to the wealthy, but were becoming “part of the fabric of everyday [post-war] life”.<sup>126</sup> As early as 1930, “growth in demand for seaside holidays was more apparent in the expanding industrial districts of the English Midlands”. It was, as Barton indicated, the involvement of the trade union movement which was “able to secure self-directed time away from employers, as well as travel for personal fulfilment”.<sup>127</sup> Following the 1938 Holidays with Pay Act, which recommended paid annual leave, they became increasingly feasible.<sup>128</sup> By 1952 approximately two thirds of manual workers received paid annual leave of 12 to 14 days.<sup>129</sup> Overseas holidays, formerly the province of the wealthy,<sup>130</sup> were, at least

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<sup>123</sup> O’Connell, *The Car*, p. 68.

<sup>124</sup> Tipton Mr MJ, Mrs BJ.

<sup>125</sup> Pressley, A., *Changing Times: Being Young in the ‘60s*, London: O’Mara Books Ltd., 2000, p. 89.

<sup>126</sup> Sandbrook, *White Heat*, p. 184.

<sup>127</sup> Barton, S., *Working-Class Organisations and Popular Tourism, 1840-1970*, Manchester University Press, 2005, p. 4. Barton examines the financial intricacies involved in the financing of working-class holidays and explains the role of collective bargaining in the transition from unpaid, unauthorised leave from work to legitimate paid holidays.

<sup>128</sup> Dawson, S., ‘Working-Class Consumers and the Campaign for Holidays with Pay’, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 2007, pp. 277-305. The Holidays With Pay Act recommended, but did not enforce, one week’s annual paid vacation to all full-time workers.

<sup>129</sup> Walton, *British Seaside*, p. 62; Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, p. 217.

theoretically, accessible to many working-class families following the introduction of cheap charter flights.<sup>131</sup>

Despite Sandbrook's argument that numbers of foreign package-holidays are open to exaggeration, accounting for only a small percentage of the total annual holidays of British families, their popularity escalated rapidly and the percentage of families travelling abroad doubled between 1966 and 1971.<sup>132</sup> In Walton's estimation this increase was largely confined to middle-class consumers. However, the oral testimony indicates that high numbers of both lower-middle and working-class respondents from the Black Country were holidaying abroad by the early 1960s.<sup>133</sup>

These holidays were encouraged by advertisements and journal articles. In 1958 *Housewife* magazine contained an eleven-page supplement on holiday planning, which included an alphabetical destination chart ranging from Barcelona to Vienna, instructions on holiday wear and a guide to packing.<sup>134</sup> Fyvel and Pressley indicated that growing numbers of working-class "boys and girls" were holidaying abroad by 1961,<sup>135</sup> but the trend swiftly expanded to encompass working-class and lower middle-class families.<sup>136</sup> Increasingly, "ordinary" members of the working-class aspired to foreign holidays.<sup>137</sup> This was confirmed within television programmes, as depicted in a 1964 episode of the popular BBC comedy show *The Likely Lads*. Bob and Terry, two working-class 'lads' from the North of England, employed as electricians in an assembly shop, returned from two-week's holiday abroad bemoaning the fact that "half the works has been to the Costa Brava this year, half England's there now".<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Walton, *British Seaside*, p. 58.

<sup>131</sup> Sandbrook, *Never Had It*, p. 134.

<sup>132</sup> Sandbrook, *White Heat*, p. 184. In 1966 they accounted for a mere 4% of holidays taken and in 1971 the total was 8.4%.

<sup>133</sup> Walton, *The British Seaside*, p. 63.

<sup>134</sup> *Housewife*, February 1958, pp. 70-81.

<sup>135</sup> Fyvel, *Insecure Offenders*, p. 68; Pressley, *Changing Times*, p. 89.

<sup>136</sup> Akhtar and Humphries, *The Fifties*, p. 123; Pressley, *Changing Times*, p. 89; Tatem, *Just Me*, p. 42.

<sup>137</sup> Akhtar and Humphries, *The Fifties*, p. 123.

<sup>138</sup> Episode entitled 'Entente Cordiale' *The Likely Lads*, BBC 1964. Interestingly, Terry is from a working-class background but Bob and his family have distinct aspirations to the lower middle-class. The Black Country 'shut-down', or the 'industrial fortnight', occurred during the last week in July and the first week in August, when the majority of families were compelled to holiday. Hathorne, *Five Minutes*, p. 41.

Newspapers also endorsed the changing trends in holidaymaking. In 1955 the *Dudley Herald* carried an article entitled ‘Tips for Women Holidaying Abroad’, providing recommendations for leisure and swimwear and suggesting ways to combat the excessive heat.<sup>139</sup> Throughout the 1960s, the local press contained several pages of advertisements enticing readers to new and exotic locations, and, failing that, to caravan parks and hotels in Britain.<sup>140</sup>

Nevertheless, the experiences of the respondents were varied and the divisions were determined more by age than gender. Also, decisions concerning holiday destinations were not necessarily class-based, but influenced by income and family size. Several respondents, born before 1939, alluded to hop and fruit-picking holidays, facilitated by close proximity to agricultural areas. As discussed in chapter five, by the 1950s the local authorities were strenuously attempting to prohibit working holidays during term-time and families made a gradual transition to legitimate holiday periods on the coast. To Mrs Greenaway, increasing affluence was measured in terms of annual holidays - “[we had] plenty to eat and as I say we had our one holiday... [so] we never felt we were poor”.<sup>141</sup> According to Mr Cripps affluence was also demonstrated in the regularity of holidays – “Yes dad always made sure that we had a week’s holiday and as time progressed two [weeks].<sup>142</sup> As Carol Bennett recalled, “Yes we always had a holiday when I was a child, a week every year”.<sup>143</sup>

Generally, unless families were exceptionally poor, annual holidays became increasingly attainable by the 1950s, with Blackpool the favoured resort.<sup>144</sup> Mr and Mrs Wade, who married in 1951, “always had a week’s holiday didn’t we? We went to Blackpool in them days...we went in boarding houses”.<sup>145</sup> One family frequented Rhyl, “we went on the coach. But out of my friends at school and that (sic) I think I was the only one”.<sup>146</sup> Bill Jones, born in 1938, first visited the seaside in 1950, holidaying in “a single-decker bus that had been turned into a caravan at Talybont”.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 14<sup>th</sup> May 1955, p. 9.

<sup>140</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 1960- 1970; *Tipton Herald*, 1960-1970.

<sup>141</sup> Pensnett Mrs SG.

<sup>142</sup> Sedgley Mr MC.

<sup>143</sup> Sedgley Mrs CB.

<sup>144</sup> Tipton Mr PD, Mrs MD, Mrs JL; Sedgley Mrs DG; Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, p. 217.

<sup>145</sup> Sedgley Mr GW, Mrs RW.

<sup>146</sup> Pensnett Mrs SG.

<sup>147</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ.

This was not unprecedented as a number of bus and rail companies converted and refurbished their stock for holiday use. “Camping-coach holidays” were “popular from the 1930s right through to the 1960s”; with private railway companies offering “simplified camping” in seaside locations and rural beauty spots. Great Western Railway coaches were modified to accommodate up to 10 people and equipped with bed-linen, cutlery and crockery, and the railway company operated a savings scheme to facilitate the financing of holidays, issuing cards “designed to take twenty ordinary sixpenny postage stamps”.<sup>148</sup>

The early 1960s marked a period of transition from British to foreign holidays, particularly for the young; although, some respondents were sampling foreign travel as early as 1948. Newly-wed Mr and Mrs Houlton recalled a first excursion to Switzerland and a second trip in 1953, bringing back tinned food and cheese to circumvent the rationing system.<sup>149</sup> Switzerland appeared to have been a popular destination with respondents - in 1957, at the age of 21, Mr Cripps travelled to Lake Lucerne for 15 days at a cost of £24<sup>150</sup> and 14 year-old Betty Tolley met her future husband on a youth club trip to Switzerland, in 1961.<sup>151</sup> One twenty four year-old “went to Austria in 1960, but before that we went to Blackpool every year and after that...mind you we often went abroad. We went to Rome and all over”.<sup>152</sup> At 18, Rev. CH and her friends “went on a package holiday to Italy in 1962...it was absolutely quite radical then”.<sup>153</sup> Following A-level examinations in 1969, Mr Southall’s sister and her friend booked a two-week holiday in Rimini.<sup>154</sup> Continental holidays quickly became popular amongst working-class teenagers. Roy Evans of Pensnett recalled that “people went I would think it was [to] Majorca. That was the ‘in’ place then, the cheapest place to go I would think”.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> ‘Great Western Holiday Haunts’ published in 1939, cited *The Black Country Bugle*, 28<sup>th</sup> August 2008, p. 7. The savings cards were exchangeable towards the cost of rail travel, accommodation, party excursions and outings.

<sup>149</sup> Tipton Mr OH, Mrs OH.

<sup>150</sup> Sedgley Mr MC.

<sup>151</sup> Tipton Mr BT.

<sup>152</sup> Pensnett Miss NP.

<sup>153</sup> Tipton Rev. CH.

<sup>154</sup> Sedgley Mr NS.

<sup>155</sup> Pensnett Mr RE.



Despite the increasing numbers, foreign holidays were still perceived as both adventurous and novel. Vera Weigh claimed that, “We went abroad in the 1950s, there wasn’t many people doing that.”<sup>156</sup> Comments included: “People didn’t go abroad then (1960s), they went to Blackpool”<sup>157</sup> and “not many of my generation [went abroad] unless they had reasonably good jobs”.<sup>158</sup> Employment in the financial sector was one such job. Following her 1965 holiday in Switzerland, Mrs PB travelled abroad “virtually every year...I think some people [from work] went before us...the people I worked with [in the bank] definitely did”.<sup>159</sup> Mrs Ashfield and Mrs Davies, also bank clerks, holidayed in Spain and other Mediterranean countries from the mid 1960s.<sup>160</sup>

Between 1945 and the early 1970s, holidays were increasingly accessible to large numbers of the British people, demonstrating the “breadth and depth of the holiday habit, and its growth”.<sup>161</sup> Facilitated by the Holidays with Pay Act, full employment, and increasing wages the numbers escalated throughout the period, peaking in the early 1970s.<sup>162</sup> Oral testimony confirms that respondents from both the lower-middle and working classes perceived the ability to finance as least one week away from home as an indicator of affluence. Despite legal restrictions the traditional hop and fruit-picking holidays continued until 1960 for a minority of respondents. However, by the 1950s only the respondents living in comparative deprivation were entirely unable to afford holidays – Mrs Lakin’s annual holiday usually consisted of a day’s coach trip organised by a neighbour, to local beauty spots, or on one memorable occasion, in 1963 to a murder site. Until 1961 (when he was 18) Mr Tolley’s family holiday consisted of excursions to nearby Cookley where his father “nailed stumps in the corners of a flat-bed lorry and chucked a sheet over” to provide accommodation”.

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<sup>156</sup> Tipton Mrs VW.

<sup>157</sup> Tipton Mr MJ.

<sup>158</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB; Tipton Mr MD.

<sup>159</sup> Tipton Mrs PB.

<sup>160</sup> Tipton Mr DA; Mrs MD.

<sup>161</sup> Walton, *British Seaside*, p. 62.

<sup>162</sup> Walton, *British Seaside*, p. 63.

<sup>163</sup> 10 Rillington Place the site of a number of murders committed by John Christie between 1943 and 1953. Tipton, Mrs Lakin, Mrs BT, Mr HT.

It is evident from the oral testimony that financing annual holidays became an important factor of post-war consumption. From the late 1940s, the escalating numbers of respondents, particularly amongst the younger generation, aspiring to holidays abroad endorsed Fyvel's claims that working-class "boys and girls now [in 1961] go in growing numbers on holidays abroad".<sup>164</sup> Conversely, oral evidence refutes suggestions by Walton that foreign holidays remained the province of the upper-middle class.

### Teenage Consumption

All aspects of teenage behaviour in the post-war era have been subjected to detailed analysis. Intergenerational conflicts, the appearance of various subcultures and their challenges to the values of pre-war society have been closely scrutinised, as have the effects of wartime experiences upon young adults.<sup>165</sup> However, the phenomenon of teenage affluence and excess consumption has elicited the highest levels of attention, with the topic inspiring numerous books and research projects.<sup>166</sup> Almost without exception, analysis of the years between 1950 and 1970 devotes sizeable segments to 'the Teenage Consumer'.<sup>167</sup> Lifestyles of teenagers in the post-war period were vastly different from those of previous generations; the phenomenon of affluent teenagers possessing a distinctive culture resulting from post-war economic conditions.<sup>168</sup>

Recently, the phenomenon of adolescence has been brought into question, with investigations claiming the existence of distinct youth subcultures, which originated in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>169</sup> However, in Fowler's estimation the first generation of teenagers, with disposable income and a measure of financial and

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<sup>164</sup> Fyvel, *Insecure Offenders*, p. 68.

<sup>165</sup> Green, *All Dressed Up*; Hall and Jefferson, *Resistance*; Laurie, *Teenage Revolution*; Heron, *True, Dare*; Maitland, S., (ed.) *Very Heaven: Looking Back at the Sixties*, London: Virago, 1988; Pressley, *Changing Times*.

<sup>166</sup> See for example, Abrams, *The Teenage Consumer*; Abrams, M., *Teenage Consumer Spending in 1959*, London: The London Exchange Press Ltd., 1961; Tolley, 'Lets Talk'; Ogorsby, 'One for the Money'; Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, Chapter 6; Hall and Jefferson, *Resistance*,

<sup>167</sup> Sandbrook, *Never Had It*, chapter 12; Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*; Benson, *Affluence and Authority*; Akhtar and Humphries, *The Fifties*.

<sup>168</sup> Abrams, *Teenage*; Hopkins, *New Look*; Fyvel, *Insecure*; Hall and Jefferson, *Resistance*.

<sup>169</sup> Savage, J., *Teenage: The Creation of Youth, 1875-1945*, London: Pimlico, 2008. Admitting that the appellation teenager was a product of 1940s America, Savage has, using personal testimony, examined youth groups in America and Europe between 1875 and 1945 in a "prehistory" of the teenager. He stated that the emergence of teenagers as discrete social, cultural and economic entities was linked to America's post-war prominence as a global power, which had a profound influence over Europe.

social autonomy at its disposal, was the inter-war generation.<sup>170</sup> Nevertheless, it is evident that disposable incomes and the range of opportunities for consumption amongst teenagers rose to unprecedented levels following economic recovery in the 1950s.<sup>171</sup> This led Fyvel to speak of an “economic revolution which has put spending money on a scale not known before into the pockets of working class boys and girls”,<sup>172</sup> claiming that a “commercial youth culture...has on the basis of... [teenage] spending already become an integral part of life in the affluent society”.<sup>173</sup>

Teenagers have been defined as those between 13 and 19. But Fowler indicated that the teenage years extended beyond the age of 19 as a significant proportion of the young workforce were apprenticed until the age of 21,<sup>174</sup> whilst Roberts defined the years from 14 to 25 as “bridging...childhood and independent adulthood”.<sup>175</sup> However, for the purposes of this study Abrams’ definition will be adopted and teenage will refer to “unmarried young people between fifteen and twenty-five”, as the act of marriage customarily tends to denote the transition from young people to adults.<sup>176</sup>

In the period 1945 to 1970, full employment and high wages provided British youth with new economic power.<sup>177</sup> In 1959, working teenagers had an annual uncommitted spending power of £850 million, with non-employed teenagers receiving and estimated £50 million in pocket money.<sup>178</sup> Their spending power was escalating, as the post-war baby boom resulted in 800,000 more teenagers in 1963 than a decade earlier.<sup>179</sup> Adolescent spending reached unprecedented heights with an increasingly

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<sup>170</sup> Fowler, *The First Teenagers*. Utilising a wide variety of sources Fowler contends that a sizeable majority of working-class teenagers of the interwar period were employed in highly paid factory-based occupations and that the “economic and demographic conditions for a youth market to emerge were extremely favourable in interwar Britain”. p 94. He indicated that a distinctive teenage culture demonstrating a marked deviation from the behaviour of previous generations was in existence in the 1920s and 30s.

<sup>171</sup> Musgrove, F., *Youth and Social Order*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964, p. 10.

According to Fowler teenage consumption during the interwar years was largely confined to cinema visits, dancing, sheet music and cosmetics. Chapter 4 – The Teenage Consumer.

<sup>172</sup> Fyvel, *Insecure*, p. 66.

<sup>173</sup> Fyvel, *Insecure*, p. 133.

<sup>174</sup> Fowler, *The First Teenagers*; Musgrove, *Youth*, p. 2.

<sup>175</sup> Roberts, *A Woman’s Place*, p. 39.

<sup>176</sup> Abrams cited in Sandbrook, *Never Had It*, p. 408.

<sup>177</sup> Benson, *Consumer Society*, p. 18.

<sup>178</sup> Abrams, *Teenage Consumer*, p. 9.

<sup>179</sup> Green, *All Dressed Up*, p. 3.

tempting range of goods becoming accessible. They “were involved...in the purchase, for themselves, of an extensive, and apparently ever-changing, cornucopia of consumer goods”<sup>180</sup> and were viewed as a “serious engine of economic growth”.<sup>181</sup> Donnelly indicated that Abrams’ research may have exaggerated the scale of affluence amongst teenagers, but concurs that their economic power was a “key cultural determinant of the era”.<sup>182</sup>

The following discussion questions Abram’s assertion that the “teenage market is almost entirely working-class”.<sup>183</sup> Although, as demonstrated earlier, some adolescent’s earnings were still included in the family income, fewer teenagers relinquished their entire wages. Consequently, prosperous young men and women were increasingly treated as independent consumers, targeted by advertisers as a discrete audience<sup>184</sup> and “newly defined ‘teenaged’ girls became an important segment of the market for consumer goods.”<sup>185</sup>

Magazines were targeting teenager consumers, as early as 1948, advocating that ‘Schoolgirl Cinderellas’ “make themselves more beautiful in adolescence” with expressly designed fashion and make-up.<sup>186</sup> Abrams’ study confirmed that, by the 1950s the use of cosmetics amongst young women “in the teenage population...[was] heavy and widespread”.<sup>187</sup> A few years later, a plethora of magazines, aimed specifically at teenage girls, “functioned as consumer guides”.<sup>188</sup> Their innovative marketing strategies encouraged their purchase of an increasing array of cosmetics, clothing, record players and records.<sup>189</sup> In 1959, the *Economist* featured an article on the circulation of women’s magazines, advocating the necessity for magazines aimed

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<sup>180</sup> Benson, *Consumer Society*, p. 66.

<sup>181</sup> Hennessy, *Having It*, p. 492.

<sup>182</sup> Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, p. 35.

<sup>183</sup> Abrams, *Teenage Consumer*, p. 13.

<sup>184</sup> Bernstein, *The Myth*, pp. 420-422; Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, p. 35.

<sup>185</sup> August, A., ‘Gender and 1960s Youth Culture: The Rolling Stones and the New Woman’ *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 23, No. 4, March 2009, p. 2.

<sup>186</sup> *Woman and Beauty*, August 1948, pp. 34-39, 117 and 118.

<sup>187</sup> Abrams, *Teenage Consumer*, p. 11.

<sup>188</sup> For example Marilyn, Mirabelle, Roxy, Valentine and Boyfriend in the 1950s, Cherie, Jackie and others in the 1960s.

<sup>189</sup> Sandbrook, *Never Had It*, pp. 386-412.

at “a sizeable group of high-spending young women and girls without domestic ties – for whom the hideous name of ‘teenage women’ has been thought up”.<sup>190</sup>

During the 1960s, Rev. Hathorne, who worked as a journalist on a local newspaper, was also contributed stories and articles to teenage magazines – *Marilyn*, *Jackie*, *Patches* and *Romeo*.<sup>191</sup> These magazines had a profound effect on teenage consumption, as Joan Leddy indicated: “I think [my influence] was...Valentine Magazine” regarding fashion advice, clothing and make-up purchases.<sup>192</sup> New products aimed specifically at young women were cleverly marketed, almost inextricably connecting films, cosmetics and the music charts in the minds of teenage consumers. In 1958, Miner’s advertised their ‘Top Ten’ cosmetics, in the form of super-stay lipstick and nail lacquer, enabling girls to be “right on the beat” with “Miner’s Cosmetic hit parade, the make-up made for *you* in *your* style, *your* colours at *your* price”.<sup>193</sup> Pussy Cat Pink and Pussy Cat Peach lipstick were associated with the record “What’s New Pussycat?” and the film of the same name, and imaginatively marketed for teenage girls in 1966.<sup>194</sup> It was estimated that British teenagers spent approximately £850 million “essentially on themselves”.<sup>195</sup>

Sandbrook argued that teenage spending was class-specific, with grammar school pupils purchasing alternative music, in the form of jazz and folk, to “the rock and roll beloved of working-class youth”. In his opinion, the two groups adopted distinctive modes of dress and pursued separate class-based leisure activities.<sup>196</sup> However, the oral testimony indicates that teenagers were just as likely to rebel against stereotypical class-based images. Sandbrook’s perception is based on generalisations and it is simplistic to attribute consumption inseparably to educational experiences, particularly as a number of first-generation of rock stars were the products of a

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<sup>190</sup> ‘Petticoat Battleground’ *The Economist*, 21<sup>st</sup> November 1959, pp. 745-747. It stated that some magazines were monthly “from necessity not choice; the capacity could not be secured to print, in colour, fifty-two issues a year”. And concluded that the shortage of colour printing capacity is the most important single factor in the market, rendering it impossible for publishers to quickly launch new mass-circulation weekly magazines to compete with those already in circulation.

<sup>191</sup> Tipton Rev. CH.

<sup>192</sup> Tipton Mrs JL, Mrs BT; Sedgley Mrs CB.

<sup>193</sup> Ogersby, ‘One for the Money’, p. 264. Chapter six focuses upon what he considers to be the financial autonomy of teenage girls between 1947 and 1970. However, the experiences of the respondents in Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton were significantly different – see chapter four.

<sup>194</sup> The author.

<sup>195</sup> Green, *All Dressed Up*, p. 3.

<sup>196</sup> Sandbrook, *Never Had It*, p. 414.

grammar school education.<sup>197</sup> In reality the situation was more complex. Many grammar school pupils, in Pensnett Sedgley and Tipton,<sup>198</sup> were adherents of rock and roll music<sup>199</sup> and Mods, often employed as apprentices or as office workers,<sup>200</sup> were just as likely to have attended secondary modern school as they were grammar schools.<sup>201</sup> Local historian Keith Farley, who was born into a working-class Wolverhampton family in 1947, stated that it was his passion for rock and roll which allowed him to become “one of the lads” when he gained a place at Wolverhampton Grammar School.<sup>202</sup> Confirming theories of sub-cultural mobility,<sup>203</sup> teenagers transferred allegiance to, and from, specific youth groups as new fashions and alternative music styles were marketed. They wore the leather jackets beloved of rock and roll for a season and exchanged them for the Italian suits of Mods at a later juncture,<sup>204</sup> or, as Mr Davison explained, changing styles as decreed by wives and girlfriends. From meeting his wife in 1967, Mr Davison forsook his former style icon James Dean, for the smart suits and ties purchased by his wife – “Barbara bought them [clothes], she always dressed me”.<sup>205</sup> Although, David Ashfield, a trainee accountant, always preferred mod clothes and music – “it was Teddy Boys...I never went through that phase and I can’t remember any of my contemporaries – I never had winkle pickers either...I usually wore black polo-necked t-shirts and Chelsea boots...[my] peers influenced my style”.<sup>206</sup>

Despite suggestions that working-class school leavers had greater spending power than their lower middle-class counterparts in full-time education,<sup>207</sup> many of the respondents remaining at school worked part-time specifically to facilitate their

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<sup>197</sup> John Lennon, George Harrison, Paul McCartney, Pete Townsend, Roger Daltry, John Entwistle, Bill Wyman, Keith Richards, Mick Jagger and numerous others. As stated earlier Sandbrook’s critics are of the opinion that his work lacks primary research.

<sup>198</sup> Tipton Grammar, Dudley High School, Wednesbury Commercial and High Arcal, was a modern grammar school situated in Sedgley, which opened in 1961.

<sup>199</sup> Tipton Mr Davies, Mrs Tolley, Mrs Kendrick, Mr DA; Hathorne, *Five Minutes*, pp. 136-153.

<sup>200</sup> Donnelly, *Sixties*, p. 38; Sandbrook, *White Heat*, p. 47.

<sup>201</sup> Sedgley Mr NS.

<sup>202</sup> *Express and Star*, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2010, p. 16. Keith Farley was a teacher and author. He produced a number of books, including *N Between Times: An Oral History of the Wolverhampton Group Scene of the 1960s* in 2002. The book utilised oral interviews and was published privately. It is now accessible on the internet at: [www.localhistory.sat.wlv.ac.uk.../InBetweenTimes](http://www.localhistory.sat.wlv.ac.uk.../InBetweenTimes) He died on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2010, on the day he received the completed layout for his new book – *They Rocked, We Rolled*.

<sup>203</sup> Cohen, ‘Sub-cultural’, p. 96.

<sup>204</sup> Tipton Mr HT, Mr Davies. For a detailed study which charts the changes in Mods, music and fashion see: Hewitt, P., *The Soul Stylists: Six Decades of Modernism – from Mods to Casuals*, Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2008.

<sup>205</sup> Pensnett Mr KD.

<sup>206</sup> Tipton Mr DA

<sup>207</sup> Abbott, *History of Family*, p. 105.

consumption.<sup>208</sup> Full-time education certainly did not prohibit adherence to youth cultures or the purchase of fashionable clothing. The experiences of novelist David Lodge indicated that the end of National Service in 1960 ushered in a “decade of unprecedented affluence, liberty and licence” amongst the British youth.<sup>209</sup> As a result young men and women in their comparatively carefree pre-marriage years, when financial commitments were limited, were purchasing quantities of luxury items.<sup>210</sup>

Teenage consumption correlated to spending capacity and, as discussed in chapter three, the wages of men surpassed female incomes during this period. The average wage of teenagers in the 1960s was around £10 per week and after paying ‘board’, to their mother, some teenagers retained a disposable income of £7,<sup>211</sup> or £150 a year.<sup>212</sup> At the beginning of 1960 male teenagers were spending over £3 per week (71s 6d) whilst females spent considerably less (54s).<sup>213</sup> Teenage spending was “concentrated in particular consumer markets”,<sup>214</sup> with the vast majority of teenage expenditure was concerned with the consumption of clothes, cosmetics, luxuries and on a widening variety of leisure pursuits and entertainment.<sup>215</sup>

Adolescent spending power increased in Pensnett, Tipton and Coseley, even amongst teenagers classifying their families as ‘less well off’ or relatively poor. In the 1950s, Doris Greathead “couldn’t really afford fashionable clothes...as the money wasn’t there”, but spent the majority of her earnings on records.<sup>216</sup> In Tipton, Carol Hathorne coveted a ‘bopping skirt’ for the local dance. The skirt was made by her grandmother and her mother purchased the net underskirt from the market, but Carol’s Saturday job at Woolworth’s financed the ‘bopping shoes’.<sup>217</sup> Mr Davies was gratified to commence full-time employment in 1955 and purchase new clothes. As one of six

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<sup>208</sup> Tipton Mr DN, Mr DA, Mrs MD; Pensnett Mr SB; Sedgley Mr FG.

<sup>209</sup> Lodge, D., *Ginger, You’re Barmy*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982, p. 28.

<sup>210</sup> Hobsbawm, *Age*, p. 307;

<sup>211</sup> Akhtar and Humphries, *The Fifties*, p. 43.

<sup>212</sup> Laurie, *Teenage Revolution*, p. 61.

<sup>213</sup> Abrams cited in Sandbrook, *Never Had It*, p. 409.

<sup>214</sup> Ogersby, ‘*Well it’s Saturday Night*’, p. 294. p. 190.

<sup>215</sup> Donnelly *Sixties Britain*, p. 35; Ogersby, ‘One for the Money’, Tolley, ‘Let’s Talk About Girls’.

<sup>216</sup> Sedgley Mrs DG.

<sup>217</sup> Hathorne, *Five Minutes*, pp. 129-138. During her teenage years Carol’s life was a constant struggle to obtain fashionable clothing which was similar to her peers. Frequently the clothes were home-made or purchased from the local markets and she was conscious of the inferior quality and the over-generous size of her Grammar School uniform which was purchased ‘to last’. The blouses made by her grandmother differed from the uniform in design and fabric but “It was no use trying to explain that being ‘different’ was the very last thing I wanted”.

children he had always worn clothes which were handed down – usually following bereavement in the family or the immediate neighbourhood. His only shirt was washed in the evenings enabling him to “go courting”. So with his first wages he “put down payment” on a suit, shirt and tie.<sup>218</sup> During this time a number of Tipton respondents wore ‘hand me downs’ or clothing from jumble sales (although few from Pensnett or Sedgley) and recalled understandable relief when escalating incomes allowed the purchase of new items.<sup>219</sup>

Teenage consumption also provided a means of demonstrating distinctive cultures and emphasising the disparities between the ‘stylishness’ of youth and the staidness of adult society. Various teenage subcultures made specific purchases to demonstrate their affiliations and interests.<sup>220</sup> It was, in Fyvel’s estimation, increased affluence which was a contributory factor in the rise of youth subcultures, particularly Teddy Boys, after 1945.<sup>221</sup> For the majority of teenagers, fashionable clothes were considered de rigueur in the post-war period, regardless of gender, income or cost; “Whatever the fashion was I had to have [it]”.<sup>222</sup> David Ashfield’s “friends dressed the same...our peers influenced our style”.<sup>223</sup> Clothing, cosmetics, and music were consumed in order to denote ‘belonging’ to specific youth cults from beatniks or rockers to mods or hippies.<sup>224</sup> One respondent, a teenage suede-head in the late 1960s and early 70s wore Ben Sherman shirts, Sta-pressed trousers and Crombie overcoats purchased from the Red House in Wolverhampton, which “*did* define [my] belonging to a group”.<sup>225</sup> Roy Evans explained that “at college you always tended to stick with a group so you always stuck to whatever was going...obviously Levi’s”.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Mr Davies December 1998. Mr Davies informed me that he “would love to have been a bank manager but how could you with holes in your trousers?”.

<sup>219</sup> Tipton Mr Davies, Mrs Lakin, Mrs Mcroft, Mrs Cartwright, Mrs Tolley, Mrs Kendrick.

<sup>220</sup> Fyvel, *Insecure Offenders*, chapter 6; Benson, *Affluence and Authority*, p. 55.

<sup>221</sup> Fyvel, *Insecure Offenders*, p. 112. It was his view that increases in juvenile delinquency in Europe and America were a product of the “shortcomings of housing estates, the culture of the streets”, economic prosperity, the breakdown of family life and emotional insecurity amongst the young. pp. 9-24.

<sup>222</sup> Sedgley Mr FG

<sup>223</sup> Tipton Mr DA; Sedgley Mr DG.

<sup>224</sup> Akhtar and Humphries, *The Fifties*, Chapter two, ‘Teenage Rebels’; Hall and Jefferson, *Resistance*, p. 20; Hathorne, *Five Minutes*, p. 134.

<sup>225</sup> Sedgley Mr NS.

<sup>226</sup> Pensnett Mr RE.



In an earlier generation Mr Rudd, born in 1934, who had “modelled” himself on Frankie Lane, in the late 1950s, “used to wear a blue suit”. But he also coveted a pair of “blue suede shoes with yellow stitching and I would have killed to have these shoes...I didn’t get them”.<sup>227</sup> Affiliation to subcultures generated an interest in specific garments, causing occasional intergenerational friction. Gary Smith “lived only for Rock and Roll” necessitating “fashionable clobber” with drainpipe trousers and cutaway collars, which “the old chap didn’t like.”<sup>228</sup> As a Teddy Boy, Mr MJ wore “black drapes, crepe-soled shoes and pretty coloured socks (laughter) from Burton’s, the 10 shilling tailor they used to call it...my friends dressed the same”; his mother approved although his father was less complimentary.<sup>229</sup> “Clothes conscious” Dave Nixon recalled a holiday job, in 1969, specifically to facilitate the purchase of a black leather coat costing “21 guineas – a lot in those days”.<sup>230</sup> Mr Burgin, however, indicated, “I suppose I was a bit of a hippie in those days. I was very proud of my afghan coat”, which incurred the disapproval of teachers and parents.<sup>231</sup>

Teenager’s clothes shocked adults both visually and because of their cost. One Teddy boy recalled that: “you certainly stood out from the rest of the lads...and it was certainly expensive...I still have one [a suit] at home and that cost me twenty seven pounds, which was a lot of money in 1956”.<sup>232</sup> In 1950s and 60s Pensnett, Norman Raybould purchased clothes that were “Teddy-boy style – tails down the back...DA...brothel-creepers ...well it was the fashion and all me friends had got them you know”. His parents thought them “terrible, they day like ‘em”.<sup>233</sup> The ambitions of some embryonic teenagers were stifled by parental disapproval – “One of my greatest ambitions when I was a teenager was to...get my hair cut in a DA. I never did achieve it because I was frightened of my parents and their reaction”.<sup>234</sup> The stock phrase of Mr Southall’s father was “you must have more money than

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<sup>227</sup> Sedgley Mr PR.

<sup>228</sup> Smith, *Winson Green*, p. 47.

<sup>229</sup> Tipton Mr MJ. He was extremely detailed with reference to styles and the number of buttons etc., despite stating that he was “never interested in fashion”.

<sup>230</sup> Tipton Mr DN. He had just completed his O level examinations and was waiting to commence his apprenticeship, for which he would receive £8 a week. So he found a job driving a ‘stacker truck’ to finance his purchase.

<sup>231</sup> Sedgley Mr TB.

<sup>232</sup> Anon, ‘When you are Seventeen or so’, Price, *In My Life*, p. 44.

<sup>233</sup> DA refers to the greased back hairstyle reminiscent of a duck’s rear (duck’s arse) and brothel-creepers were a type of shoe with a thick crepe sole. Pensnett Mr NR.

<sup>234</sup> Farley, *N Between*, p. 4.

sense”, a comment which he frequently made to his son and son-in-law.<sup>235</sup> When Mr Tolley and his brother saved to purchase suits from Burtons - “Italian style, thirteen quid” - their father was extremely annoyed. “When we got back the old man went mad, called us fops”.<sup>236</sup>

Female clothing also engendered parental criticism, although apparently less frequently, as Betty Tolley remembered: “Oh God, they hated it. Dad was terrible, he thought everything was disgraceful and Mom used to say what’s the neighbours gonna say when they see you in that?”<sup>237</sup> But parental ire could be circumvented if necessary with the co-operation and conspiracy of friends. According to Barbara Woolley of Pensnett “Skirts, mini skirts and all them things...me mom hadn’t used to like it so I used to leave everything at me friend’s and put ‘em on ... and go out”.<sup>238</sup> Mr Southall’s mother approved of his sister’s mini-skirts. However, she disliked the subsequent midi- skirts of the late 1960s and shortened her daughter’s skirts when she was out at work.<sup>239</sup> Nevertheless, evidence from respondents suggests that the vagaries of female clothing were accepted more indulgently by parents whereas fashionable men’s clothes were more likely to be censured, particularly by their fathers.

Specific items of clothing evoked strong memories for female respondents, who were able to describe the garments, the shop and price, particularly those who had experienced war-time privations. “Oh yes, the New Look...seersucker, a lovely print because you’d had a lot of dull in the war... we followed ... Bridget Bardot, ‘cos she had such lovely little trim suits... you just saw photographs of film stars like Rita Hayworth, Patricia Roth, Margaret Lockwood and all them, they [photographs] were all in the chemist’s shop”.<sup>240</sup> At the age of 16 in 1953, Yvonne Bennett had vivid recollections of specific suits, “one was heather, oh I loved the one [it] was a heather mix... [with] a box pleated skirt and the other was a pink like a grosgrain”.<sup>241</sup> Miss NP recalled a “beautiful” navy suit purchased when she was “17 or 18” from an

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<sup>235</sup> Sedgley Mr NS.

<sup>236</sup> Tipton Mr HT.

<sup>237</sup> Tipton Mrs BT. Follow up phone call 21<sup>st</sup> July 2009.

<sup>238</sup> Pensnett Mrs BW; Oggersby, ‘One for the Money’, p. 281.

<sup>239</sup> Sedgley Mr NS. Midi-skirts were mid-calf length and became fashionable in 1969.

<sup>240</sup> Tipton Mrs MA.

<sup>241</sup> Pensnett Miss YB.

exclusive shop in Dudley Arcade.<sup>242</sup> Joan Leddy recalled that, “I modelled myself on Debbie Reynolds...I loved lipstick...hair accessories and ...shoes. I suppose I was spoilt”.<sup>243</sup> Although one respondent, Mrs BA, initially denied interest in clothing, she subsequently produced a black and white photograph album and described the colours of various outfits and their purchase in intimate detail.<sup>244</sup>

Younger female respondents also expended a great of time and energy acquiring appropriate clothes which were modified as fashions changed. “A fashionable sheath dress and a fitted coat and...hair in a beehive” could ensure that girl “looked a lot older than her sixteen years”.<sup>245</sup> Carol Bennett, who was born in 1944, recalled that “It had to be fashionable or I didn’t want it...but I did like clothes when I was a teenager and then I came down to earth with a bump when I had children...you knew what was popular, what was fashionable and you wanted that and I did like things at the height of fashion when I was young”.<sup>246</sup> Girls’ clothing purchases rarely denoted affiliation to a specific youth group, as their styles evolved as fashions changed. Rev CH described her changing tastes between the 1950s and 60s: “When I was young the rock and roll fashions were around...later it was mini skirts, Hippie things, trouser suits, flowing skirts, hot-pants, beads, cow-bells and joss sticks, flowers in our hair”.<sup>247</sup> Mr Southall’s sister moved from the minis skirts of Mary Quant to the flowing clothes of Biba as fashions changed.<sup>248</sup> Pop singers and actresses also influenced the consumption choices of adolescent girls -“I think it was different pop stars, what they were wearing. You know people like Lulu, Sandie Shaw...fashion and films...when Bonnie and Clyde came out everyone was wearing berets...and belted macs...as a result I did very little saving”.<sup>249</sup> Again the impact of magazines, television programmes and films had an undeniable impact upon teenage consumption during this period.

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<sup>242</sup> Pensnett Miss NP.

<sup>243</sup> Tipton Mrs JL.

<sup>244</sup> Pensnett Mrs BA.

<sup>245</sup> Hathorne, C., *All Shook Up*, Dudley: The Kates Hill Press, 2007, p. 17

<sup>246</sup> Sedgley Mrs CB.

<sup>247</sup> Tipton Rev. CH.

<sup>248</sup> Sedgley Mr NS.

<sup>249</sup> Tipton Mrs BT.

As mentioned above, transport, in the form of car, motor bike or motor scooter, was the major item of aspirational consumption amongst adolescent males. But the ubiquitous Dansette record player was universally coveted, its purchase mentioned in autobiographies, by historians and respondents alike,<sup>250</sup> as from the “1950s the market for commercial music was increasingly a teenage one”.<sup>251</sup> In 1961, this status symbol of a “modern long-playing record-player had... become the fashion among the very young” who purchased the majority of the half-million sold annually in Britain.<sup>252</sup>

This enthusiasm was reflected locally; acquisition of this item provided teenagers with access to constant pop and rock music, usually in their bedrooms, as a necessary accompaniment to homework or as background music whilst preparing to ‘go out’.<sup>253</sup> Leaving the needle-arm of the Dansette back facilitated repeated plays of a 45rpm record, simultaneously providing musical pleasure and annoying parents.<sup>254</sup> In 1965 Mr Southall’s father threatened to confiscate the Dansette after his 14 year old sister repeatedly played ‘Groovy Kind of Love’ over ten times before school.<sup>255</sup> As Mr TB recalled “I had a record player at a very early age and spent a vast amount of money [on music and records].<sup>256</sup> David Mountford’s first purchase after leaving school in 1963 was a record player – “I’d *always* wanted a record player...You know to get records and play them on”.<sup>257</sup>

Most teenagers, regardless of class, made regular weekly music purchases influenced by the current record charts. Access to television merely encouraged the habit; as Vic the ‘hero’ of Stan Barstow’s novel, published in 1960, explained – “Just look at records...You’d have thought TV would have killed all that: but it hasn’t – just the opposite. They see a bloke on TV and run out to buy his latest record. And there’s

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<sup>250</sup> Obviously the Dansette record player was not unique but it was the one which was most frequently referred to by brand name. Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, p. 35; Hathorne, *Five Minutes*, p. 79; Pressley, *Changing Times*, p. 33; Obelkevich and Catterall, *Understanding*, p. 147; Pensnett Miss NP; Sedgley Mr NS, Mrs MA; Tipton Mrs BT, Mr Tolley, December 1998, Mrs MA. However, Mr RE of Pensnett purchased a BSR stating that “everyone in the area had a BSR” and Mr DA of Tipton said he had a BRC, “everybody else had got a Dansette...but I was a bit upmarket”.

<sup>251</sup> McKibbin, *Classes*, p. 412.

<sup>252</sup> Fyvel, *Insecure Offenders*, p. 78; Hopkins, *New Look*, p. 432.

<sup>253</sup> Mr Tolley December 1998; Pressley, *Changing Times*, p. 33; Tipton Mrs PB; Sedgley Mr NS.

<sup>254</sup> Pressley, *Changing Times*, p. 33; Tipton Mr DN.

<sup>255</sup> Sedgley Mr NS. Groovy Kind of Love was written by Carole Bayer Sager and Toni Wine and recorded by the Mindbenders and covered by a number of other bands.

<sup>256</sup> Sedgley Mr TB.

<sup>257</sup> Pensnett Mr DM.

new ones coming out every month”.<sup>258</sup> Mr MJ purchased “records every Saturday”.<sup>259</sup> Regardless of age, respondents readily recalled their earliest musical purchases, recounting their favourite stars and songs. In 1956, Bill Haley’s Rock Around the Clock was “rebellious music” to be played whilst wearing “rebellious clothes” and almost guaranteed to shock the older generation.<sup>260</sup> Woolworth’s record counter was a popular attraction for consumers of pop records and Val Cartwright was a regular purchaser of Elvis’s latest records and other memorabilia.<sup>261</sup> Mr Southall’s first record purchase, made in 1965, was Mr Tambourine Man by the Byrds, played on the Dansette record player he shared with his sister.<sup>262</sup> In Sedgley the demand for records was such that the Gould brothers, owners of the electrical goods shop, diversified their business interests – “we started getting asked for records you know and [thought] it would be a good idea to start selling them and eventually we did”.<sup>263</sup> Uniformed teenagers from the local grammar school could be seen queuing outside their store, at lunchtimes and after school, when the Beatles, the Kinks, Donovan or Dylan released new albums.<sup>264</sup>

Despite the contribution which most teenage respondents made to the family income, excess funds were undoubtedly expended upon financing a specific teenage lifestyle. Parental concern was expressed at unprecedented levels of consumption amongst young people in the Black Country.<sup>265</sup> This anxiety was reflected in a 1960 column for teenagers in the *Dudley Herald*. The newspaper invited responses to the critique that:

“Never before have teenagers been the centre of so much discussion and criticism...They have more money to spend upon themselves than their mothers and fathers at their age. They are severely criticised for the way they

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<sup>258</sup> Barstow, S., *A Kind of Loving*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960, p. 61.

<sup>259</sup> Tipton Mr JW.

<sup>260</sup> Anon., ‘When you are seventeen or so’, Brew, *Wolverhampton*, p. 44.

<sup>261</sup> Pensnett Miss NP, Mrs DB, Miss VC; Tipton Mr JW; Hathorne *Five Minutes*, p. 93. Miss VC was, and remains, an avid collector of Elvis memorabilia. The walls of her house are decorated with Elvis clocks, mirrors and photographs.

<sup>262</sup> Sedgley Mr NS.

<sup>263</sup> Sedgley Mr DG.

<sup>264</sup> Sedgley Mr NS.

<sup>265</sup> Tolley, ‘Let’s Talk About Girls’. Tolley’s thesis examines the experiences of young female consumers in the Black Country, focusing upon the relationship between shopping and the formation of gender relations and sexual identity in an attempt to counter the marginalization of girls in the development of consumer culture. Her respondents recall expressions of parental anxieties concerning their daughters’ purchases.

spend this money, and girls in particular are said to spend unwarranted amounts on dress and cosmetics. Not only the cosmetic expenditure but the misapplication of the same is criticised”.<sup>266</sup>

Ambivalent attitudes are displayed within the feature as the invitation for teenagers’ responses was followed by a page of hairstyle and fashion reviews complete with photographs, which would almost inevitably stimulate increased adolescent spending.

The oral testimony revealed that, despite some assertions of continuing poverty, and the necessity of contributing to the family economy, all respondents participated, to some extent, in specific and distinct youth cultures, which were characterised by an element of consumption. This phenomenon was not confined to those who were teenagers in the post-war period, women born between 1921 and 1939 also described their consumption of clothes and cosmetics, albeit on a much reduced scale.<sup>267</sup> With the exception of Mr MJ and Mr RB, even respondents who handed over their entire wage packets to the family economy were able to participate though clothes and music in a teenage culture, financed by additional employment.<sup>268</sup> The less affluent teenagers made their purchases utilising traditional consumption methods – Provident checks, clothing clubs and mail order catalogues. Increasingly influenced by magazines, music, television and film, teenagers purchased items which demonstrated, at least temporarily, their allegiance to specific sub-cultures.

Spending decisions were not class-based as Ogersby claimed;<sup>269</sup> nor were they, despite Sandbrook’s assertions, dependent upon educational opportunities. Grammar school pupils in full-time post-15 education were not necessarily deprived of consumption opportunities due to financial restraints, as they undertook weekend work and part-time employment in order to finance purchases, buying distinctive, ‘fashionable’ goods marketed specifically for their generation. There is no evidence, within the oral testimony, to support Abram’s claims of an “almost entirely working class” teenage market”.<sup>270</sup> The increasing availability of cosmetics, music and

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<sup>266</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 6<sup>th</sup> May 1960, p. 9.

<sup>267</sup> For example: Pensnett Mrs DB, Mrs BD, Mrs JB; Sedgley Mrs PJ, Mrs MB, Mrs DR1, Mrs VR; Tipton Mrs OH, Mrs MA, Mrs LJ.

<sup>268</sup> Tipton Mr MJ, Mr RB. Although neither family was particularly poor their mothers retained all their earnings until they married as “it was all about control”.

<sup>269</sup> Ogersby, ‘Well, It’s Saturday Night’, p. 295.

<sup>270</sup> Abrams, *Teenage Consumer*, p. 13.

consumer durables, from record-players and transistor radios to hairdryers, and their subsequent purchase, in Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton, confirmed Benson's assertion of an "ever-changing cornucopia of consumer goods".<sup>271</sup>

The consumption of teenagers in all three localities demonstrated their affiliation to the periphery of youth sub-cultures, but no real rebellion or fierce resistance to the traditional culture of their parents or community, as indicated in sociological surveys.<sup>272</sup> From Teddy Boys, Mods and Rockers, to Hippies and Skinheads the respondents expressed themselves in terms of fashion, music and transport purchases, not in what Abrams termed the "cruder social aspects" of flick-knives and zoot suits.<sup>273</sup> It is likely that the continuity of traditional neighbourhood networks and the enduring community cohesion, revealed in chapter three, precluded the serious inter-generational conflict. In Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton there was little evidence of the "battleground", that Cohen found in 1972, which was caused by slum clearance and the resultant disintegration of East End community.<sup>274</sup> Respondents may have, on occasions, incurred parental disapproval, but none of the respondents spent their leisure hours embroiled in street or dance hall violence, or attended all-night clubs,<sup>275</sup> in fact all-night parties remained a rare phenomenon locally. If the era of 'free love' reached these three areas of the Black Country there was little confirmation from the respondents and all their offspring were born in wed-lock. The memories of the respondents endorsed Donnelly's assertion that the majority of teenagers were "part-timers, content with buying some of the trappings of subcultures pre-packaged from high-street retailers", and were not part of the "sub-cultural vanguard".<sup>276</sup> By the early 1970s there was little evidence to suggest that post-war changes to working-class communities led the respondents to reject the traditional mores of their families, or indeed their communities.

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<sup>271</sup> Benson, *Consumer Society*, p. 66.

<sup>272</sup> Murdoch, G. and R. McCron, 'Consciousness of Class and Consciousness of Generation' in Hall and Jefferson, *Resistance through Rituals*, pp. 162-176; Cohen, 'Sub-Cultural', p. 96.

<sup>273</sup> Abrams, *Teenage Consumer*, p. 1.

<sup>274</sup> Cohen, 'Sub-cultural', p. 89.

<sup>275</sup> Fyvel, *Insecure Offenders*; Cohen, S., *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of Mods and Rockers*, Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1990; Rawlings, T., *Mod: A Very British Phenomenon*, London: Omnibus Press, 2000; Hewitt, *The Soul Stylists*.

<sup>276</sup> Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, p. 37.

## Respectability, Status and Consumption

As stated above the inter-class divisions between the lower-middle and the working class are nebulous and it is extremely difficult to differentiate between them. Before the war methods of consumption and the acquisition of personal possessions may, to some extent, have provided one of several indicators of class. However, the improved living conditions and the general affluence of the period enabled both working and middle-class families to “purchase similar products in similar ways from similar suppliers”,<sup>277</sup> during the second half of the twentieth century. Consequently, it is possible to argue that although some class distinctions remained, particularly in the means of consumption, the acquisition of specific “essentially classless”<sup>278</sup> items played a role in the reduction, or at least in their concealment.<sup>279</sup>

However, despite assertions and reassurances that “we were all the same, all working-class people even in the private [houses],”<sup>280</sup> a number of respondents reflected traditional views, commenting on the inability, or unwillingness, of some families to expend their income wisely. These observations may not have a direct connection to class, but they appear to reflect the distinctly class-based opinions of the nineteenth century concerning class, respectability and poverty.<sup>281</sup> Understandably, respondents were reluctant to mention class and generally indicated the similarity of people within their neighbourhood,<sup>282</sup> but they implied differences of an unsubstantiated nature connected to the nebulous concept of respectability. Mrs IT described Pensnett as working-class, but described some as “very very working class – I don’t know how to put it. I don’t like to say”.<sup>283</sup> Mrs BA explained that “of course the rougher people had poor role models”.<sup>284</sup> One Tipton respondent described some neighbours as “less respectable” with broad accents. He became aware of these disparities when he went to grammar school, as he sensed that he and his friends in the C and D streams were

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<sup>277</sup> Benson, *Affluence and Authority*, p. 48.

<sup>278</sup> Obelkevich and Catterall, *Understanding*, p. 149. In the estimation of Obelkevich many consumer durables, for example televisions, fridges and washing machines, are in the ownership of all classes and consequently are ‘essentially’ classless.

<sup>279</sup> Obelkevich and Catterall, *Understanding*, p. 149; Moorhouse, *Britain*, p. 107; Benson, *Affluence and Authority*, p. 49.

<sup>280</sup> Pensnett Mr BT; Sedgley Mr NS.

<sup>281</sup> Above, see chapter one.

<sup>282</sup> Pensnett Mrs PG and Mr PG were of the opinion that “we were all exactly the same” and “we were all poor”; Pensnett Miss VC, Miss YB, Mr DM; Sedgley Mr NS; Mr FG.

<sup>283</sup> Pensnett Mrs IT.

<sup>284</sup> Pensnett Mrs BA – off tape.



“slightly rougher,”<sup>285</sup> and was conscious that some pupils lived in “big posh houses”, owned “their own semi-detached house[s]”, and even “brand new Cortina[s] in 1965”. Consequently, he measured the affluence and status of their families through detrimental comparison with his own family’s possessions.<sup>286</sup>

It is possible to detect similar notes of criticism or censure, to those of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, concerning the ways in which other people budgeted or, indeed, consumed their income. Mr BT explained that his father went into debt to purchase his house and mentioned that “lots of people had the same amount of money but wouldn’t take a mortgage – they preferred to spend it in the pub”. Later in the interview he recalled that, “people did have money worries but beer was so cheap and people were so poor that they spent their money on it”.<sup>287</sup> Continuing attitudes of disapproval to working-class consumption and budgeting were reflected in the observations made during court appearances and the manner in which they were reported in the newspapers. For example, the headline in a 1961 edition of the *Dudley Herald* read: “Unemployed but he put £2 on horses”. The accused was in court due to the theft of tinned food worth 12s 11d and his justification was that he “had not got two half-pennies for a penny”. The commentary clearly demonstrated a continuation of the traditional views on fecklessness and financial mismanagement amongst the lower classes, as it continued by reporting that the accused was in receipt of £8. 3s 6d in unemployment benefit and £3. 8s in family allowances and concluded that “at the time of his arrest he [the accused] had a betting slip in his pocket”.<sup>288</sup> Again, although ostensibly class-based, these opinions could be deemed to be distinguishing between respectable society and the irresponsible elements.

During a debate on proposed rent increases in the Dudley area, in 1956, class conflict and disapprobation over consumption choices and budgeting is clearly demonstrated. Conservative councillor Dr J Haldane asserted that many working-class wives were unaware of the precise amount of their husband’s earnings. He continued, stating that he knew “people who spend pounds a week on beer and cigarettes and then there’s all

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<sup>285</sup> Tipton Mr DN.

<sup>286</sup> Tipton Mr DN.

<sup>287</sup> Pensnett Mr BT. His father’s house was purchased for £450 as was the house belonging to Mr BJ’s father in a different area of Pensnett.

<sup>288</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1961.

this fuss about 2s a week. They can cut a pint of beer a week- its no good to them anyway”. At this juncture a voice from the public gallery retorted “and pack up living”.<sup>289</sup>

Conversely, the proprietors of a Sedgley corner shop were disparaging concerning the spending habits and parsimony of some of their affluent customers; doctors, lawyers and businessman, living in the spacious, detached houses opposite the shop. For example, Mr Wesley recalled “one rich lady in the Crescent came to the shop on Monday and said her visitors hadn’t turned up so could she give half a cucumber back”.<sup>290</sup> His wife indicated that these wealthier customers were more difficult to please and less eager to settle their bills than some of the inhabitants of the council estate, and that they often “came in with their old clothes and asked if mother would sell them at the back of the shop”.<sup>291</sup>

Despite some levelling of class distinctions, through educational opportunities and conspicuous consumption, inter-class disparities remained visible in the differing consumption priorities of specific families and their contrasting views upon ‘essential items’. When Carol Hathorne, whose father was employed in the car industry, visited the Sedgley home of her school friend, whose parents were both teachers, their house was “like none I had ever seen before, with a high ceiling, plaster coving and a magnificent marble firegrate”. She was surprised that the family possessed a piano and a telephone but no car. The lack of a car, which the Hathorne family viewed as essential, was explained when the friend said: “No we haven’t got a car...my dad always says there are other priorities”.<sup>292</sup> When shopping, on behalf of her employer, for “a punnet of mushrooms – some pears and a bunch of fresh parsley”, Carol was aware that these items were “very different from the tins of baked beans and rashers of bacon that made up our usual diet” causing her to wonder “not for the first time...what it must be like, to be an authentic member of the middle class”.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> *Express and Star*, 25<sup>th</sup> July 1956, Newspaper cuttings file at Dudley Archives.

<sup>290</sup> Sedgley Mr DW.

<sup>291</sup> Sedgley Mrs IW.

<sup>292</sup> Hathorne, *Five Minutes*, pp. 112-114.

<sup>293</sup> Hathorne, *All Shook Up*, p. 26.

For the majority of respondents, class was less important than respectability. Contemporaries were censured if they became indebted through reckless expenditure on gambling, cigarettes and alcohol. Consumption decisions made on the basis of whether “we could afford it without going into debt” were acceptable, whereas indiscriminate use of credit was denounced.<sup>294</sup> Respondents made relatively few class-based distinctions, whilst readily distinguishing between rogues, the rougher elements and ‘respectable’. As Mrs PB, whose father was a cabinet maker, explained – “Well I wouldn’t say my dad had a fantastic job but *it was the way you looked after your money*” which denoted status and enhanced reputation.<sup>295</sup>

### **Conclusion**

It is undeniable that by the mid 1950s consumer spending had become, as Benson indicated, increasingly focused upon luxury items and that lower-middle and working-class families were eager participants in the trend.<sup>296</sup> In Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton, the oral testimony confirmed Benson’s assertions that whilst women retained responsibility for every-day consumption, other members of the family became involved in the purchase of consumer durables.<sup>297</sup> Husbands and fathers demonstrated an interest in the purchase of the more expensive consumer durables, particularly electrical items and cars. Teenagers became involved in the consumption of an unprecedented range of items, many of which were intended specifically for the adolescent market.

As Moorhouse indicated, from the mid-1950s levels of prosperity in the Black Country were exceptionally high and unemployment was minimal.<sup>298</sup> This fuelled aspirations amongst the lower-middle and working classes to ownership of items which, according to the respondents, enhanced their status and respectability. Material possessions became a means of assessing the success (or failure) of individuals and families. Consequently, the inability to afford domestic gadgets, particularly televisions, became an indicator of poverty, engendering pity within the

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<sup>294</sup> Pensnett Mrs BD.

<sup>295</sup> Tipton Mrs PB.

<sup>296</sup> Benson, *Affluence*, p.32. See also Kynaston, *Family Britain*; Offer, ‘British Manual Workers’; Marwick, *British Society*.

<sup>297</sup> Benson, *Consumer Society*, pp. 70-73.

<sup>298</sup> Moorhouse, *Britain*, p. 107.

community when families “were too poor to afford one”.<sup>299</sup> Thus, perceptions and definitions of poverty were changing during the 1950s, as primary poverty was less evident. The majority of interviewees recollected the acquisition of their ‘TV’s’ with a great deal of pride, in the words of Muriel Box they were the “sort of luxury that you’d got to have”.<sup>300</sup>

Car ownership was also gaining importance as an indicator of prosperity during the late 1950s, and although Clarke suggested that cars remained a middle-class status symbol, oral testimony revealed that increasing numbers were being purchased by the working and lower-middle classes. Ted Gulliver was the sole male respondent who had neither learned to drive nor purchased a car. All other men, regardless of occupation had aspirations to car ownership from an early age, valued driving as an important skill, and had acquired a vehicle as soon as was practicable. Again, they viewed the acquisition of transport as a priority and spoke of the prestige which car ownership conferred. Amongst female respondents car ownership was less important, with the women generally learning to drive at a later stage - particularly married women, who frequently saw motherhood as the catalyst for acquiring this skill. The gender-specific views on car ownership revealed conflicting consumption preferences, with the majority of female respondents asserting that household expenditure was their priority.

Although some families continued to take hop or fruit picking holidays into the 1950s, attitudes towards annual holidays in the post-war period signified a clear change in consumption priorities. Post-1945, employees were able to take advantage of the 1938 Holidays with Pay Act, making an excursion from home increasingly feasible. The scale and destination of these holidays was determined more by age and family size than gender or class, and again the ability to finance an annual holiday was an indicator of prosperity. Respondents recalled a gradual progression, beginning with a week at the British seaside, either camping or in a caravan, and increasing to a fortnight by the early 1950s and into the 1960s. However, despite Walton’s assertions that foreign travel remained the province of the middle class, a surprising number of

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<sup>299</sup> Cedric Davies 1998.

<sup>300</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB.

working-class respondents were travelling abroad by the late 1950s.<sup>301</sup> Undoubtedly the experiences of war-time service provided Mr Houlton to take his bride to Switzerland in 1948, and National service inspired others with the confidence for foreign travel. However, by the late 1950s youth clubs and church groups were also travelling further afield and during the 1960s teenagers from all backgrounds were beginning to consider holidays abroad after A-levels. Older respondents, who were married with children during this period, usually restricted themselves to holidays in Britain, only venturing abroad as their children became independent.

Although Fowler's research has indicated that a distinctive teenage culture emerged during the inter-war years,<sup>302</sup> there were dramatic changes in the lifestyles and spending habits of post-war adolescents, which were fuelled by the rising wages, full employment and consumption choices of the period. However, despite the fact that many of the respondents continued to contribute the majority of their wage-packet to the family economy until they reached the age of majority, or married, they confirmed an interest in following current trends and purchasing fashionable items. Certainly this began before the war, but escalated with the economic recovery of the early 1950s. The oral testimony has called into question Abrams' claims that the teenage spending boom was largely confined to the working class,<sup>303</sup> as adolescents from the lower-middle class, who remained in full-time education, undertook part-time work in order to finance their consumption, in music, clothing, makeup and cars. The respondents' consumption choices and the limited inter-generational conflict in Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton also challenge Cohen's assertions that post-war slum clearance caused the disintegration of community, resulting in adherence sub-cultures, rebellion and family friction.<sup>304</sup>

It was the acquisition of consumer durables, fashionable clothing, cars and the burgeoning holiday market which played a role in the reduction of inter-class distinctions, during the post-war period.<sup>305</sup> However, interviewees, from lower-middle and working-class backgrounds, identified some disparities in accents,

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<sup>301</sup> Walton, *The British Seaside*, p. 64.

<sup>302</sup> Fowler, *First Teenagers*.

<sup>303</sup> Abrams, *Teenage Consumer*, p. 13.

<sup>304</sup> Cohen, 'Sub-cultural Conflict'.

<sup>305</sup> Although undoubtedly new educational opportunities played a role in these changes, they are beyond the remit of this thesis.

housing and possessions. They generally made these distinctions on the grounds of 'rough' and 'respectable' families and/or behaviour, rather than making class-based judgments. As in earlier generations, they also observed that feckless behaviour and budgeting failures were the distinguishing features, which reduced the status of both families and individuals.

Between 1945 and the early 1970s conspicuous consumption became an increasingly important factor of life for members of the working and lower-middle classes. Undoubtedly, this trend reflected some elements of competition and aspirations to the consumption and ownership of items which conferred prestige and a measure of social superiority. The manufacture and purchase of a variety of consumer durables reflected the apparent affluence of post-war society. Conversely, in the perceptions of the community and the respondents, to be deprived of accepted status indicators, in the form of household objects, televisions cars and holidays, denoted deprivation and poverty. It was the acquisition of these items which challenged class distinctions, but more importantly conveyed status and respectability amongst all generations of consumers. The ability to purchase these goods, and the life-styles which they denoted, demonstrated that families and individuals had the capacity to successfully 'manage' their incomes and budget wisely, in order to participate in the new era of mass-consumption.

## CHAPTER EIGHT:

### SAVING

This chapter will investigate ways in which the respondents saved and invested their disposable income, and examine some of the complexities of the relationship between consumption and saving in the post-war period. It will demonstrate that, despite suggestions to the contrary, there was no discernable difference between the saving habits of the lower-middle and working-class inhabitants of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton. It will also contend that in a time of increasing affluence, despite government encouragement and the introduction of ‘official’ savings schemes, there was much continuity in saving habits, serving to demonstrate that the consequences of affluence were slow to impact upon traditional behavioural patterns in Black Country communities.

The concept of saving, the reservation or ‘putting aside’ of a portion of income for use at some time in the future, has long been recommended by observers of working-class behaviour. Writing in 1866 Smiles advocated that “the provident and careful man must necessarily be a thoughtful man, for he lives not merely for the present, but with provident forecast makes arrangements for the future”.<sup>1</sup> Nineteenth century commentators lamented the lack of foresight, discipline and the fecklessness which they believed was responsible for the descent of individuals and families into poverty and pauperism.<sup>2</sup> As a result, a combination of industry, self-improvement, thrift, and frugality were prescribed to combat the economic vicissitudes of life in a low-income household.<sup>3</sup> Despite these recommendations, in many households the margins between financial security and penury remained extremely narrow, as the precarious nature of working-class employment combined with low wages frequently precluded regular saving.<sup>4</sup> Amongst the poor there was an increasing awareness that setting aside money for future contingencies was desirable, particularly as the nineteenth century progressed. However, balancing the weekly income against expenditure –

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<sup>1</sup> Smiles, *Self Help*, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup> Townsend, *Poverty*, p. 97.

<sup>3</sup> Smiles, *Self Help*. Chapter 10 is entitled ‘Money – its Use and Abuse’ and contains numerous exhortations for working-class frugality and simple economy.

<sup>4</sup> Johnson, *Spending and Saving*, p. 1.

‘making ends meet’- was frequently an all consuming exertion, allowing no margin either for error or saving. Nevertheless, it was customary for many families to engage in small-scale traditional methods of savings, usually for specific eventualities i.e. sickness or burial clubs, which provided an extremely limited measure of security in times of inevitable hardship.<sup>5</sup> This allowed access to medical assistance and provided fitting and respectable funerals, as evidence of the family’s ability to “cope with the financial burden of death”.<sup>6</sup> As Smiles and his adherents advised, “If a man...takes care of the pennies – putting some weekly into a benefit society or an insurance fund...he will soon find that this...will abundantly repay him”.<sup>7</sup> Johnson indicated the complex relationship between working-class budgeting, aspirations and respectability, between 1870 and 1939, arguing that erratic and uncertain earning patterns were compensated by various forms of borrowing and saving as households attempted to pre-empt financial problems.<sup>8</sup> He differentiated between working and lower middle-class savings patterns, arguing that working-class saving constituted the accumulation of funds for particular items and middle-class saving provided defence against unspecified future uncertainties.<sup>9</sup> The experiences of the respondents in the three localities reveal no such clear-cut class distinctions.

Labour and social historians divided the disposable income of the working class into three discrete categories which were utilised for the disparate purposes of consumption, saving or investment. However, Benson challenged this traditional view, stressing that there was no clear-cut delineation between consumption, saving and investment between 1851 and the early twentieth century<sup>10</sup>, as it is virtually impossible to disentangle the complications of expenditure existing within most households. The rigidity of categorisation resulted in an overestimation of working-class consumption and an underestimation of the working-class propensity for saving.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, in the post-war period considerable overlap in the processes of spending, saving and investment existed, as some methods of consumption facilitated

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<sup>5</sup> Johnson, P., ‘Credit and Thrift and the British Working Class, 1870-1939’ in Winter, J., (ed) *Modern British History: Essays in Honour of Henry Pelling*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, *Spending and Saving*, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Smiles, *Self Help*, p. 187.

<sup>8</sup> Johnson, *Credit and Thrift*, p. 148.

<sup>9</sup> Johnson, *Spending and Saving*, p. 99, p. 116.

<sup>10</sup> Benson, J., ‘Working-Class Consumption, Saving and Investment in England and Wales, 1851-1911’, *Journal of Design History*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1996, p. 87.

<sup>11</sup> Benson, ‘Working-Class Consumption’.



saving and the purchase of specific items could be construed as forms of investment for the future.<sup>12</sup>

In the increasing affluence of the 1950s and 60s, the vast majority of the population was undeniably more prosperous and, after essential financial outgoings, possessed some disposable income. Nevertheless, the dividing line between apparent affluence and impending poverty remained fine, at least in the estimation of the oral testimony, and judicious spending, as well as saving, remained a fundamental necessity. The respondents, influenced by memories of the 1930s and wartime deprivation were anxious to mitigate the possibility of further financial catastrophes. The introduction of state benefits failed to prevent financial disaster amongst a proportion of households, with “sectors of society... [remaining] more or less permanently on, or below, the poverty line”.<sup>13</sup> In the mid-1950s “a third of the population had no liquid assets at all...and another third possessed less than £100 as a defence against the uncertainties of life”.<sup>14</sup> By 1971 the Crowther Committee on Consumer Credit noted the precarious nature of working-class finances, as “for many low income households, the borderline between success and disaster in planning expenditure is extremely narrow and to be as little as ten shillings on the wrong side may have serious consequences”.<sup>15</sup>

Mindful of the perils suffered by previous generations, in times of ill-health or lost income, and regardless of state assistance, most families continued to dispose of their earnings in a complex arrangement of spending and saving which would serve to maintain them in times of misfortune. As Johnson revealed, “High incomes during the Second World War [and beyond] were not readily channelled into new forms of thrift; habits developed over many years of low income were not quickly changed”.<sup>16</sup> This is corroborated by the respondents in the three localities, where mutuality remained an important consideration, and whose spending and saving habits followed

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<sup>12</sup> Benson, ‘Working-Class Consumption’.

<sup>13</sup> Taylor, A., *Working Class Credit and Community Since 1918*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 112. Using a combination of archival research and oral interviews, Taylor examined working-class communities on the Tyneside arguing that a great deal of continuity between pre and post-1945 patterns of behaviour were still in evidence, with regards to methods of consumption, credit, and saving.

<sup>14</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 145.

<sup>15</sup> Johnson, *Spending and Saving*, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Johnson, *Spending and Saving*, p. 215.

traditional patterns in which thrift and the accumulation of funds were largely defined by local and familial customs.

### **Government Savings Schemes**

The post-war Labour Government, mindful of the precarious economic state of the country after the war, made concerted efforts to encourage saving. In the late 1940s cinema advertising, accompanied by appropriate jingles, aimed to educate individuals in this practice:

“Make your aim a bob in the pound  
A bob in the pound today.  
Make your aim one in twenty  
Mind how you spend,  
You’ll find 19 more than plenty.”<sup>17</sup>

Poster campaigns and local newspapers exhorted saving. Schools displayed ‘wise owl’ posters reminding children and parents that saving would ensure personal and national prosperity.<sup>18</sup> Advertisements published by the National Savings Committee enjoined the population to “restore the greatness of our country and bring prosperity to our people”, as “thoughtless spending” would imperil the country further. The task was clear – “Whatever else you may be doing to help, save for all you are worth. The need for saving is as great and urgent as when we were at war”.<sup>19</sup> Locally, war-time savings campaigns were commemorated, with tributes and certificates distributed to Sedgley residents congratulating their “excellent savings record”.<sup>20</sup> The *Dudley Herald* provided regular updates upon local targets, encouraging the involvement of individuals and companies. A 1950 editorial deplored the apathetic attitudes of ‘big firms’,<sup>21</sup> towards savings schemes and suggested that saving should be objective because “people want to know when they’ll get their money back”.<sup>22</sup> There were regular advertisements for the National Savings Scheme,<sup>23</sup> promoting 15 shilling

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Barnes, *Coronation Cups*, p. 165.

<sup>18</sup> Telephone conversation with the mother of Mr TB who was a teacher at a Sedgley school from the 1950s to the 1980s. 14<sup>th</sup> April 2008.

<sup>19</sup> *Woman and Beauty*, August 1948, p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 20<sup>th</sup> July 1946, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> In this editorial a ‘big firm’ was defined as one with over 500 employees.

<sup>22</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 21<sup>st</sup> January 1950, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 20<sup>th</sup> May 1950, p. 6. Established in 1861 the Post Office Savings Bank aimed at encouraging “ordinary workers to provide for themselves against adversity and ill-health”, the scheme was expanded during the First World War and again in the 1940s.

National Savings Certificates as “**E**asy to buy...**E**asy to hold...**E**asy to cash”.<sup>24</sup> In 1955 the President of the National Savings Committee commented that, “There has never been so much money in people’s pockets” and noted a marked increase in National Savings.<sup>25</sup>

General trends of saving escalated. In 1965 the annual investment with the Trustee Savings Bank was “the largest ever recorded”.<sup>26</sup> Three months later the West Bromwich Savings Committee reported increased savings, as children are “trained” to save,<sup>27</sup> by the end of the year they were “prospering”.<sup>28</sup> Certainly, the oral evidence indicated the success of the Campaign within the Black Country, particularly when the savings were conveniently extracted by the employers before wages were paid, requiring minimal effort on the part of the savers – as Anthony Davies remarked, “what you never had [in your wage packet] you never missed.”<sup>29</sup> Mr Southall’s father, an accountant for the Motor Pressing Division of a local firm, was photographed in the late 1960s receiving a silver cup for winning the “Ist League of the National Savings Competition in the Wolverhampton area”. The Division had a savings membership of “800 and a total savings account during the year of £23,812 - ...on average each member saved 11s. 5d. per week”.<sup>30</sup> Rivalry was encouraged by the presentation of cups, long-service badges and other awards.

Most respondents were aware of the campaign, a number recalling advertisements promoting the scheme, which they supported out of patriotism, to demonstrate respectability and to conform to behavioural patterns within their community or workplace. As the oral testimony confirmed, “everybody” bought them. Marion Allen’s father “was very patriotic...You could buy stamps from school...and he used to buy them”.<sup>31</sup> Photographs of the Royal children featured on the stamps for school

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<sup>24</sup> Lake, *Daily Mail Ideal Home Book*, p. 99.

<sup>25</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1955, p. 8. A month later it reported the recruitment of 1,299 new savers in Dudley. 19<sup>th</sup> February 1955, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1965, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1965, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 9<sup>th</sup> October 1965, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Telephone conversation with Anthony Davies 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2008; Sedgley Mr NS; Mr PR.

<sup>30</sup> Undated newspaper cutting from the *Express and Star* supplied by Mr NS. The company was John Thompson’s Ltd. The First League “comprises companies with 500 or more employees and more than 40 firms are in this section....The competition has been running for some twelve years in the area.”

<sup>31</sup> Sedgley Mrs MA.

children,<sup>32</sup> which were sold on Monday mornings.<sup>33</sup> Mothers buying them during the war years continued to save for their own children.<sup>34</sup> One respondent, purchased the stamps at school - “me mother would have ‘em to pay the electric bill and things like that”,<sup>35</sup> but generally they were utilised exclusively as a savings scheme. Stamps were collected on cards which were exchanged for certificates.<sup>36</sup> Mr DA remembered “buying...stamps and when you’d got enough of those you bought a National Savings certificate...when you’d saved £5 of those [stamps] Dad used to cash them in for a...certificate”.<sup>37</sup> The government produced National Savings greetings cards, which contained spaces for additional stamps. Investment in these certificates demonstrated some financial acumen. Betty Detheridge’s “mother did savings certificates...she bought them for my children. She was very astute she’d say there’s a new issue out change them”.<sup>38</sup>

The National Savings Scheme was not confined to school-children, employers and the armed forces were equally involved in the scheme.<sup>39</sup> Bill Jones “did have a Post Office Account. I had one in the forces [during National Service] I saved 2 shillings a week, it was National Savings...then we [Mr BJ and his fiancée] split up and I drew it out and blew (sic) it”.<sup>40</sup> Some companies encouraged employees to purchase bonds; one short-hand typist in Tipton “went in for every scheme that the government did as “if you put in so much you got advantages”. In Mrs Houlton’s opinion, “the savings were very good. We used to buy government savings and they [the employers] used to put shillings. I think bonds were fifteen shillings each and every fourteen shillings we saved they would give us a shilling – the company...and you could put in as much as you could afford”.<sup>41</sup>

Agents were recruited from within the community to promote the schemes locally. Mrs Leddy “bought savings stamps...half a crown ones in a long book...I rather liked

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<sup>32</sup> Tipton Mrs MD, Mr DA. “Prince Charles was two and sixpence and Ann was sixpence”.

<sup>33</sup> email from Mr TB of Sedgley 13<sup>th</sup> February 2008.

<sup>34</sup> E mail Mr TB, Tipton Mr PR; Sedgley Mrs DR2, Mrs JB, Mrs VR.

<sup>35</sup> Tipton Mr HT. They were utilised in this way because Mr HT’s businessman father was declared bankrupt on two occasions.

<sup>36</sup> Tipton Mrs JB; Sedgley Mr PR, Mr NS; Pensnett Miss YB.

<sup>37</sup> Tipton Mr DA.

<sup>38</sup> Pensnett Mrs BD.

<sup>39</sup> Tipton Mrs LJ; Sedgley Mrs PJ.

<sup>40</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ.

<sup>41</sup> Tipton Mrs OH.

the idea of that”.<sup>42</sup> The post mistress approached Vida Dugmore, in 1960, inviting her to instigate a scheme on a new housing estate and earn an income selling stamps to friends and neighbours. She purchased stamps worth two shillings each from the post office, which she resold and “paid myself back first”. “Most of her neighbours” participated in the scheme. Completed savings books contained stamps to the value of £5 which were exchanged for cash at the Post Office or paid in to a savings account. Between 1965 and 1970, one of her customers purchased £2 of stamps every week, immediately exchanging them for cash at the Post Office. It could be argued that this demonstrated a continuing pressure to uphold one’s status in a tight-knit community where intimate knowledge of a family’s financial position was quickly disseminated within the neighbourhood. Mrs Dugmore intimated that the customer purchased stamps beyond her budget in order to enhance perceptions of her economic status and respectability - remaining unaware that local gossip conveyed the truth. Mrs Dugmore believed the customer “liked to feel she was doing her bit”, although whether this referred to a national or local contribution is unclear.<sup>43</sup> Again the pressure to conform and give mutual support remained inherent within these communities.

In November 1956 the Post Office Savings Bank introduced Premium Bonds which combined saving with opportunities to win substantial amounts of money. Virtually all respondents also purchased these, but on an irregular basis, with most people buying a limited number, usually no more than ten, for speculative purposes rather than as a concerted effort to save.<sup>44</sup> Although one respondent, Mr KD purchased more – “we’ve still got them...£1, £2, £5 we’ve got quite a few”.<sup>45</sup> Generally respondents concurred with Mrs Round that “it’s a gamble really they don’t earn anything”.<sup>46</sup> They were not usually purchased as a serious savings option but for amusement, speculation amongst workmates or children’s savings - “for the children that’s all”.<sup>47</sup> Exceptionally, Miss Bennett, an employee of the Inland Revenue, recollected that “an

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<sup>42</sup> Tipton Mrs JL.

<sup>43</sup> Informal conversation with Mrs VD of Sedgley, on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2008, who preferred not to be recorded as she was revealing information concerning former friends and neighbour.

<sup>44</sup> Pensnett Miss VC; Sedgley Mr PR; Tipton Mr TG.

<sup>45</sup> Pensnett Mr KD.

<sup>46</sup> Sedgley Mrs VR.

<sup>47</sup> Tipton Mrs RW, Mrs JB, Mrs MD, Mr TG, Mr BW; Sedgley Mrs JB, Mr GW, Mr TB, Mrs DG; Pensnett Mrs HW.

inspector at work...the last time I heard he'd got 6,000 [bonds]. This was before they put the limit up and he was very disappointed if, when they drew, he didn't win".<sup>48</sup>

Some respondents joined syndicates, recalling work-place ventures with individuals paying a set amount a week to purchase bonds.<sup>49</sup> Norman Raybould "had them at work. We were in a clique of we (sic) and we used to put so much a week and we used to have £2 Premium Bonds. We used to take it in turns".<sup>50</sup> At the Vono Works "there was a scheme...we was (sic) fed up of paying the money on the pools so instead we started to do [bonds] every week. There were ten people and...we put the money onto the premium bonds".<sup>51</sup> Similarly in Pensnett, Mr BJ recalled: "We had a Premium Bond syndicate at Round Oak [Steelworks]. We used to put...3s. and 4d. a week, there were six of us and we'd buy £1 [bond] each week and we used to have one each and it [the winnings] would be shared out. If you left you could take them with you. As I left... I won £25".<sup>52</sup>

Despite historians differentiating between middle-class long-term savings goals and the short-term aims of the working class, the disparities between the respondents are far from unequivocal.<sup>53</sup> A number of respondents distinguished between motives for and, methods of, saving. Peter Rudd, for example, explained that "there was (sic) two forms of saving. We used to save to pay bills that we knew were coming... – short term stuff that we used to save every week. But I did do some long term saving when I was on the bench in the tool room".<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Mr Evans saved "short term for cars and long term for the future" with no set goals,<sup>55</sup> as did a number of other respondents.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Pensnett Miss YB. Miss YB was employed by the Inland Revenue between 1955 and 1990.

<sup>49</sup> Sedgley Mrs MA; Pensnett Mrs RE.

<sup>50</sup> Pensnett Mr NR.

<sup>51</sup> Tipton Mr MJ.

<sup>52</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ.

<sup>53</sup> Benson, *Affluence and Authority*, pp. 44-478; Klein, *Samples*, p. 197; Johnson, *Spending and Saving*, p. 99.

<sup>54</sup> Sedgley Mr PR.

<sup>55</sup> Pensnett Mr RE.

<sup>56</sup> Pensnett Mr SB; Sedgley Mrs PJ; Mr DG.

## Long Term Saving

Virtually all respondents, regardless of occupation or income, continued the custom of saving for specific items, but a number retained long-term saving ambitions for an indeterminate “future”<sup>57</sup> or a “rainy day [as] you never knew!”<sup>58</sup> Mr BT and his wife “always tried to save a bit ‘cos you never know what you’ll want”.<sup>59</sup> Others were “not saving for anything in particular, just the future”.<sup>60</sup> Mrs Greathead “saved for the future...for a house to get married...[and] for the future”.<sup>61</sup> Mr Churchman and his wife “saved before...[they] had their children...and afterwards for “the future”.<sup>62</sup> Abhorrence of debt sometimes resulted in a determination to save to complete mortgage repayments. After initially saving for a house-deposit, Lucy James and her husband redoubled their efforts, as “we were determined to pay the mortgage off” as soon as possible.<sup>63</sup> Mr DW and Mrs IW also wanted to repay their mortgage – “for this house I paid cash once a month over the counter...I tried to pay more than the amount each time;”<sup>64</sup> “Every penny we earned went on the mortgage...every time we same my dad he said ‘have you got that house paid for yet?’”.<sup>65</sup>

As the period of affluence progressed, goods became more accessible and aspirations increased – “then you changed your standards [saving for]... a car and then holidays...you’d have a target of a few hundred and you saved for it...people were becoming more affluent ...less money worries”.<sup>66</sup> Certainly ambitions to home-ownership influenced spending habits, as Mrs Brown recalled “it was save, save, save, yes every penny...I think then [1950s] that this aspiration started to grow, that people wanted their own homes”.<sup>67</sup> Both working and lower-middle class respondents recollected long-term savings habits when home ownership became a viable proposition. Mr and Mrs Adams, and other respondents of a similar age, commenced

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<sup>57</sup> Pensnett Mrs BD, Miss YB; Sedgley Mr DW, Mrs IW; Tipton Mrs PB.

<sup>58</sup> Tipton Mr BW.

<sup>59</sup> Pensnett Mr BT.

<sup>60</sup> Pensnett Mrs HW.

<sup>61</sup> Sedgley Mrs DG – she married in 1965.

<sup>62</sup> Mr and Mrs Churchman May 1998.

<sup>63</sup> Tipton/Sedgley Mrs LJ. Mrs LJ and her husband moved from Tipton to Sedgley in mid study period in the 1950s.

<sup>64</sup> Sedgley Mr DW.

<sup>65</sup> Sedgley Mrs IW.

<sup>66</sup> Sedgley Mrs IW.

<sup>67</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB, Mrs CB; Tipton Mrs JL.

saving with a building society when they became engaged in 1962, in order to obtain a mortgage.<sup>68</sup>

Throughout the period all single respondents, including males completing National Service, between 1945 and 1962, resided at home with their parents. Saving for a mortgage as a single person was extremely unusual; Mr Evans saved “for the future without long-term goals” until his marriage in 1979, at the age of 32, only then did he consider home ownership.<sup>69</sup> A number of individuals were unable to save before marriage, because their wages were reserved for their mother (See chapter three). Such couples customarily spent some time in rented accommodation, or living with in-laws, while they waited for council housing and/or saved for a house deposit.<sup>70</sup> Bill Jones lived three years with his wife’s “mom and dad in Preston Road”, until they purchased a house,<sup>71</sup> Spencer Wilson “lived with her mom for four years until 1957”,<sup>72</sup> whilst accumulating “a deposit for a house”.<sup>73</sup> Residing with in-laws between 1947 and 1952 enabled Lucy Jones and her husband to save for a mortgage and build their home.<sup>74</sup>

Long-term saving, for identified goals, or unspecified future plans, usually necessitated saving within a specific institution - bank, building society or insurance company. In the post-war period, the financial establishments were gradually recognising the importance of attracting female customers – even housewives. In 1955 National Provincial Bank wooed housewives in advertisements claiming that “We would not offer advice on the fine points of women’s part in house management but it *is* in our province to suggest that housekeeping is made easier with a banking account”.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Pensnett Mr RA, Mrs BA; Sedgley Mrs DG, Mr NS; Tipton Mr RB, Mrs PB, Mr DA, Mr HT.

<sup>69</sup> Pensnett Mr RE. Mr RE lived with his parents in their council house until his marriage. His wages were relatively high and there was plentiful overtime and he saved for the future on a regular basis but did not consider home ownership until he became engaged.

<sup>70</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB.

<sup>71</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ.

<sup>72</sup> Sedgley Mr SW.

<sup>73</sup> Tipton Mrs LJ.

<sup>74</sup> Sedgley Mrs PJ.

<sup>75</sup> Lake, *Daily Mail Ideal Home Book*, p. 126.



Ownership of accounts revealed generational differences and what could be construed as class differences amongst respondents, although they were in reality based upon occupation and methods of remuneration. In 1966, when Betty Tolley married, at the age of 18, she opened a bank account – “I remember my mother thinking it was amazing that I’d got a cheque book. She couldn’t get over it”.<sup>76</sup> All respondents possessed some form of account although a number revealed that their parents, who were alive between 1945 and 1970, did not, preferring to keep their savings concealed at home. Despite accumulating sufficient funding to purchase a house, Mr BT’s father kept the majority of his savings money in a tin in the bedroom.<sup>77</sup> When Mrs Roberts’ father died in the late 1960s his savings were found secreted in “the back of a picture frame”.<sup>78</sup> The parents of some respondents had no aspirations to a bank account; Val Cartwright’s father opening one in his latter years, whilst her mother continued to save at home.<sup>79</sup> Joyce Beaman “couldn’t remember them [her parents] having one, it was always cash” and neither could others.<sup>80</sup> Rev CH’s parents had neither bank accounts nor savings, but this was due to financial hardship rather than mistrust of banking institutions as “they never seemed to have any spare money and if they did they spent it”.<sup>81</sup>

Misconceptions concerning types of financial institutions also affected the responses of interviewees. When asked if their parents had any category of savings accounts, some respondents replied negatively, later revealing substantial amounts saved in the Post Office.<sup>82</sup> Mr RB, whose father kept most of his savings in a box under the bed, ironically stated “my parents didn’t have accounts, just dad’s ‘post office’.”<sup>83</sup> Perhaps the formal, intimidating atmosphere of banks and building societies were eschewed in favour of the familiar buildings, situated within the community, where stamps were purchased, letters posted and pensions collected. Also, as Helen Forrester indicated in her memoirs: “Post Office Savings Accounts had the advantage that one could save in them as little as sixpence a week”,<sup>84</sup> because it was customary that “any nest

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<sup>76</sup> Tipton Mrs BT.

<sup>77</sup> Pensnett Mr BT.

<sup>78</sup> Sedgley Mrs DR1.

<sup>79</sup> Pensnett Miss VC, Mrs BD; Tipton Mr DN.

<sup>80</sup> Pensnett Mrs JB, Mrs BD.

<sup>81</sup> Tipton Rev CH

<sup>82</sup> Pensnett Miss YB; Tipton Mr RB.

<sup>83</sup> Tipton Mr RB.

<sup>84</sup> Forrester, *Lime Street*, p. 99.

eggs...had to be built up a penny or so at a time”.<sup>85</sup> This practice of small, irregular amounts of saving was endorsed by respondents who described opening a ‘little’ account with the post office<sup>86</sup>; monies saved in this way tended to be viewed almost dismissively when compared with ‘serious’ savings in a bank or building society.

Opening a bank account, in preference to a Post Office account, was necessitated by the transfer from weekly wages, in cash, to a monthly cheque, which was becoming increasingly prevalent during the 1960s. Mrs Round’s father, who was employed on the railways, “had a bank book quite late on [in the 1950s]. I presume he was paid in cash before that”.<sup>87</sup> According to Bill Jones, until the early 1960s, an account was unnecessary as “most people got paid in cash”.<sup>88</sup> His reaction and disconcertion at the transition from pay-packet to cheque was typical, both to the unfamiliar and imposing facades of the banks (and their employees) and the subsequent intricacies of converting cheques into currency. When the bank manager explained that cheques were not instantly transferable into cash, he recalled - “being naïve as I was in those days (1960s)...I found that I could open an account but I couldn’t have any money until it had been cleared [I said] that’s no good to me I haven’t given mother any money for a fortnight – no keep for a fortnight!”<sup>89</sup> The complexities and responsibilities of cheque-book accounts were generally perceived as “not for the likes of us”.<sup>90</sup> Thus, the majority of the interviewees commented that their parents had ‘never written a cheque’. Mrs Greenaway’s father - an insurance agent - “he’d got money in the Halifax Building Society but not a bank. He never wrote a cheque (sic) or anything like that”.<sup>91</sup> It was implied, although never directly expressed, that cheque accounts were for the ‘upper’ classes and respondents expressed pride when opening a current account, as it conferred a certain status upon the family,<sup>92</sup> particularly as cash payments became increasingly associated with manual labour.

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<sup>85</sup> Beck, *Perhaps*, p. 94.

<sup>86</sup> Pensnett Miss YB, Miss NP; Sedgley Mrs SB; Tipton Mrs JL.

<sup>87</sup> Sedgley Mrs VR.

<sup>88</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ.

<sup>89</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ, Mr BT

<sup>90</sup> Sedgley Mr FG; Tipton Mr BW.

<sup>91</sup> Pensnett Mrs PG.

<sup>92</sup> Tipton Mrs PB; Sedgley Mrs JB; Pensnett Miss YB.

The shift from weekly cash payments to monthly salaries assisted respondents in their saving endeavours. Recipients of salaries were likely only to withdraw sufficient cash for their immediate needs, thereby retaining surplus money in their accounts, whereas a Friday night pay-packet provided an opportunity to squander the excess.<sup>93</sup> The transition to pay cheques or to white-collar employment sometimes denoted a similar transition to regular, more formalised saving, which could be extracted at source and invested in employee savings schemes.<sup>94</sup> When transferring from factory to clerical work Miss Plant's saving patterns altered, as a deckchair assembler and then a tailoress she saved in a post office account – “Of course later on when I worked in an office...I saved quite regularly. You sort of go into things like Scottish Widows and that for your pension”.<sup>95</sup>

Traditionally insurance policies were a recognised method of circumventing potential financial difficulties, offering insurance cover for a variety of contingencies, from unemployment to death, which could leave an uninsured family in unforeseen poverty.<sup>96</sup> In the period up to 1939, Friendly Societies provided the working class with the most economical and popular form of security - death or burial insurance.<sup>97</sup> Despite the difficulties of obtaining accurate statistical evidence, it is believed that this type of cover was widespread, “particularly among the poorer sections of society”.<sup>98</sup> However, respondents from relatively affluent families continued to make contributions as was customary in the pre-war period. “The old Penny Refuge, Prudential, Pearl, in actual fact when dad passed on we cashed his penny. He used to pay a penny a week” and so did we.<sup>99</sup>

Despite state benefits, this type of insurance continued from the nineteenth century into the late twentieth century, with weekly premiums collected by company agents, who were frequently familiar as relatives or neighbours. The experience of Mr PD was fairly typical: “Cynthia's father, my uncle ran it”.<sup>100</sup> Payments were small, so

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<sup>93</sup> Sedgley Mr NS; Tipton Mr TG; Mr BW.

<sup>94</sup> Sedgley Mr SW, Mrs CB; Tipton Mr OH.

<sup>95</sup> Pensnett Miss NP, Mrs BA.

<sup>96</sup> Johnson, ‘Credit and Thrift’, p 160.

<sup>97</sup> Johnson, ‘Credit and Thrift’, p. 160.

<sup>98</sup> Johnson, ‘Credit and Thrift’, p. 161; Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 124.

<sup>99</sup> Tipton Mr BW.

<sup>100</sup> Tipton Mr PD.

were returns, but costs were high so that “half the pitiful sums...goes in expenses and lapsed policies. Not six pennyworth of value do they get for any shillings so hardly spared”.<sup>101</sup> Respondents recalled the weekly ritual of the “insurance man’s visit”,<sup>102</sup> concurring that such safeguards were virtually obligatory - “Well you had to – insurance just to cover you and that,”<sup>103</sup> and “everyone took out insurance in those days”.<sup>104</sup> Mrs James still retains a policy which was “put in for a penny when I was born”, in 1927.<sup>105</sup> Agents selling insurance frequently became “family friends... [who] were given an unrivalled insight into the household’s means and behaviour”<sup>106</sup> and their familiarity with their customers undoubtedly sustained their use into the 1970s.

Commercial interests and advertisers exploited the insecurities of potential customers, particularly young women who were anxious concerning their marriage prospects. When the war ended Norwich Union commenced a campaign aimed at young professional women, or “business girls”, reminding them that although marriage was a possibility “surely it’s better to be prepared in case” it didn’t materialise. The inference was that state provision was inadequate, as “twenty-six shillings a week from the Government when I’m 60 won’t take me far”, whereas for a nominal weekly amount “it’s lovely to know I shall get a pension of three pounds a week from a Norwich Union policy” or, alternatively, a lump sum.<sup>107</sup>

The working-class custom of saving specifically for funeral expenses continued throughout the period under consideration. Informal death and draw clubs, or sick and death clubs, operated in all three areas. Pubs ran sick and dividend clubs where “fees were collected... [and] the next of kin...had a small payment towards funeral costs and any amount left each year was shared out”.<sup>108</sup> Rev. CH’s grandmother “was in several death and draw clubs”<sup>109</sup> and local churches continued to “run funeral

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<sup>101</sup> Hilton, J., ‘Rich Man Poor Man’, cited in Johnson, *Spending and Saving*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>102</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ.

<sup>103</sup> Pensnett Mr SG.

<sup>104</sup> Pensnett Mrs BA, Miss NP, Mrs JB, Mrs BW, Mr NR; Sedgley Mrs DG, Mrs MA; Tipton Mr TG.

<sup>105</sup> Tipton Mrs LJ.

<sup>106</sup> Beck, *Perhaps*, p. 94.

<sup>107</sup> *Woman and Beauty*, August 1948, p. 123.

<sup>108</sup> Sedgley Mrs PJ.

<sup>109</sup> Tipton Rev. CH.

insurance clubs”.<sup>110</sup> “Once a week you were sent to the basement vestry of the local non-conformist chapel or the Sunday schoolroom to pay in the penny or twopence a week”.<sup>111</sup>

Formal policies with reputable insurance companies were an option both for saving and security, particularly when connected with the familiar face of the Prudential man. David Gould “was aware that there was the man from the Pru was in Victoria Street in a grey mac....when I was in Tipton”.<sup>112</sup> Mrs Tolley explained that “The Pru man used to come, I think it was once a month and they used to save with him and every few years they’d have a little lump sum out and as they got older the Pru man used to come round and they’d take out little insurance policies in case one of them died and they needed it for the funeral”.<sup>113</sup> When Mr Wade’s wife was ill he “took an endowment policy out for 10 years (on his own life)...so that if anything happened” his wife would be financially secure.<sup>114</sup>

The purchase of these insurance policies was perceived as a means of long-term saving, despite acknowledgment of poor returns. As Mrs Jones laughingly recounted, she “used to have life insurance because once when it matured...[she] bought an eiderdown. (laughs) That’s how much it was”.<sup>115</sup> Promoted by familiar faces to customers within their own environment, such policies were an inherent part of working-class life - “endowments...were paid weekly collected from the house”.<sup>116</sup> David Ashfield and his wife saved with one of these policies - “Marge and I took out endowments as a way of saving”.<sup>117</sup>

Mr Mountford described purchasing endowment policies “with Prudential”. “You paid so much a week...and you survived...and (laughter) you didn’t need to use it. At the end of say 5, 10 years you could get it back with bonuses *so that was a form of saving*”.<sup>118</sup> Val Cartwright interjected, saying “Yes yes I mean a lot of people had

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<sup>110</sup> Tipton Miss LJ; Pensnett Mr RA. For example, St. John’s of Tipton and St. James of Pensnett.

<sup>111</sup> Beck, *Perhaps*, p. 93.

<sup>112</sup> Sedgley Mr DG.

<sup>113</sup> Tipton Mrs BT.

<sup>114</sup> Sedgley Mr GW.

<sup>115</sup> Sedgley Mrs PJ.

<sup>116</sup> Tipton Mrs JL.

<sup>117</sup> Tipton Mr DA.

<sup>118</sup> Pensnett Mr DM.

...we'd got ours [with]...the Wesley and General and...the Britannic. Ooh I don't think anyone saves like that now". Miss Bennett responded indicating the poor returns. "No 'cos they weren't really very good savings were they?" Mr Mountford was offended by this observation, stating assertively: "Well we were with the Prudential and it depended what bonus you got, depended on inflation."<sup>119</sup> Brought up to "be cautious", Mick Cripps recalled insurance policies as an alternative means of saving – "I took one of these insurance policies which could be converted to house purchase. [It] became an endowment policy and...the only thing I did to save more was to up what I put into life insurance".<sup>120</sup> Of course, the familiarity between company representatives, individual customers and the community undoubtedly resulted in enduring loyalty, so perhaps this connection became more important than the potential gains of the policy.<sup>121</sup> Habit and custom ensured the continuation of such practices. Frank Green, born in 1952, recalled the "endowments weren't worth much but the people came to the door!"<sup>122</sup>

Saving with insurance policies ensured the long-term future of offspring and grandchildren, again the familiarity and convenience of doorstep agents were a contributing factor. Mr Adams' mother insured her family with Britannia Insurance – "Now my mother, throughout *my* life, paid into a society".<sup>123</sup> Rose Wilson purchased endowment policies for her daughters, born in 1958 and 1962, "not life insurance, just for ten years or (sic). I bought one for each of the girls when they were 18, as savings"<sup>124</sup> Others, like Mrs Beaman, had personal policies "and then obviously we took them out for the children as well until they were 18...it was a way of saving".<sup>125</sup> The practice continued into future generations – "My parents did...and Graham and I always did that. We did it for our children and now we're doing it for our grandchildren...I worked for an insurance company and we did do endowments".<sup>126</sup> The weekly payments were relatively low, an affordable amount to save for the future benefit of children. Mr PD's family also used these policies to invest for their

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<sup>119</sup> Pensnett Mr DM, Miss VC, Miss YB were interviewed together on several occasions both formally and informally. They were life-long friends who attended the same church.

<sup>120</sup> Sedgley Mr MC.

<sup>121</sup> Taylor, *Working-Class Credit*; Beck, *Perhaps*, p. 94.

<sup>122</sup> Sedgley Mr FG.

<sup>123</sup> Pensnett Mr RA.

<sup>124</sup> Tipton Mr SW, Mrs RW.

<sup>125</sup> Tipton Mrs JB.

<sup>126</sup> Sedgley Mrs CB.

children - “Yes mom used to have...friendly society insurance only about 6d a week or something like that...mom had one for us me and my sister and it matured when we were 15 (in 1962)”.<sup>127</sup>

A minority of respondents, such as Mrs Bagley, disagreed with the governing principles of insurance, refusing to participate – “Dad was never one for insurance”.<sup>128</sup> Mrs HW expressed disapproval of the concept, “Mother didn’t like insurance [and] you didn’t argue with mother”<sup>129</sup> and Olive Houlton’s mother expressed disapprobation when her daughter and son-in-law obtained a policy – “I think I took one out once but mother didn’t agree so we had it [the money] out”.<sup>130</sup> Similarly, one respondent rejected insurance policies due to vociferous family objections and “started saving in other ways”. In this she conformed to the expected behavioural standards within the family, subsequently implying that the decision was correct as the returns were likely to be poor and that insurance policies were an outdated method of saving.<sup>131</sup>

### **Short Term Savings**

Short-term savings are defined as those required to purchase specific items for the home, or as a contingency measure intended to provide a small financial buffer in time of adversity or unforeseen crisis. Benson has suggested that the working class saved in the short-term to facilitate expenditure on “more immediately realizable objectives” such as clothes, household goods, holidays or celebrations such as birthdays or Christmas.<sup>132</sup> An almost universal abhorrence of credit or any form of ‘debt’ was exhibited in all three localities and respondents saved whenever possible, for long *and* short-term goals. Much saving was facilitated by various local savings schemes, which were generated within the immediate community. The classic draw clubs of the early twentieth century<sup>133</sup> retained their popularity in post-war Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton, as a means of consumption and to facilitate saving, which was

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<sup>127</sup> Tipton Mr PD.

<sup>128</sup> Tipton Mrs PB.

<sup>129</sup> Pensnett Mrs HW. Mrs HW’s mother disapproved of anything which she perceived as debt and always purchased with cash. She ‘didn’t like’ insurance, HP, catalogues, Provident checks, or savings clubs.

<sup>130</sup> Tipton Mrs OH.

<sup>131</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB.

<sup>132</sup> Benson, *Affluence and Authority*, p. 47.

<sup>133</sup> Roberts, *Classic Slum*, p. 20.

usually for specific ends. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, corner shops and public houses operated traditional systems of short-term saving. “Oh yes you went in clubs for everything. I had them at my shop...clubs were lovely”.<sup>134</sup> The Albion pub in Pensnett ran a “little club” in which patrons could save a small weekly sum, which was paid out each year.<sup>135</sup> Mr Evans recalled “a pub on nearly every corner” in nearby Woodside and “most of them ran some sort of club...[he] always remembered going up there to pay...[with] a little card and the money” which was shared out at the end of the year.<sup>136</sup> Rich’s study found that Death and Dividend and Sick and Draw clubs “were still very popular...[as] members gather weekly...to pay subs and have a drink or a chat”.<sup>137</sup> Various Tipton pubs had savings clubs which patrons used for short-term saving, sometimes for holidays, outings and coach trips.<sup>138</sup>

Churches continued to initiate savings schemes, with a proportion of the accrued interest used to boost church funds.<sup>139</sup> Bromley Methodist Tuesday Fellowship Class ran one such club, “the interest went to the church and you just got your money back in [mid] November...and you could spend it for Christmas,”<sup>140</sup> and Cyril Green ran the savings club at Hill Street Methodist Church in Tipton.<sup>141</sup> The Pleasant Sunday Afternoon Club at Wallbrook Chapel existed into the 1990s, providing savers with some freedom of choice - “We all paid whatever we chose. It had to be the same [amount] each week. If you ‘went in’ for 6d – 6d is what you paid! The money was paid out in June and December for the S.S. [Sunday School] Anniversary and Christmas”.<sup>142</sup> All respondents were conversant with the arrangement of these schemes even when not personally involved. Mr Adams was aware of the Friendly Society used by most members of his chapel in Pensnett, but “never made...[himself] available for that”.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Tipton Mrs OH.

<sup>135</sup> Pensnett Mr SG.

<sup>136</sup> Pensnett Mr RE.

<sup>137</sup> Rich, ‘Social relationships’, p. 50.

<sup>138</sup> Tipton Mr RB.

<sup>139</sup> Beck, *Perhaps*, p. 93.

<sup>140</sup> Pensnett Mr BT.

<sup>141</sup> Tipton Mrs RW.

<sup>142</sup> Taken from notes written in 1999 by Mrs P Jones of Wallbrook.

<sup>143</sup> Pensnett Mr RA.



Churches, shops and individuals also ran various ‘diddlum’ clubs in all three localities. These draw clubs have been described by O’Connell as a “halfway house between credit and cash”.<sup>144</sup> They were not a local phenomenon, various diddlum or diddly clubs were common throughout England;<sup>145</sup> in Birmingham Katherine Dayus saved for her honeymoon in a diddlum club.<sup>146</sup> They generally functioned upon a lottery basis, with designated agents making weekly collections, and were distributed upon the basis of a weekly draw.<sup>147</sup> A number of Methodist Churches ran diddlums for the benefit of affiliated members.<sup>148</sup> Lake Street Methodist Church ran a diddlum: “yes and we’d got a bank. My uncle used to run it”.<sup>149</sup> Again, interest accrued was utilised to benefit church funds; participants viewed them as a means of contributing support to individual churches whilst they saved.<sup>150</sup>

A number of individuals also ran both savings and diddlum clubs for their immediate neighbours, friends and relatives. The ladies living in some Tipton communities, for example, paid weekly sums into a hairdressing club, conducted on the principles of a diddlum, in order to defray the expenditure on a ‘perm’.<sup>151</sup> In order to obtain a free perm for herself the mother of Mrs Houlton instigated her own perm club: “it was six shillings for a perm and she had to get six people so she could get her own perm free and you had to wait your turn”.<sup>152</sup>

Rose Wilson’s grandmother “always” ran a diddlum,<sup>153</sup> as did Olive Houlton, from her teenage years and into her marriage, – “all my friends joined in you’d throw it all in and sometimes you’d have a big do [when the draw took place]. Everyone paid in and then you’d draw it out for that week. It was a bit of fun really”.<sup>154</sup> “There was this character in Parkes Hall and she was everyone’s ‘Aunt Martha’...she was an

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<sup>144</sup> O’Connell, *Credit and Community*, p. 212. See O’Connell Chapter 6 for a comprehensive examination of both formal and information co-operative credit. pp. 209-237.

<sup>145</sup> Tebbutt, *Making Ends Meet*, p. 190.

<sup>146</sup> Dayus, *Where There’s Life*, p. 140.

<sup>147</sup> Tebbutt, *Making Ends Meet*, p. 190.

<sup>148</sup> Tipton Mrs RW.

<sup>149</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB. Lake Street was actually in Gornal but Mrs MB has always attended that church as it “has been the family chapel for generations”. As well as a savings club, Cyril Green also organised the diddlum at Hill Street Chapel in Tipton.

<sup>150</sup> Sedgley Mr NS, Mrs PJ.

<sup>151</sup> Mrs Cartwright June 1999.

<sup>152</sup> Tipton Mrs OH.

<sup>153</sup> Sedgley Mrs RW.

<sup>154</sup> Tipton Mrs OH.

absolutely wonderful woman...she used to brew small beer...was there at births [and] deaths...diagnosed illness...she ran a diddlum”.<sup>155</sup> Mr Rudd described the operation of that particular scheme: “I think it gave rise to the expression... ‘your prize has come out of the club’. Well that’s what it was. If there were 20 in the club and they all paid a shilling a week and they drew the names out. So if you were drawn first and you’d only paid a shilling you’d get it right away...*So in actual fact you got credit if you were the first out. If you were last out you’d already paid....it went on for years and years...a way of saving.*” (my italics)<sup>156</sup> Mr Rudd’s explanation perfectly encapsulates the complexity of the relationship between consumption, saving and credit which continued well into the 1970s in Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton.

‘Aunt Florrie’ also ran a Tipton diddlum throughout the period, as Mrs Jones recalled: “We used to start with a penny [per week] and then tuppence and three pence” rising by one penny a week until the end of the year.<sup>157</sup> The draw to decide when customers received their cash was not necessarily impartial or fair and was manipulated in certain circumstances. The “first draw” alluded to above by Mr Rudd was particularly important for customers in need of immediate funds. For example, George Wade and his wife saved in a diddlum club when they first married and were short of funds; familiar with the club leader he frequently requested the first draw. “We used to have the first draw (laughs) we used to say let we (sic) have the first draw...she knew we’d continue paying”.<sup>158</sup> Mrs Jones described the “great jubilation” of families when their tickets were drawn early, before the requisite number of payments had been made.<sup>159</sup> Others intimated that clubs were “one way of buying Christmas presents and things like that...they did it more to get the money to buy the kids presents”.<sup>160</sup>

Consumption of specific goods was also inextricably linked to traditional saving schemes, with shopkeepers instigating clubs entitling customers to cash or vouchers be expended in that particular shop. This dual-purpose arrangement encompassed savings schemes and credit arrangements, as Ted Gulliver described, “Joneses I was

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<sup>155</sup> Sedgley Mrs DR1, Mr PR, Mrs DR.

<sup>156</sup> Sedgley Mr PR.

<sup>157</sup> Sedgley Mrs PJ.

<sup>158</sup> Sedgley Mr GW, Mrs RW.

<sup>159</sup> Extracted from written notes made by Mrs Pauline Jones in 1999.

<sup>160</sup> Mr Drew June 1998; Sedgley Mrs CB.

telling yer about (sic)...yer could go in there and have some [clothes]...pay weekly and they stamped it [the card]...there was a good many places [in Tipton] *where you could pay weekly and have it when you finished paying for it. Or you could have it there and then*".<sup>161</sup> Potters of Princes End in Tipton, provided customers with the opportunity to take items on credit and paid for subsequently, or to "put items buy" until the requisite amount had been saved on the "club card".<sup>162</sup> Mr Davies saved "two bob a week" to purchase a suit from Potters,<sup>163</sup> whilst other respondents "saved with Potters" to buy household linen, "anniversary dresses" and other items.<sup>164</sup> When she purchased a drapers shop in 1960, Olive Houlton ran a 'seven penny club' which paid out "at Christmas like a dividend. That was their Christmas money...They could spend it on what they wished but they had to spend it in the shop".<sup>165</sup>

As mentioned in chapter five, Mail Order Catalogues were utilised as a means of earning income, consumption and short-term saving. Again, customers made purchases from familiar individuals - friends, family and neighbours.<sup>166</sup> Some customers used the system to save for purchases, "preferring to pay on nothing" until they accumulated a certain amount, only placing an order when the requisite sum was reached. In this way they were not incurring a debt, which in their estimation fulfilled the criteria of respectable behaviour.<sup>167</sup> Mrs Leddy's mother "used to buy from Littlewoods and she'd buy sheets and bed linen, but she would never buy until she'd paid. She gave the catalogue owner all the money, she was always in credit. And when she'd got enough money she would have something...She always paid Beryl so much a week and she'd say 'you've got this much credit would you like the book?' and she'd choose something".<sup>168</sup> Again this idea was linked to a continuing abhorrence of debt and perceptions of respectability.

Christmas clubs were extremely popular with those wishing to save for that particular festival. Mrs IT recalled that her customers "paid in some [money] with their weekly

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<sup>161</sup> Tipton Mr TG.

<sup>162</sup> Sedgley Mrs PJ; Tipton Mrs Mcroft, Mrs Cartwright, Mrs Lakin,

<sup>163</sup> Mr Davies December 1999.

<sup>164</sup> Sedgley Mrs PJ; Tipton Mrs Lakin, Mrs Tolley.

<sup>165</sup> Tipton Mrs OH.

<sup>166</sup> Tipton Mrs BT, Mr DA; Pensnett Miss NP.

<sup>167</sup> Sedgley Mrs PJ, Mr NS; Tipton Mrs JL.

<sup>168</sup> Tipton Mrs JL.

grocery bill” which was recorded in the shop book and on the customer’s card and redeemed at Christmas.<sup>169</sup> Heath’s in Sedgley had similar arrangements throughout the period.<sup>170</sup> In Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton virtually all butcher and corner shops provided customers with the facility to defray the expense of Christmas whilst simultaneously ensuring their own profits.<sup>171</sup> Mrs BJ’s mother saved in the butcher’s Christmas club enabling her to budget for the additional expenditure of the season.<sup>172</sup> In Pensnett, Clemson’s customers saved from January until mid December, allowing them to access their cash for Christmas.<sup>173</sup> Similarly, Shepherd’s customers saved their “money and on (sic) Christmas time you could have the money to buy...whatever you wanted”, as they also ran an off-licence this club was extremely popular.<sup>174</sup> Worker’s at Newey’s factory saved for Christmas in a club initiated by Mr MJ’s Aunt Gladys,<sup>175</sup> or in the Christmas club attached to Tolley’s mobile shop – “they’d pay perhaps a shilling, two shilling, two and six a week...They had a card yeah. Put it on their card and in your book” until Christmas.<sup>176</sup>

Another important festival requiring additional expenditure and necessitating careful budgeting, or saving, was the church or chapel anniversary. This tradition continued in all three localities and the provision of new clothing for the entire family remained de rigour. Yates’s haberdashery shop in Pensnett, “had a club ...and [customers] paid into the club every week for a year and they’d get us rigged out with our anniversary clothes and that”.<sup>177</sup> Some clubs remain in existence, as Mrs Beaman explained - “As a matter of fact we still do one. You wouldn’t call that going into debt as you didn’t have anything until you’d paid”.<sup>178</sup> Mrs Hurdman’s shop on the High Street had a similar scheme; her daughter, who worked in the shop, was a Sunday school teacher with a vested interest in correctly attiring children for the occasion. They “catered for the anniversary” ordering white dresses and gloves for the girls and allowing parents to save in advance for their purchases, ensuring that the off-spring of poorer families

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<sup>169</sup> Sedgley Mrs IT.

<sup>170</sup> Sedgley Mrs RW.

<sup>171</sup> Pensnett Mrs DB, Miss NP

<sup>172</sup> Tipton Mrs BJ. Friends of Mrs PB also saved in the local Butcher’s scheme – Tipton Mrs PB, MR BW.

<sup>173</sup> Pensnett Miss YB, Miss VC. The advertisements for Pensnett shops were discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>174</sup> Pensnett Miss YB, Miss VC.

<sup>175</sup> Tipton Mr MJ.

<sup>176</sup> Tipton Mr HT.

<sup>177</sup> Pensnett Mrs JB.

<sup>178</sup> Pensnett, Mrs JB.

were suitably dressed.<sup>179</sup> This continued through the 1960s, Mrs Woolley recalling that, although her mother paid cash to “Miss Hurdman [who] used to get our anniversary dresses and everything”, other mothers took advantage of the club system which defrayed the expense.<sup>180</sup>

Living in a tight-knit community resulted in restricted choices for shopping and saving, as reciprocal arrangements between individuals and businesses were often a factor for consideration. Consequently, teenagers found their purchasing decisions curtailed by parental controls - “Mom used to pay money in ...like a club for our shoes and *we had to go there* [Bunce’s in Pensnett High Street]. Miss Bunce did insurance business with my dad...and so because she had insurance with me dad we had to go and have our shoes from there. That’s how it worked... you didn’t have a lot of choice ‘cos you’d just go to one shop”.<sup>181</sup> Mrs IW made similar reciprocal arrangements with “Mrs Wade the music teacher next door to Eggington’s...she used to do (sic)...National Savings and we used to have stamps every week...and because she was a good customer to us we reciprocated”.<sup>182</sup> However, usage of specific financial schemes depended upon individual families’ attitudes to spending and saving; in Pensnett only Mrs Detheridge denied knowledge of savings clubs in the area stating “I don’t [know of them] ‘cos my mother didn’t like them”.<sup>183</sup>

Use of clubs demonstrated the close alignment between earning, spending and saving. Hawkin’s drapery business encouraged female customers to become agents by offering them discounted goods, with the onus upon agents to recruit clients from their immediate circle. Mrs Jones explained the dynamics of the system - “She asked around and got a group of women to pay a set amount each week for (say) eight weeks. She would need eight ladies to pay 1/- each. This meant that each week there was an 8/- vouchers for Hawkins. A draw was made to decide the order of issue. People used to swap chances if they needed something urgently, people who were

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<sup>179</sup> Telephone conversations with Miss YB and Miss VC of Pensnett, 17<sup>th</sup> April 2008. These were necessary in order to clarify points raised during their interviews.

<sup>180</sup> Pensnett Mrs BW, Miss NP.

<sup>181</sup> Pensnett Mrs PG. There were two shoe shops next door to each other in Pensnett High St

<sup>182</sup> Sedgley Mrs IW. Mrs IW was the proprietor of greengrocer and grocery stores in Sedgley.

<sup>183</sup> Pensnett Mrs DB.

desperate for cash would ‘sell’ their 8/- voucher for 7/-”.<sup>184</sup> Throughout the period, the author’s mother, and other female family members, “paid into Hawkins”, through longstanding custom and loyalty to the local agent, whose husband was unable to work. In these instances, allegiance to shop-keepers, or their intermediary, and acknowledgment of family custom were the over-riding decisive factors and deemed more important than personal preference. Other customers visited Hawkins personally to pay a weekly sum, which was entered onto a card and ‘spent’ on household linen at a later date.<sup>185</sup> Although never purchasing ‘on tick’, Mrs Woolley’s mother patronised Hawkins’ shop, paying “so much a week and when she’d got enough she’d have the stuff”.<sup>186</sup>

Mr Mountford recalled a similar arrangement with another Dudley Store in the 1960s. “We used to give the next door neighbour 2/6d a week and after so many week whatever it was we used to have a voucher that she [his mother] would go to Bunce’s ...for tea towels, curtains, bed linen all sort of things...she couldn’t have any money back...so she’d have some towels with it”.<sup>187</sup> This concept was extremely popular with young women from nearby villages who were “saving for their bottom drawer [and] would use the Hawkins club to get bed linen and towels”.<sup>188</sup>

The Provident Check system of facilitating consumption, discussed in chapter six, was also utilised for short-term saving, as the check was normally issued when payments had ended - “once the club had finished”.<sup>189</sup> Marion Allen confirmed that “they used to have to be paid for by the time we went for the clothes.”<sup>190</sup> Although Val Cartwright’s mother disapproved of purchasing in this way, her sister “used to save and...have the vouchers off them to spend in the shops”.<sup>191</sup> Despite some apparent stigma associated with purchasing and saving in this manner, a few respondents

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<sup>184</sup> Hawkin’s shop was situated in Dudley town centre but easily accessible to surrounding villages. Extracted from written notes provided by Mrs Pauline Jones in 1999.

<sup>185</sup> Pensnett Mrs BW.

<sup>186</sup> Pensnett Mrs BW.

<sup>187</sup> Pensnett Mr DM. He recollected this practice with much amusement stating that his mother had purchased sufficient tea-towels for both their lifetimes.

<sup>188</sup> Extracted from written notes provided by Mrs Pauline Jones in 1999.

<sup>189</sup> Tebbutt, *Making Ends Meet*, p. 146.

<sup>190</sup> Sedgley Mrs MA.

<sup>191</sup> Pensnett Miss VC.

deemed checks to be a necessity,<sup>192</sup> whilst others criticised the system intimating that it was not respectable, as “some families overdid it and got in a right pickle”.<sup>193</sup>

The Co-operative Society also exemplified a continuation of the inextricable links between consumption and saving. Despite assertions that, up to the outbreak of war, members of the lower-middle class “eschewed the mutual thrift organisations of manual workers” such as co-ops,<sup>194</sup> regardless of income or class virtually all respondents patronised the local co-op. For affluent and poor alike, the divvy was anticipated with great pleasure –“we really looked forward to that”.<sup>195</sup> Marion Allen “always used the co-op... [and] saved the divvy”, until she was compelled to spend it on groceries in 1970 when her husband’s employer imposed a three-day working week.<sup>196</sup> Other respondent’s utilised it to save in the short term for specific items. “I shopped for food mainly at the Co-op...and also they had the dividend...you joined the Co-op club for a shilling and that entitled you to shares...and then every 12 months they paid a dividend *which was quite something really...we used to buy something for the house*”.<sup>197</sup>

Some shopped at the Co-op almost exclusively, purchasing food, clothing, white goods and furniture in order to receive the dividend.<sup>198</sup> Mrs IT saved her dividend checks to purchase clothing from the larger store in Dudley High Street.<sup>199</sup> Between 1945 and 1970 the “dividend and the use to which it could be put... was the real inducement to cooperate.”<sup>200</sup> In 1969, local newspapers carried advertisements announcing the dates of “triple dividend week”, a device designed to encourage spending.<sup>201</sup> The dividend was viewed by most respondents as a means of saving, usually in the short-term but with the opportunity to save long-term. The Pensnett

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<sup>192</sup> Mrs Mcroft and Mrs Cartwright June 1999; Tipton Mr HT.

<sup>193</sup> Mrs Churchman May 1998, Mr Drew June 1998.

<sup>194</sup> Johnson, *Spending and Saving*, p. 9.

<sup>195</sup> Pensnett Mr KD.

<sup>196</sup> Sedgley Mrs MA.

<sup>197</sup> Tipton Mrs RW.

<sup>198</sup> Pensnett Mrs NP, Mrs DB. The only exception was Mrs JB of Tipton who said that she never used a co-op shop and neither had her mother.

<sup>199</sup> Pensnett Mrs IT; Beck, *Perhaps*, p. 94.

<sup>200</sup> Johnson, *Spending and Saving*, p. 126.

<sup>201</sup> *Dudley Herald*, 12<sup>th</sup> September 1969, p. 14.

Cooperative Store was a “great favourite” with local residents.<sup>202</sup> As Mr Mountford and Mrs Beaman both recalled, “the ‘divi’ was like a savings [club] you got so your slips and at the end you got so much saved on the card”.<sup>203</sup> Mrs Beaman said that she’d “forgotten about the divi. That was lovely that was”.<sup>204</sup> Mrs BJ purchased food at Co-op, using the dividend to augment her savings.<sup>205</sup> In one extreme instance Mrs HW’s wedding in 1963 was financed entirely through previous purchases made at Pensnett and Dudley Coops – “oh yes mother paid for my wedding out of her divi”.<sup>206</sup>

Sedgley and Tipton Co-operative Stores were also both utilised,<sup>207</sup> with dividends eagerly anticipated and saved for appropriate occasions such as Christmas.<sup>208</sup> Mr Rudd’s mother and his wife patronised stores at both Sedgley and Tipton, saving the dividend,<sup>209</sup> as did other respondents.<sup>210</sup> Rev. CH’s mother frequented the Co-op at Ocker Hill, Tipton when she “got herself into trouble” with strap at the corner shop.<sup>211</sup> Mr RB’s mother patronised Co-ops at both Tipton and Dudley; she saved “quite a bit of money”.<sup>212</sup> One mother utilised the dividend on an extremely short-term basis, fetching “little bits from there every day...saved so much [of the dividend] and then got [more] stuff”.<sup>213</sup> This may be explained as the family was comparatively wealthy, with other savings, therefore the fairly small amounts of dividend were considered to be of minimal little importance.

Purchasing items at stores giving trading stamps also combined consumption and small-scale saving, usually for domestic items. Stamps from shops, supermarkets and garages were collected in books and “exchanged for goods...[on] the something-for-

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<sup>202</sup> Pensnett Miss YB, Miss VC, Mr DM, Mrs BW. Mrs BA shopped at the Kingswinford Cooperative, despite living at Pensnett, because she was able to access it during her lunch hour.

<sup>203</sup> Pensnett Mr DM.

<sup>204</sup> Pensnett Mrs JB.

<sup>205</sup> Tipton Mrs BJ.

<sup>206</sup> Pensnett Mrs HW.

<sup>207</sup> Sedgley Mrs MB, Mrs RW; Tipton Mrs MD, Mr TG.

<sup>208</sup> Sedgley Mrs CB.

<sup>209</sup> Sedgley Mr PR.

<sup>210</sup> Tipton Mr PD, Mr BW; Sedgley Mr NS, Mrs CB.

<sup>211</sup> Tipton Rev. CH.

<sup>212</sup> Tipton Mr RB.

<sup>213</sup> Tipton Mrs PB.



nothing principle”.<sup>214</sup> The 1964 Trading Stamp Act regulated their use, stipulating that stamps were redeemable in cash or goods.<sup>215</sup> Mrs Beaman usually patronised shops providing Green Shield Stamps, which she saved up to exchange for china and cookware.<sup>216</sup> Mrs Jones used the stamps from petrol purchased at one garage, collecting drinking glasses, sets of dishes and other kitchen-wares for her daughter’s bottom drawer.<sup>217</sup> Other garages had similar schemes with books of stamps were exchanged for gifts or cash.<sup>218</sup>

An array of other institutions ran short-term savings clubs for their members. For example, the inhabitants of Sedgley, affiliated to the local Conservative, Labour, and Working-Men’s Clubs, saved for Christmas, holidays or outings. Members and their families “paid so much a week and ...had it out at Christmas” or in the annual holiday period. This practice also ensured that members attended (and spent) regularly if they wished to utilise the saving scheme.<sup>219</sup>

Alternative saving schemes were instigated by employers, involving minimal effort on the part of savers as they were extracted from wages at source and invested appropriately. Customarily, many firms and institutions offered employees opportunities of this type, particularly, although not exclusively, the paternally-minded ‘family-run firms’. Members utilised them for long and short-term saving. Beattie’s staff savings scheme worked in conjunction with the Trustee Savings Bank and facilitated regular monthly saving. In the 1960s and 70s, Doris Greathead “used to put some aside. Beatties did. It was their own [savings scheme] from the Trustee Savings Bank they did it for you...it used to go straight out of my wages”.<sup>220</sup> A personnel department employee was regularly sited in the shop’s canteen during the

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<sup>214</sup> May, *Economic and Social*, p. 304. The two types of stamp which were prevalent in the Black Country were Green Shield and Trident.

<sup>215</sup> May, *Economic and Social*.

<sup>216</sup> Pensnett Mrs JB.

<sup>217</sup> Sedgley Mrs PJ telephone conversation 21<sup>st</sup> April 2008. Mrs PJ’s in-laws owned a haulage company and reams of stamps were generated when filling lorries with diesel.

<sup>218</sup> Sedgley Mr TB.

<sup>219</sup> Sedgley Mr GW.

<sup>220</sup> Sedgley Mrs DG. Mrs DG was employed at James Beatties in Wolverhampton when she left school in 1960 until 1969.

lunch hours, providing easy access to a savings system, without the necessity for making a firm monthly commitment.<sup>221</sup>

A similar system operated in John Thompson's, a large-scale, family-run engineering company where staff members were encouraged to join the scheme.<sup>222</sup> Anthony Davies corroborated this, explaining that the company facilitated several savings schemes for blue and white collar employees beyond the 1970s. Employees made savings in a fund in which a proportion of the accrued interest financed Christmas parties for employee's children. Additionally, the company arranged for funds "to be stopped at source from our wages and paid into the TSB", which was popular with "shop floor workers and those in the offices". Thompson's also operated a scheme whereby employees saved for the purchase of Premium Bonds.<sup>223</sup>

Similarly Mr DW, a civil engineer for a railway company, made regular weekly payments into a system which he described as the "railway savings bank". Employees elected to make weekly or monthly payments, which were extracted from their wages and invested.<sup>224</sup> Members of the Police Force were encouraged to take advantage of the police saving scheme, which consisted of Mutual Bonds purchased on a monthly basis "and every 10, 15 or 20 years you'd get hundreds of pounds...you could have as many of these bonds as you liked and it was an unwritten rule that you'd start off with one and buy another [bond] every time you got a pay rise or promoted".<sup>225</sup> Despite state welfare, workers at Bean's, Lee Howl's and other factories continued to save in their companies' sick clubs into the 1970s and beyond.<sup>226</sup>

There were adverse repercussions for savers in one work-sponsored scheme; the incident demonstrated the benefits the schemes *and* the continuation of traditional inter-class antagonism and social control concerning working-class consumption and budgeting. Spencer Wilson, employed as a toolmaker at Sankey's Engineering Company, contributed to the works' savings scheme initiated for tool room members:

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<sup>221</sup> Telephone conversation with Vida Dugmore Jan 2009.

<sup>222</sup> Sedgley Mr PR.

<sup>223</sup> Telephone conversation with Mr Anthony Davies 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2008; Sedgley Mr NS; Mr PR.

<sup>224</sup> Sedgley Mr DW.

<sup>225</sup> Tipton Mr RB.

<sup>226</sup> Joseph Drew June 1999.

“in the 1950s and 60s you used to pay what you could afford...the chap used to come round out of the wages office and you used to take up your money and your card”. Employees usually saved sixpence or a shilling a week, but one employee made regular payments of half a crown. However, in negotiations for the yearly pay-rise the company manager “threw it against us. He said well you’ve come up here for a rise...but it has come to my knowledge that people are putting half a crown a week into the holiday savings club. Now if you can afford to put half a crown a week you don’t need a rise...” He concluded “so you shot yourself in the foot really”.<sup>227</sup>

As in the past, some individuals preferred to make short-term savings independently, a number of respondents continued to save for specific purchases at home, into the 1970s.<sup>228</sup> Miss Bennett’s mother, despite savings in bank and post office accounts, always retained a few hundred pounds in cash at home “in case she needed to go out and buy something in a hurry”; this practice continued until her death in 2005.<sup>229</sup> Dave Nixon recalled his mother saving for her household bills and consumer durables in a variety of tins and purses. Neither parent possessed a bank account until 1973 when his father left engineering for employment as a chauffer.<sup>230</sup> Mr RB’s father “used to have a metal box with a big hasp on it” containing his personal papers and large amounts of cash. The box, which was referred to as Fort Knox, was under the bed, its contents remaining secret until his Father’s death; Mr RB recalled that “every time he [his father] got paid he’d go upstairs and shut the bedroom door”, in order to preserve his privacy and discourage inquisitive tendencies amongst his family.<sup>231</sup>

Undoubtedly the practice of short-term saving for specific items continued throughout the period,<sup>232</sup> with respondents saving for consumer durables and white goods in preference to purchasing on credit arrangements.<sup>233</sup> As Miss Plant explained “we

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<sup>227</sup> Sedgley Mr SW.

<sup>228</sup> Badger, ‘Consumption’. A number of her respondents saved at home, including Mrs Chater who saved three-penny pieces in a jam jar in order to purchase a washing machine without resorting to credit. p. 31.

<sup>229</sup> Pensnett Miss YB.

<sup>230</sup> Tipton Mr DN.

<sup>231</sup> Tipton Mr RB.

<sup>232</sup> Klein, *Working-Class Cultures*, p. 197; Johnson, *Spending and Saving*, p. 99.

<sup>233</sup> Pensnett Mrs BA; Tipton Mrs JL, Mr RB.

used to save for our holidays and things like that but really it was mostly a case of saving up and spending, saving up and spending”.<sup>234</sup>

### **Gender and Saving**

Some interesting anomalies concerning gender and saving were revealed during the interviews. All the female respondents, except Rev. CH,<sup>235</sup> commenced regular long-term saving as soon as possible, usually for some indeterminate ‘future’ event or financial security - “just so we’d got something behind us”.<sup>236</sup> When discussing commencing employment, one respondent recollected “I think I used to save a fair bit”.<sup>237</sup> Others, like Mrs HW also saved - “I’ve always had an account in my name...I don’t spend it. What’s mine is me (sic) own”. She wasn’t “saving for anything in particular, just the future”.<sup>238</sup> Mrs Roberts managed to save £100 when she married in 1951.<sup>239</sup> It appears a peculiarly feminine trait to describe the amount of savings as ‘small’ or ‘little’, or to say “we put a little bit away”.<sup>240</sup> As Joyce Beaman indicated she “always tried to save a little bit. Before we got married, I had a little Post Office account and I kept that afterwards. It was my little bit of cash”.<sup>241</sup> The sole exception was Rev. CH, whose financial situation during the early years of marriage was “always in a mess. I used to have to borrow...we were always broke...we were very irresponsible really”.<sup>242</sup>

However, there are some inconsistencies in masculine attitudes to saving, or at least in their recollections of accumulating capital. A significant number of men claimed that they did not save until they were engaged, indicating that saving was instigated by wives and girlfriends.<sup>243</sup> Mr Southall “never saved...I was more concerned with enjoying myself”.<sup>244</sup> Bill Jones “only saved in the forces” whilst he was courting, spending it all when his girlfriend ended their liaison – “then we split up and I drew it out and blew it”. They subsequently resumed their relationship and he recommenced

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<sup>234</sup> Pensnett Miss NP.

<sup>235</sup> Tipton Rev. CH.

<sup>236</sup> Sedgley Mrs PJ.

<sup>237</sup> Tipton Mrs PB. When she left work in 1972 she had saved £1,000.

<sup>238</sup> Pensnett Mrs HW.

<sup>239</sup> Sedgley Mrs DR1.

<sup>240</sup> Sedgley Mrs MA; Sedgley Mrs MB.

<sup>241</sup> Pensnett Mrs JB.

<sup>242</sup> Tipton Rev. CH.

<sup>243</sup> Sedgley Mr NS; Pensnett Mr SG; Tipton TG.

<sup>244</sup> Sedgley Mr NS.

saving in order to marry.<sup>245</sup> Similarly, Mr Rudd saved “later in life” when he married and wanted to purchase a house.<sup>246</sup> When questioned regarding saving for their marriage Mr RA gave a categorical “no”. His wife stated, “well we had enough for a [mortgage] deposit”, to which Mr RA retorted “oh we had enough for a deposit but that wasn’t a priority”.<sup>247</sup> Most of the male respondents embarked upon significant and long-term saving only when marriage was imminent and under varying degrees of compulsion. Only Ted Gulliver admitted that he had *never* saved. Although his wife “saved for the two of we (sic) really. She’d do the saving...she gives me so much a week and saves the rest (of his income)”.<sup>248</sup>

Despite refutations of saving, a number of men actually saved regularly. However, this practice usually involved accumulating funds for specific ends, often the purchase of motorbikes or cars, which was potentially a source of inter-gender friction. Stan Greenaway disappointed and dismayed his future wife when he spent his savings on a car in 1952 – “ I always remember joining the post office and saving me (sic) first hundred pounds ‘cos it was a lot of money then and her [his girlfriend] said ‘you’ll be able to go all the way now’ [with further saving], and as soon as I had £100 a car come (sic) come on view. And this old car, the first car I bought I think it was, around £90. I said that’ll last for years”.<sup>249</sup>

In his “wild youth” Norman Raybould “had a motorbike [which] I had to save for”.<sup>250</sup> Mr Evans, who had already differentiated between short and long-term saving (above), saved for his first car in 1964 when he was 17. “I didn’t want a second-hand one so I saved up for a new one...I don’t think anyone saved in advance for a mortgage”.<sup>251</sup> Rev. CH described the extreme poverty of her childhood, but recalled her father saving for a car in the 1950s, at a time when the family “very often ran out of money on a Thursday”.<sup>252</sup> Newly wed Mr MJ spent his savings on a Mini car in

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<sup>245</sup> Pensnett Mr BJ.

<sup>246</sup> Sedgley Mr PR.

<sup>247</sup> Pensnett Mr RA, Mrs BA.

<sup>248</sup> Tipton Mr TG.

<sup>249</sup> Pensnett Mr SG.

<sup>250</sup> Pensnett Mr NR.

<sup>251</sup> Pensnett Mr RE.

<sup>252</sup> Tipton Rev. CH.

1961, despite his wife objecting to the expenditure when they were living in rented accommodation.<sup>253</sup>

Exceptionally, for Mr SB saving for a car, or any other specific item, was unnecessary as “I’d pretty well got everything I wanted. It was just spare money that I had for the future, long term...Me dad had a good stash so he did save [but] he used to save at home.”<sup>254</sup> In comparison with the views and experiences of other respondents his attitude and behaviour was exceptional. Nevertheless, once imbued with habitual saving male respondents were fervent advocates of the practice.

Although some gender differences in attitudes to saving are displayed, the oral evidence suggests that savings habits changed very slowly between 1945 and 1970. Despite their undoubted support for government sponsored savings schemes, during the period of escalating affluence, the inhabitants of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton continued to utilise a wide range of traditional methods of saving. This took the form of the Cooperative Society, clubs, diddlums and life insurance, in addition to those proffered by the formal financial institutions. There is no clear evidence to confirm Johnson’s assertion of a distinction between lower-middle and working-class savings patterns.<sup>255</sup> Respondents from lower-middle and working-class households displayed similar savings goals, making short-term savings, accumulated for specific ends, and long term savings to provide for future contingencies.

### **Parental Guidance and Saving**

Cohen argued that the critical impact of post-war change and increasing affluence was the initiation of inter-generational conflict, leading to rebellion and resistance against traditional values.<sup>256</sup> However, oral testimony indicates that parental guidance and preferences continued to play a major role in the shaping of the respondents’ attitudes to financial matters, particularly with regards to saving and investment. This evidence supports Abrams’ assertion that the newly-married were heavily dependent upon parental support. He found that in the 1950s “newly-married working class girls [turned] to their mothers for standards and guidance”, which explained the

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<sup>253</sup> Tipton Mr MJ. See chapter seven for details of this argument.

<sup>254</sup> Pensnett Mr SB.

<sup>255</sup> Johnson, *Spending and Saving*, p. 99, p. 116.

<sup>256</sup> Cohen, ‘Sub-Cultural Conflict’, p. 92.

conservatism of the consumer market.<sup>257</sup> The oral evidence corroborated that parental values remained important throughout the period, as most respondents reflected the practices and customs of the previous generation with reference to financial affairs - using clichés, mottoes and homilies with regard to economic and monetary concerns. Explaining that she and her husband were habitual savers, which had been instilled into them from childhood, Mrs Wise said that “my mother’s motto is £1 of your own is always worth £2 of someone else’s (sic)”.<sup>258</sup> Saving was a concept inculcated into another respondent who recalled her “mother saying your bit of money is your best friend”.<sup>259</sup> Mr DW and Mrs IW claimed they saved, never going into debt because “Dad said what you can’t afford you don’t have”.<sup>260</sup> “My dad used to say...if we hadn’t saved the money we didn’t have it”.<sup>261</sup> Mr RB’s “dad used to have a saying. Unless you can pay cash, unless you can afford it. Don’t have it”.<sup>262</sup> Once again this testifies to the inextricable links between saving and consumption in the psyche of the working and lower-middle classes.

In Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton most respondents, of lower-middle and working-class backgrounds, had been inculcated into the habit of regular saving by one or both of their parents. Marion Allen explained that “Yes dad always saved and I saved in the Tipton Building Society - Five shillings a week”.<sup>263</sup> Similarly, Mrs Detheridge’s saving was inspired by her father who “never missed a Saturday but what he took some of his wages and put it in the building society”.<sup>264</sup> Mrs JB habitually followed her mother’s example – “well she saved up...she would save up until she’d got the money and then she’d go and buy”.<sup>265</sup> Her father-in-law was also a “big believer in saving” encouraging his son to do the same.<sup>266</sup> Having purchased National Savings certificates for his children, one father also “made me put half a crown in a building society every week...well he did it for me. I think it was security wasn’t it?”<sup>267</sup> Mr Burgin’s grandparents opened savings accounts for him, but he felt that the family’s

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<sup>257</sup> Abrams, *Teenage Consumer*, p. 22.

<sup>258</sup> Pensnett Mrs HW.

<sup>259</sup> Sedgley Mrs DG.

<sup>260</sup> Sedgley Mr DW, Mrs IW.

<sup>261</sup> Tipton/ Sedgley Mrs LJ.

<sup>262</sup> Tipton Mr RB; Sedgley Mr NS.

<sup>263</sup> Sedgley Mrs MA.

<sup>264</sup> Pensnett Mrs BD.

<sup>265</sup> Tipton Mrs JB.

<sup>266</sup> Tipton Mrs JB.

<sup>267</sup> Tipton Mr DA.

attitude to saving was excessive and in some ways detrimental to their lives. Yet he appeared, almost reluctantly, to replicate their savings habits. His parents had always been “very big on savings, very big on the future...not so good on enjoying the present”. He added that, “I still haven’t grown out of it [saving] yet...I’d like to” and when questioned on his motives for saving he replied ironically “just because it’s good to save”.<sup>268</sup> Mr Genge’s parents fostered habitual saving which he passed on to his offspring – “They encouraged us...and I gave my children an account...I must have inherited that I think.” He explained that his parent’s experiences of the 1930s had affected their attitudes. “It was a thing that they had to do, put money in the account. To them it was most important seeing what they’d gone through”.<sup>269</sup>

The inculcation of parental fiscal values came in a variety of guises - including coercion and cajolery - but respondents were *expected* to save. Miss Bennett, one of the few respondents not obliged to pay board, remarked “I had all mine [wages]. But I had to save it. It was stipulated that I had to save everything - except - and I can’t remember how much it was but it wasn’t a lot. *Everything had to be saved except my pocket money.*”<sup>270</sup> When questioned concerning parental checks on her saving, Miss Bennett responded with “no she trusted me, (laughter) but she knew where I kept my handbag (laughter)”. When she left school in 1954, Val Cartwright’s wages were given to mother and “she gave me some back. But out of what she gave me back I had to have an (sic) half a crown savings stamp every week – in the book *and if I didn’t have that woe betide*”.<sup>271</sup> Other respondents “always” saved as that “was the way we were brought up”,<sup>272</sup> “to put a little bit by”.<sup>273</sup> Although his parents had very little money, Frank Green saved “because I wanted things and I knew I wasn’t going to get them [otherwise]...the saving carried on habitually”.<sup>274</sup>

## Conclusion

Saving for both specific items and the future appears to have been equated with respectability and status and was inextricably linked to methods of purchasing and

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<sup>268</sup> Sedgley Mr TB.

<sup>269</sup> Sedgley Mr TG.

<sup>270</sup> Pensnett Mr RW.

<sup>271</sup> Pensnett Miss VC.

<sup>272</sup> Pensnett Mr SG, Mrs PG.

<sup>273</sup> Sedgley Mrs CB.

<sup>274</sup> Sedgley Mr FG.



consumption i.e. to wait and save for items demonstrated a certain responsibility, discipline, and prudence, whereas the instant gratification of purchasing by credit did not. As Mrs Woolley, born in 1943, explained, “We just saved and if we wanted anything it was there...we just had so much in the bank and if we wanted anything it was never on the strap”.<sup>275</sup> Parents opened accounts encouraging children to “saving for savings sake. Again come back to this rainy day. You never know”.<sup>276</sup> Savings were an important means of acquiring goods such as cars, washing machines and furniture, which conferred status upon both the individual and the family, as well as providing a buffer against dire predictions of possible misfortune. They were also important as they demonstrated restraint and foresight; an ability to provide a measure of security against misfortune and a means of funding future plans.

Oral testimony confirmed McKibbin’s view that the weekly collection – “the habit by which people paid into ‘savings clubs’ fixed sums weekly for a specific, usually short-term purpose” remained unchanged.<sup>277</sup> Evidently the inhabitants of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton continued to utilise traditional methods of saving into the 1970s and beyond. Many of the schemes remained locally-based and centred upon the immediate community, as they had for previous generations of savers. Clubs and savings schemes were organised within public houses, churches and chapels, workplaces and corner shops, as well as by individuals in specific streets and neighbourhoods. The reasons for participation in these savings schemes varied, convenience, custom and mutuality appear to have been the primary motives. Short-term, small-scale saving allowed the participants the means to finance holidays, festivals, purchase new clothing and leisure goods. One elderly lady organised outings for her friends and neighbours which they paid for via a savings scheme. “One old lady in the street used to get a trip up. Her’d (sic) say we’re going to Trentham Gardens... and she’d come round every week and if you’d got sixpence spare you could save with her”.<sup>278</sup> In one particularly memorable year the inhabitants of one street in the ‘Lost City’ in Tipton saved for a day-excursion to the scene of a

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<sup>275</sup> Pensnett Mrs BW.

<sup>276</sup> Tipton Mr BW.

<sup>277</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 178.

<sup>278</sup> Mrs Lakin December 1998.

murder when a “trip to 10 Rillington Place was organised” and saved for with much excitement.<sup>279</sup>

Johnson’s differentiation between working and lower-middle-class savings patterns does not precisely apply to the respondents in the three localities. It is too simplistic to believe that whereas middle-class savings are comprised of the “accumulation of unspent residue,”<sup>280</sup> working-class savings are made with “some specific expenditure in mind”.<sup>281</sup> The interviews suggest that whilst, regardless of occupation or income, respondents made short-term savings for specified items, the vast majority were in the habit of saving their residual income for unspecified future needs, or as a means of long-term security. Gender specific attitudes to saving and methods of cash accumulation were still in evidence throughout the period and parental influence and family custom remained of great import.

Although the older generation had viewed formal saving institutions with some suspicion, by the early 1960s an increasing number of the respondents possessed banks or building society accounts. The shift was extremely gradual and dependent, to some extent, upon the method of wage-payment – remuneration received in the form of cheque necessitated modification of traditional attitudes.

During the period between 1945 and c1970 respondents in all three areas revealed that increased affluence, social mobility and access to cheque book accounts were almost imperceptibly affecting attitudes to saving. However, traditional methods of saving remained extremely important. Individuals remained loyal to the customs and rituals of their families and localities, which were fostered by familiarity with the shopkeepers, agents and members of the local community who promoted or merchandised the various schemes and clubs. In Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton, parental influence and opinions remained an important factor in attitudes to saving as well as consumption. The inextricable relationship between consumption, saving and investment, which Benson highlighted,<sup>282</sup> survived virtually undiminished throughout the post-war period and into the 1970s, with complex systems of loyalty, custom and

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<sup>279</sup> Betty Tolley June 1999.

<sup>280</sup> Johnson, *Spending and Saving*, p. 99.

<sup>281</sup> Johnson, *Spending and Saving*, p. 116.

<sup>282</sup> Benson, ‘Working-Class Consumption’.

mutuality continuing to influence financial and economic choices. The interviews failed to reveal discernable differences in lower middle and working-class attitudes to saving, but endorsed the arguments of Taylor and O'Connell that much of the saving, credit and consumption of the post-war period continued to rely upon the social nature of communities, not "bureaucratic and depersonalized" financial systems.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> O'Connell, *Credit and Community*, p. 26; Taylor, *Working Class Credit*.

## CONCLUSION

For the majority of the British population, the impact of post-war economic, social and political developments is undeniable. The benefits of full employment, rising wage-levels and conspicuous consumption, underpinned by a system of state welfare designed to provide income security 'from the cradle to the grave' changed many aspects of society between 1945 and the early 1970s. The dominant historiography of the period suggests that the unprecedented prosperity of an affluent society transformed living standards, aspirations and morals.<sup>1</sup> Improvements in material circumstances were discernable in most communities, as reconstruction transformed the social and domestic environment and economic growth facilitated working-class security and mobility. The oral testimony of the inhabitants of Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton endorsed these views, as their access to new housing, amenities and consumer durables escalated during the period. Nevertheless, it is important not to exaggerate the rate and impact of such changes. This study of the Black Country has shown that a number of historians have overplayed the notion that social transformation was dramatic and all encompassing.

Despite the undeniable benefits of increasing affluence and security, the behavioural patterns and social mores of the respondents demonstrated a clear continuity with those of previous generations. Although post-war prosperity impacted upon the material conditions of the inhabitants of the three localities, their continued adherence to the customs and practices of the inter-war era was evident. Attitudes to the generation of income, to spending and consumption, and to saving were modified at a much slower rate than was previously indicated.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rosen, *The Transformation*; Cannadine, D., *Class in Britain*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998, p. 145; Benson, *Affluence and Authority*, p. 3; Hoggart, *Literacy*, p. 14; Bourke, *Working-Class*, p. 8; Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, p. 255; Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 1; Laing, S., *Representations of Working-Class Life, 1957-64*, Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1986, p. 3; Royle, *Modern Britain*, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> Rosen, *The Transformation*; Davis, *History of Shopping*; Fyvel, *Insecure Offenders*; Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*; Osgerby, 'Well it's Saturday Night'; Marwick, *British Society*; Obelkevich and Catterall, *Understanding*; Chinn, *They Worked*; Hopkins, *The Rise and Decline*; Green, *All Dressed Up*.

Undoubtedly respondents recognised and appreciated the environmental developments, as slums were cleared and houses reconstructed. As far as their financial circumstances permitted, they aspired to new homes and accoutrements of the consumer society, expending their labour and income in the acquisition of these items. The Black Country generally was indeed the beneficiary of significant economic advances and this is reflected in Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton, endorsing Moorhouse's claims that, in the 1960s, "man for man there is no wealthier area in England, no place more economically stable".<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the testimony revealed a marked reluctance to relinquish the traditional methods for the alleviation of hardship, as memories of pre-war poverty and fear of its return were perpetuated by the culture of their locality.

The thesis has demonstrated that the environmental changes wrought by post-war planners had little effect upon social and cultural trends. Neighbourhood cohesion, community spirit, ties of family and kin were maintained regardless of the physical transformation of individual localities. The nineteenth century concepts of respectability, reciprocity and self-reliance retained their importance as indicators of status for individuals, families and communities. The respondents' testimony has refuted the claims of Coates and Silburn, Seabrook, Hoggart and others that affluence necessarily impacted adversely upon traditional communities and cultures.<sup>4</sup> The major change wrought upon these neighbourhoods was the financial implications of relocation to new homes, which necessitated additional expenditure. This resulted in lifestyle changes necessary to encompass excessive hours of overtime and the increasing numbers of married women remaining in, or returning to, paid employment.

Reciprocity and kinship networks remained important on new housing estates, refuting earlier claims of the disintegration of neighbourhood solidarities.<sup>5</sup> State welfare provision retained its former stigma and in many cases was rejected in favour of the customary habits of self-help and mutual aid. The old defensive mechanisms of family and neighbourhood continued to function into the 1970s, with matriarchs

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<sup>3</sup> Moorhouse, *Britain*, p. 106.

<sup>4</sup> Coates and Silburn, *Poverty*; Seabrook, *Landscapes*; Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*; Benson, *Working Class*.

<sup>5</sup> Klein, *Samples*; Lewis, *Women in England*; Benson, *The Working Class*.

regulating social mores, on behalf of the community, and providing support in difficult times.

Formal full-time work was considered to be obligatory for the majority of people, inseparable from notions of self-respect and status. This was particularly important for men who were judged upon their capabilities as providers. Regardless of the plethora of employment opportunities within the Black Country, and wages above the national average, perceptions of the family as an economic unit continued. Men's wages were supplemented by the income of their wives and, increasing affluence notwithstanding, teenagers' earnings continued to make a significant contribution to the family economy. Despite careers advice and employment exchanges, parental influence was a major factor in career decisions and, as in the past, work was secured through the recommendations of friends and family. One of the most striking revelations of the oral testimony is the surprising number of adolescents relinquishing their earnings to their mothers. The vast majority of respondents recalled feeling a moral obligation to contribute and an awareness of continuing parental expectations that they would comply. This relationship between youths and parents provides a critique of the claim made by some historians of rising teenage financial autonomy in the post-war period.<sup>6</sup>

Assumptions that post-war affluence and state welfare negated the necessity for the informal employment strategies of previous generations are unfounded. The informal economy of the early twentieth century, identified by Benson and Roberts, continued unabated into the 1970s.<sup>7</sup> A wide range of penny-capitalist enterprises, supplementary work and illegal activities were used, by men, women and children, regardless of occupation or income, to augment formal wages. The reasons for the continuation are not clear-cut, although they were less likely to be motivated by primary poverty. However, the evidence suggests that the economic problems of the inter-war years and war-time deprivation underpinned a continuing fear of poverty, which was slow to dissipate. Inevitably, the post-war consumer society generated aspirations to the acquisition of a wide range of goods and services, which

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<sup>6</sup> Abrams, *The Teenage Consumer*; Fowler, *The First Teenagers*; Kynaston, *Family Britain*; Benson, *Affluence and Authority*; Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives*.

<sup>7</sup> Benson, *The Penny Capitalists*; Roberts, 'Working-Class Standards'.

necessitated additional income. There were no discernable differences between lower-middle and working-class ambitions to supplement formal wages, nor the methods which they utilised. Blue and white-collar employees were equally likely to indulge in ‘moon-lighting’, penny-capitalism and illegal activities, which were justified by the need to “make a few extra bob”.<sup>8</sup> From 1945 into the 1970s the circumvention of government restrictions and petty crime were perpetuated by the attitudes and beliefs of traditional close-knit communities and perceptions of ‘us’ and ‘them’. Consequently, the evasion of the authority of both government and employers was tolerated and condoned by the majority of respondents, who viewed minor infringements of the law as a feature of “British industrial life whatever the...economic circumstances”.<sup>9</sup> Attitudes to the state welfare system were slow to change and the recipients of benefits were likely to be stigmatised, unless they were ill or elderly. Therefore, additional employment or recourse to the grey economy was deemed preferable to a loss of respectability engendered by the acceptance of state aid.

Rising levels of affluence had minimal impact upon the traditional gender division of economic responsibilities. The primary duty of lower-middle and working-class husbands and fathers remained the acquisition of sufficient income for the family’s material well-being and the wife was responsible for its efficient disposal. Although increasing numbers of married women undertook paid employment, much ambiguity in women’s attitude to work was revealed. During this period their employment opportunities remained poorly paid and gender restricted. Women’s working hours reflected their domestic responsibilities and male respondents were apt to dismiss their wives’ earnings. This situation was again indicative of the continuities with the inter-war period.

The evidence of this thesis suggests that the erosion of women’s responsibility was protracted over a longer period than that indicated by Roberts.<sup>10</sup> In Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton women’s management of the family budget and her ability to ‘make ends meet’ retained importance into the 1960s, despite signs of generational change.

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<sup>8</sup> Mr Drew, Mr Churchman, Mr Brimble, Mrs Lakin; Pensnett, Mr BJ; Sedgley Mr SW; Tipton Mrs BT, Mr RB, Mr MJ.

<sup>9</sup> Smithies, *The Black Economy*, p. 113.

<sup>10</sup> Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 11; Roberts, ‘Women, the Family Economy’, p. 16.

Although couples marrying in the late 1950s and early sixties were more likely to discuss financial decisions, the sum allocated to household expenses was fixed and women were expected to budget accordingly. The allocation of funds and the timing of bill payments were within her jurisdiction, confirming Vincent's claims that women's managerial skills retained importance.<sup>11</sup>

The advent of supermarkets had minimal impact upon habitual food consumption. Regardless of age, respondents continued to purchase food on a virtually daily basis and patronised traditional stores within their locality, refuting Davis's suggestions that food shopping was revolutionised by the 1960s.<sup>12</sup> As Benson asserted, food shopping, meal planning and the purchase of small household goods remained the responsibility of women.<sup>13</sup> Their motivations for this behaviour were the accessibility and familiarity of corner shops, combined with an enduring loyalty and flexibility of payment, should the need arise. Fashion boutiques and chain stores were visited sparingly, as most purchases were financed as in the past. Teenagers and young married couples, as well as their parents, habitually utilised Provident checks, club cards and mail order to buy personal items and clothing. These traditional consumption patterns were influenced by close customer-agent relationships, familial conventions and allegiance to the community, and were not necessarily perceived as debt.

New systems of credit arrangements, in the form of hire purchase and credit cards, were treated with suspicion, and only gradually adopted, as they were initially equated with a loss of respectability and late-Victorian values. Major debt was only deemed permissible in the form of a mortgage; even so the respondents expressed a determination to repay the debt as soon as possible, undertaking additional jobs or working overtime to fulfil this obligation. These views were a reflection of parental opinion and prevailing social mores.

The oral evidence endorses the claims of Offer, Benson and James that previously unattainable luxuries became accessible to increasing numbers of lower-middle and

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<sup>11</sup> Vincent, *Poor Citizens*, p. 186.

<sup>12</sup> Davis, *Shopping*, p. 92.

<sup>13</sup> Benson, *The Rise of Consumer*, pp. 68-76.



working-class families.<sup>14</sup> As these groups became important centres of consumption, the acquisition of consumer durables became more important. However, a minority of families were unable to afford such luxuries until the mid 1960s. In large families or when the main breadwinner suffered ill-health, poverty precluded the purchase of such items. As Mr KD recalled, “we were poor, very poor” because father “was a general labourer [who]...was always ill from the day I remember...and he died when he was 53”.<sup>15</sup> Mrs Tolley recollected that “dad was ill a lot, and very often he couldn’t work, and I know that money was extremely tight all the time”- “it was a really hard life” for mother.<sup>16</sup> Such families suffered from severe economic difficulties, unable to fulfil basic financial commitments, but resolutely eschewed state aid.

Nevertheless, for the majority of respondents, the definition of poverty and affluence was transformed between 1950 and the 1970s. Bench-marks of affluence were televisions, electrical equipment, cars and holidays and, conversely, the inability to acquire these items denoted poverty. Family status was enhanced by ownership of material possessions, demonstrating their respectability, thrift and ability to save. In the post-war period the lack of a television set, in particular, was a clear indicator of deprivation, forcing all but the poorest families to conform despite financial difficulties.

Car ownership was a further indicator of material success, especially in the perceptions of male respondents. Regardless of class, income, occupation or age, with the exception of Mr Gulliver, the skill of driving and possession of a vehicle was a priority, as it conferred prestige and status. Although less important to female respondents, cars were a visible demonstration of affluence within the community and a source of masculine pride and rivalry. Similarly, the ability to afford annual holidays indicated affluence and a clear change in post-war consumption priorities. The oral evidence refutes Walton’s views that foreign travel remained the province of the middle-class.<sup>17</sup> By the early 1950s a striking number of working-class

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<sup>14</sup> Offer, ‘British Manual Workers’, p. 5; James, *The Middle Class*, p. 434; Benson, *Affluence*, p. 32.

<sup>15</sup> Pensnett Mr KD.

<sup>16</sup> Tipton Mrs BT.

<sup>17</sup> Walton, *The British Seaside*, p. 64.

respondents regularly holidayed abroad, particularly young married couples and teenagers.

The dramatic changes in the lifestyles and spending habits of adolescents were confirmed, despite the high numbers of teenagers who contributed to the family economy. However, the experiences of the respondents counter Abrams assertions that the teenage spending boom was largely confined to the working class.<sup>18</sup> Middle-class adolescents in full-time education also defined their allegiances and adherence to specific youth groups through consumption, taking part-time and evening jobs to finance their purchases. The absence of “real” rebellion amongst teenagers from all three areas demonstrated a lack of inter-generational conflict, which in Cohen’s opinion resulted from slum clearance and relocation.<sup>19</sup> Clearly, re-housing in Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton did not cause the disintegration of family or the fragmentation of the notion of “community” in these areas.

In times of prosperity savings patterns demonstrated much continuity with pre-war habits, although there was some, albeit gradual, change. There were no discernable differences between the savings habits of lower-middle and working-class respondents, despite Johnson’s claims to the contrary.<sup>20</sup> Respondents acknowledged the necessity to save as a buffer against future financial difficulties and used a combination of long and short-term savings measures to combat potential problems. Regardless of income or occupation they continued the custom of long-term saving for indeterminate future needs. Individuals and families utilised National Savings Schemes through patriotism and pressure from within the neighbourhood and the work-place and saved with other financial institutions, as cash wages were replaced by cheques during the 1960s.

The informal savings methods of previous generations retained their importance in the post-war period. A number of respondents recollected that their parents held an innate mistrust of formal saving and kept their money at home throughout the period. Despite state welfare, respondents continued to use traditional insurance policies to

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<sup>18</sup> Abrams, *Teenage Consumer*, p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> Cohen, ‘Sub-cultural Conflict’.

<sup>20</sup> Johnson, *Spending and Saving*, p. 116.

cover contingencies from unemployment or ill-health.<sup>21</sup> Pubs, clubs, chapels and churches, in Pensnett, Sedgley and Tipton, continued to operate a system of draw clubs and diddlums, which were used by the respondents and their families into the 1970s and beyond. Custom, convenience and mutuality were their primary motives for this short-term, small-scale saving for unspecified ends, which ran in conjunction with long-term saving for future security. The oral testimony confirmed the inextricable links between methods of consumption and saving, which were highlighted by Benson,<sup>22</sup> survived into the 1970s, sustained by community cohesion, mutuality and custom.

In matters of saving, as in all other areas of life, respondents continued to be influenced by parental expectations and customary social mores. As Johnson indicated: “despite high incomes...habits developed over many years...[are] not quickly changed”.<sup>23</sup> Class differentials were challenged by the rising wages of manual workers, new housing, employment opportunities, education and the aspirations of a consumer society, but it is important not to exaggerate the rate of change. The oral testimony confirmed that many traditional behavioural patterns and cultural norms continued into the period of affluence. A contemporary observer of the Black Country in the post-war period would no doubt have echoed Hoggart’s claim that “old habits persist”.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See Rich, ‘Social Relations’, p. 50.

<sup>22</sup> Benson, ‘Working-Class Consumption’.

<sup>23</sup> Johnson, *Spending and Saving*, p. 215.

<sup>24</sup> Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, p. 40.

## *Appendices*

### **Appendix I**

#### **Biographical Details of Respondents**

Party Interviews indicated by \*

##### **Pensnett:**

**Mrs BA \***    b. 1940            m. 1964            2 children  
Occupation: 'head girl' (office manager)    Father: welder            Mother: housewife

**Mr RA\***        b. 1937            m. 1964 to Mrs BA    2 children  
Occupation: draughtsman, made redundant in 1970s and opened a newsagent's shop  
Father: works manager at Gibbons (Lenches Bridge)            Mother: housewife

**Mrs JB**        b. 1935            m. 1957            3 children 1962, 1965, 1972  
Occupation: secretary            Husband: manager at Round Oak Steelworks  
Father: skilled worker at Austin Rover            Mother: bucket factory worker > teashop manager

**Mrs DB\***        b. 1922            m. 1953            no children  
Occupation: welder > canteen assistant > driller at Vono > caretaker    Husband: factory work  
Father: scaffolder            Mother: housewife            Sister to Miss NP

**Miss YB\* (OBE)**    b. 1937            unmarried            no children  
Occupation: personal assistant/office manager Inland Revenue – awarded OBE for youth work    Father: brick burner    Mother: housewife and school cook due to husband's ill-health

**Mr SB**      b.1960      m. 1986      2 children  
Occupation: self-employed auto technician      Wife: care assistant  
Father: miner at Round Oak Steelworks      Mother: housewife

**Miss VC\***    b. 1939      unmarried      no children  
Occupation: packer at Gill and Weavers>packer at Burton's Biscuits  
Father: unskilled worker for Earl of Dudley>Round Oak Steelworks      Mother:  
housewife

**Mr KD**      b. 1949      m. 1970      2 children 1970, 1975  
Occupation: electronic technician> lecturer at F.E. college      Wife: care assistant  
Father: general labourer      Mother: housewife>wide variety of part-time work due  
to husband's ill-health

**Mrs BD**      b. 1928      m. 1954      2 children 1959, 1966  
Occupation: teacher      Husband: building contracts manager      Father: fitter  
Mother: housewife

**Mr RE**      b. 1947      m. 1979      no children  
Occupation: maintenance electrician> electrical instructor      Wife: clerk  
Father: foreman      Mother: housewife>part-time worker in sister's shop

**Mr BJ**      b. 1938      m. 1964      no children  
Occupation: personnel manager      Wife: invoice clerk      Father: motorman at  
Round Oak Steelworks      Mother: housewife

**Mrs PG\***    b.1939      m. 1959      2 children 1962, 1965  
Occupation: office worker>housewife      Husband: engineer      Father: insurance  
agent      Mother: packer in factory

**Mr SG\***      b. 1929      m.1959 to Mrs PG      2 children  
Occupation: engineer      Wife: above      Father: engineer      Mother:  
housewife

**Mr DM\*** b. 1948 unmarried no children

Occupation: retail trade Father: toolmaker Mother: tailor

**Miss NP\*** b. 1936 unmarried no children

Occupation tailoring>clerical>deckchair assembly Father: scaffolder Mother:  
housewife Sister to Mrs DB

**Mr NR\*** b. 1942 m. 1964 no children

Occupation: toolmaker Wife: housewife Father: miner Mother:  
housewife Cousin to Mrs BW

**Mr BT\*** b. 1928 m. 1962 1 child 1964

Occupation: various skilled manual work> shopkeeper (general store) Wife:  
clerical Father: bacon curer at Marsh and Baxter  
Mother: housewife Married to Mrs IT

**Mrs IT\*** b. 1930 married to Mr BT 1 child

Occupation: clerical work> shop keeper Father: brick maker at Gibbons  
Brothers Mother: housewife>retail assistant due to husband's ill-health

**Mrs HW** b. 1940 m. 1963 3 children 1965, 1969, 1975

Occupation: packer in factory> clerical/administration work Husband:  
electrical engineer at Patent Shaft Father: turncock for South Staffs Water Board  
Mother: housewife>canteen worker.

Born in **Tipton** and moved to **Pensnett** in 1948.

**Mrs BW\*** b. 1943 m. 1965 2 children 1966, 1972

Occupation: curtain maker/carpet fitter Husband:  
Father: Round Oak Steelworker Mother: housewife Cousin to Mr NR  
**Sedgley**

**Mrs CB** b. 1944 m. 1964 2 children 1965, 1968

Occupation: shorthand typist>part-time insurance agent Husband: engineer  
Father: bricklayer Mother: housewife> part-time casual work

**Mrs MB**      b. 1930      m. 1952      2 children 1954, 1958  
Occupation: teacher      Husband: printer>company director  
Father: miner at Baggeridge Colliery      Mother: housewife

**Mr TB**      b. 1956      unmarried      no children  
Occupation: specialist academic support tutor      Father: stock controller GKN  
(has PhD in Mathematics)      Mother: teacher

**Mr MC**      b. 1936      m. 1960      3 children 1962, 1963, 1964  
Occupation: metallurgist      Wife: librarian>teacher  
Father: electrical fitter      Mother: housewife  
Mr MC was born in **Oxley** and moved to **Sedgley**

**Mr DG**      b. 1945      m. 1970      2 children 1974, 1975  
Occupation: proprietor of electrical goods and music stores      Wife: retailer  
Father: scrap metal merchant (long-standing family business)  
Mother: housewife  
Mr DG was born in **Tipton** and the family moved to **Sedgley** in the 1950s

**Mr TG**      b. 1931      m. 1956      3 children 1958, 1961, 1963  
Occupation: draughtsman>retrained as teacher 1950s>local historian  
Wife: wages clerk>retrained as teacher 1960s      Father: construction supervisor  
John Thompson's      Mother: housewife

**Mrs DG**      b. 1945      m. 1965      2 children 1966, 1969  
Occupation: cashier James Beattie      Husband: draughtsman  
Father: bench fitter Villiers Motorbikes      Mother: retrained as a teacher 1960s  
(when children were adult)

**Mr FG**      b. 1952      m. 1972      3 children 1972, 1977, 1986 (divorced  
1985 remarried 1986)  
Occupation: technician> businessman (bathroom designer and fitting business)  
Wife: housewife      Father: moulder at iron foundry>furnace re-liner

Mother: barmaid

**Mrs PJ**      b. 1921      m. 1947      2 children 1948, 1955

Occupation: shorthand typist>bookkeeper (family business)

Husband: professional footballer>haulage contractor      Father: grounds-man at

Newey's      Mother: housewife

**Mrs DR1\***    b. 1926      m. 1951      2 children 1953, 1957

Occupation: factory work (Newey's)      Husband: engineer

Father: L.M.S. Goods      Mother: housewife

Born in **Tipton** moved to **Sedgley** in 1951

**Mrs VR**      b. 1933      m. 1967      2 children 1973, 1976

Occupation: domestic science teacher      Husband: mechanical engineer

Father: railway goods agent      Mother: housewife

**Mrs DR2\***    b. 1934      m. 1957      1 child 1968

Occupation: office worker      Husband: toolmaker at John Thompson's

Father: plater (deceased 1946)      Mother: various

Born in **Tipton** moved to **Sedgley** 1940s

**Mr PR\***      b. 1934      married Mrs DR2      1 child

Occupation: toolmaker at John Thompson's      Father: sales administrator at

John Thompson's      Mother: housewife

Related to Mrs DR1- nephew by marriage

**Mr NS**      b. 1954      m. 1978      2 children 1982, 1985

Occupation: draughtsman>warehouse manager      Wife: clerical assistant

Father: cost accountant at John Thompson's      Mother: domestic engineer

**Mr GW\***      b. 1930      m. 1951      2 children 1963, 1965

Occupation: line manager British Gas      Wife: tailoress. Housewife

Father: invalid (WWI)      Mother: housewife

**Mrs RW1\***    b. 1932      married Mr GW      2 children



Occupation: housewife      Father: steelworker      Mother: housewife

Mr and Mrs W moved to **Sedgley** when they married.

**Mr DW\***      b. 1929      m. 1954      2 children 1960, 1963

Occupation: civil engineer (British Rail)      Wife: proprietor of general store

Father: railway clerk      Mother: housewife

**Mrs IW\***      b. 1930      married to Mr DW      2 children

Occupation: family-owned corner shops. Father and mother both working in shops with 3 daughters

**Mrs RW2\***      b. 1932      m. 1953      2 children 1958, 1962

Occupation: employed by Hedges shoe factory      Husband: toolmaker at Sankey's

Father: deceased 1949      Mother: valve grinder at Rover

**Mr SW\***      b. 1927      married Mrs RW      2 children

Occupation: toolmaker      Father: plater      Mother: housewife

## **Tipton**

**Mrs MA**      b. 1934      m. 1958      2 children 1967, 1972

Occupation: accounts clerk      Husband: foundry worker      Father: foundry man

Mother: tailoress      Mrs MA was born in **Tipton** and moved to **Sedgley** in 1969

**Mr DA**      b. 1945      m. 1968      2 children 1969, 1972

Occupation: accountant      Wife: bank clerk>civil servant      Father: electrical

engineer      Mother: housewife      Mr DA moved from **Tipton** to **Sedgley** in the 1970s

**Mrs PB**      b. 1942      m. 1964      2 children 1972, 1977

Occupation: bank clerk      Husband: police superintendent      Father: cabinet maker  
Mother: dressmaker

**Mr RB** b. 1941 married to Mrs PB 2 children  
Occupation: police superintendent Wife: bank clerk Father: gardener Tipton  
Municipal Park Mother: housewife

**Mrs JB** b. 1938 m. 1959 2 children 1961, 1964  
Occupation: postal executive (counters' manager) Husband: carpenter>estimator  
Father: machine tool fitter Mother: housewife

**Mrs MD\*** b. 1944 m. 1964 1 child 1974  
Occupation: bank clerk Husband: metallurgist Father: maintenance  
engineer Mother: housewife>part-time school canteen worker

**Mr PD\*** b. 1937 married to Mrs MD 1 child  
Occupation: metallurgist Wife: bank clerk Father: road sweeper  
driver for Coseley UDC Mother: housewife>part-time school dinner lady

**Mr TG** b. 1939 m. 1965 2 children 1971, 1978  
Occupation: core maker Wife: worked at Newey's "on the clips"  
Father: moulder at Chatwins Mother: school cleaner

**Rev CH** b. 1944 m. 1967/1993 1 child 1973  
Occupation: librarian>journalist> Anglican Minister> writer Husband:  
Methodist Minister Father: tool setter at Austin (Longbridge) Mother:  
housewife> part-time employment (various)

**Mrs OH\*** b.1922 m. 1946 no children  
Occupation: shorthand typist>proprietor of draper's shop from 1960ish  
Husband: design engineer Father: structural engineer Mother: housewife

**Mr OH\*** b. 1922 married Mrs OH no children  
Occupation: design engineer Father: self- employed garage proprietor  
Mother: housewife Mr and Mrs OH moved from **Tipton** to **Sedgley** in  
1960

**Mrs LJ**      b. 1927      m. 1952      2 children 1957, 1960  
Occupation: wages clerk at Allen's Princes End      Husband: teacher  
Father: engineer      Mother: housewife  
Mrs LJ moved from **Tipton** to **Sedgley** in 1959

**Mrs BJ\***      b. 1940      m. 1961      1 child 1965  
Occupation: accounts clerk      Husband: engineer      Father: welder (chemical  
plumber)      Mother: housewife> various jobs (cleaner/machinist at Ewarts)

**Mr MJ\***      b. 1940      married Mrs BJ      1 child  
Occupation: engineer      Wife: clerk      Father: army 25 years  
Mother: centre lathe turner>capstan lathe turner

**Mrs JL**      b. 1943      m. 1963      2 children 1966, 1970  
Occupation: civil servant      Husband: accountant      Father: plater at Horsley  
Piggot      Mother: housewife> part-time school meals' assistant  
Mrs JL was born in **Tipton** and moved to **Kingswinford** in the 1960s

**Mr DN**      b. 1953      m. 1978      2 children  
Occupation: F.E. lecturer      Wife: runs playgroup      Father:  
engineer>chauffeur      Mother: chain maker> welder

**Mrs BT**      b. 1947      m. 1966      3 children 1971, 1978, 1982  
Occupation: office manager      Husband: self-employed fruiterer and grocer>potato  
wholesaler      Father: foundry labourer>head furnace man      Mother:  
welder>charge hand>various      Mrs BT was born in **Tipton** moved to **Sedgley**  
in 1966

**Mr HT**      b. 1943      married Mrs BT      3 children  
Occupation: self employed      Wife: clerical      Father: greengrocer/general  
merchant      Mr and Mrs HT moved to **Sedgley** in 1966 but Mr HT  
continued to work in and around the **Tipton** area

**Mr BW (MBE)**      b. 1939      m. 1964      1 child 1966

Occupation: sales order clerk> wages cashier>office manager      Wife: sales  
assistant Guest and Perry Owen St Tipton      Father: roll turner at Lee Howl  
Mother: unskilled work at Newey's

**Mr JW\***      b. 1936      m. 1960      no children

Occupation: tool maker> dye sinker>semi-professional footballer

Wife: clerk      Father: moulder (deceased 1937)      Mother: overhead crane driver as  
she was widowed

Born in **Tipton** moved to **Sedgley**

**Mrs VW\***      b. 1938      married Mr JW      no children

Occupation: clerk      Husband: semi-professional footballer      Father:  
moulder>various other jobs      Mother: housewife>clerical when children left school  
Mr JW and Mrs VW moved from **Tipton** to **Sedgley** in 1964

## Appendix II

### Biographical Details from Preliminary Respondents – Interviews Undertaken between 1998 and 2002

Party Interviews Indicated by \*

**Mr Brimble (MBE)** b. 1940 domicile: Tipton m. 1963  
Occupation: Local Historian Father: Shopkeeper Mother:  
Housewife

**Mrs Cartwright** b. 1930 domicile: Tipton m. 1955  
Occupation: Coremaker Father: Foundry worker Mother:  
Housewife Husband: Welder

**Mr Churchman** b. 1922 domicile: Dudley Port m. 1944  
Occupation: Engineer, Magistrate Father: Railway worker Mother:  
Housewife

**Mr Davies** b. 1940 domicile: Dudley m. 1960  
Occupation: Moulder Father: Moulder Mother: Housewife

**Mr Drew** b. 1926 domicile: Coseley m. 1948  
Occupation: Engineer

**Mrs Kendrick** b. 1946 domicile: Lower Green m. 1974  
Occupation: Quality Control Viewer Father: Gas man Mother:  
Barmaid Husband: Engineer

**Mrs Lakin** b. 1918 domicile: Coseley m. 1938  
Occupation: Various domestic roles, welder Father: Boatman Mother:  
Housewife Husband: Furnaceman

**Mrs Mocroft**            b. 1925            domicile: Brierley Hill    m. 1950  
Occupation: Coremaker            Father: Sand drier, Foundryman            Mother:  
Housewife    Husband: Brick layer

**Mr Tolley**            b. 1943            domicile: Whitmore Reans    m. 1966  
Occupation: Wholesale Vegetable Merchant    Father: Hawker> Shop keeper  
Mother: Shop keeper

**Mrs Tolley**            b. 1947            domicile: Coseley            m. 1966  
Occupation: Book keeper            Father: Furnaceman    Mother: welder

**Written Correspondence from:**

**Mrs Pauline Jones (dated 1999)** b. 1921    domicile: Coseley    m. 1947  
Occupation: shorthand typist            Father: Woodcutter    Mother: semi-invalid  
Husband: Businessman

**Miss Mottram (dated September 2007)** b. 1927            domicile: Kingswinford  
Unmarried    Occupation: Elocution Teacher            Father: Commerical Traveller  
Mother: Tailoress

## Appendix III

### Townsend's Index of Deprivation

From an initial list of sixty items on his deprivation index, Townsend chose twelve key indicators of deprivation:

1. A week's holiday away from home.
2. For adults – inviting a friend or relative for a meal in the last four weeks.
3. For adults – going out, or visiting a friend or relative in the last four weeks,
4. For children – having a friend to play in the last four weeks.
5. For children – not having a party on their last birthday.
6. Not going out for entertainment in the last two weeks.
7. Not having fresh meat at least four times a week.
8. Not having a cooked meal one day in a fortnight.
9. Not having a cooked breakfast most days of the week.
10. Not owning a refrigerator.
11. A household where a Sunday joint is not regularly eaten.
12. Where the household lacks the sole use of four key amenities: flush w/c, sink/washbasin, fixed bath/shower, gas/electric cooker.

Adapted from: Townsend, P., *Poverty in the United Kingdom: A Survey of Household Resources and Living Standards*, Penguin, 1979.

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