

A Study of Working-Class Men Who Desired Other  
Men in the North of England, c.1895 - 1957

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## Abstract

This thesis is the first detailed academic study of non-metropolitan men who desired other men in England during the period 1895-1957. It places issues of class, masculinity and regionality alongside sexuality in seeking to understand how men experienced their emotional and sexual relationships with each other. It argues that fluid notions of sexuality were rooted in deeply embedded notions of class and region. The thesis examines the six decades from 1895 to 1957 in an attempt to explore patterns of change over a broad period and uses a wide variety of sources such as legal records, newspapers, letters, social surveys and oral histories to achieve this. Amongst northern working men, 'normality' and 'good character' were not necessarily disrupted by same sex desire. As long as a man was a good, reliable worker, many other potential transgressions could be forgiven or overlooked. This type of tolerance of (or ambivalence to) same sex desire was shaken by affluence and the increased visibility of men with a clear sexuality from the 1950s and into the era of decriminalisation. The thesis analyses patterns of work, sex, friendship and sociability throughout the period to understand how these traditions of tolerance and ambivalence were formed and why they eventually came to an end. Although the impact of affluence and decriminalisation had countless positive effects both for working people in general and men who desired other men specifically, the thesis will acknowledge that this impact irrevocably altered a way of life and of understanding the world.

This thesis is 80,813 words.



## Contents

List of figures  
Acknowledgements

### 1. *Introduction*

Why the north?	1
Periodisation	4
Sexuality	11
Class	16
Sources and Methodology	24
Court records	27
Newspapers	28
The Edward Carpenter Archive	31
Social research and oral history interviews	36
Other sources	38
Structure	39
Summary	40

### 2. *'The love that dare not speak its name'? Public understandings of same-sex desire in the north, 1895 -1918*

The role of the press	46
Sheffield's newspapers and the trials of Oscar Wilde	50
Manchester's newspapers and the trials of Oscar Wilde	65
Prosecutions for homosexual offences	69
Arrests that went to the assize courts	70
Local policing, local attitudes	76
Differences between the Northern and North-Eastern Assizes	79
Guilty or not guilty?	81
Conclusion	85

### 3. *'Well then, give me a kiss and say no more about it': Personal experiences of masculinity and same-sex desire in the north, 1895 - 1918*

Northern masculinity	88
Edward Carpenter and his northern comrades	100
George Hukin	106
George Merrill	111
The O'Brien incident	115
Who was being prosecuted for homosexual offences?	124
Where were men being prosecuted?	127
Conclusion	131

### 4. *'The wife does not take any active interest in the matters that mostly appeal to me': Personal experiences of masculinity and same-sex desire in the north, 1919 - 1938*

Working-class culture in the north	135
<i>The Equipment of the Workers</i>	139

The 'Well-equipped' worker	144
The 'Inadequately-equipped' worker	151
The 'Mal-equipped' worker	153
How did the north cope with the depression?	157
The Altrincham trial	162
Conclusion	180

5. <i>'They are not criminals sir': Public understandings of same-sex desire in the north, 1919 - 1938</i>	183
Prosecutions for homosexual offences	183
Policing in the north	189
Differences between the Northern and North-Eastern Assizes	197
Guilty or not guilty?	198
Who was being prosecuted for homosexual offences?	200
Where were men being prosecuted?	204
The strange tale of <i>Boy</i> - an obscene libel trial	212
<i>The Manchester Guardian</i>	214
<i>The Sheffield Independent</i>	218
Conclusion	220

6. <i>'I can't help it. Every time I see a cock I go funny': Personal experiences of masculinity and same-sex desire in the north, 1939 - 1957</i>	223
The Rotherham and Barnsley trials	226
Depositions	243
George Pescod	244
Richard Hartley	245
Albert Courteney and Roy Smith	247
James Moorhouse and Roy Peatman	252
Personal experience	254
Fred Dyson	255
Terry Sanderson	258
<i>Tales From Out in the City</i>	262
Conclusion	267

7. <i>'Every effort is being made to prevent the spread of this vice': Public understandings of same-sex desire in the north, 1939 - 1957</i>	269
Prosecutions for homosexual offences	272
Differences between the Northern and North-Eastern Assizes	273
Guilty or not guilty?	275
Local policing in the 1940s and 1950s	277
The press	281
<i>News of the World</i>	282
<i>The Manchester Guardian</i>	288
The local press	295
The impact of affluence on northern working-class men	297
<i>The Uses of Literacy</i>	299
The research of Ferdynand Zweig	305
Conclusion	311

8. <i>Conclusion</i>	313
Bibliography	325





## List of figures

<u>Figure 2.1.</u>	A comparison of men in London and the north who appeared in court for homosexual acts, 1895 - 1918.	71
<u>Figure 2.2.</u>	A comparison of prosecution figures for the Northern and North-Eastern Assize circuits, 1895 - 1918.	80
<u>Figure 2.3.</u>	Guilty and not guilty verdicts in prosecutions for homosexual offences in London, 1895 - 1918.	82
<u>Figure 2.4.</u>	Guilty and not guilty verdicts in prosecutions for homosexual offences in the north, 1895 - 1918.	83
<u>Figure 2.5.</u>	Guilty and not guilty verdicts in the two northern assizes circuits.	84
<u>Figure 3.1.</u>	Working-class boys bathing in Endcliffe Wood, Sheffield.	93
<u>Figure 3.2.</u>	A fancy dress parade at Beighton, Sheffield.	95
<u>Figure 3.3.</u>	The hot room at Glossop Road Baths.	97
<u>Figure 3.4.</u>	The affectionately named 'Iron Duke' urinal, 1908.	98
<u>Figure 3.5.</u>	The Grand Hotel, 1910.	98
<u>Figure 3.6.</u>	The Norfolk Arms.	99
<u>Figure 3.7.</u>	George Hukin in a sentimental pose with Edward Carpenter.	106
<u>Figure 3.8.</u>	George Merrill as a young man.	112
<u>Figure 4.1.</u>	The Sheffield Rag Fairy.	137
<u>Figure 4.2.</u>	Rag Week parade, 1926.	138
<u>Figure 4.3.</u>	A 'Harem girl' dancing to an organ grinder.	139
<u>Figure 5.1.</u>	A comparison of men in London and the north who appeared in court for homosexual acts, 1919 - 1938.	185
<u>Figure 5.2.</u>	A comparison of prosecution figures for the Northern and North-Eastern Assizes circuits.	197
<u>Figure 5.3.</u>	Guilty and not guilty verdicts in prosecutions for homosexual offences in the north, 1919 - 1938.	199
<u>Figure 7.1.</u>	A comparison of men in London and the north who appeared in court for homosexual acts, 1939 - 1957.	272
<u>Figure 7.2.</u>	A comparison of prosecution figures for the Northern and North-Eastern Assizes circuits.	274
<u>Figure 7.3.</u>	Guilty and not guilty verdicts in prosecutions for homosexual offences in the north, 1939 - 1957.	276



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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

This thesis is the first detailed academic study of non-metropolitan men who desired other men in England during the period 1895-1957. It is distinctive not only for this reason but for the fact that it places issues of class, masculinity and regionality alongside sexuality in seeking to understand how men experienced their emotional and sexual relationships with each other. This thesis rejects the idea that the majority of working men in the north of England subscribed to a coherent sexual identity - even by the late 1950s. In fact notions of sexuality and sexual identity are not useful ways of thinking about the period and region under study here. This thesis also rejects the notion that the sexual and emotional lives of working men can be divorced from notions of class, work and masculinity. It deconstructs the assumptions that have been made about the attitudes, emotions, lifestyles and sex lives of northern working men by analysing a wide range of sources that touch on the lives and experiences of these men. This thesis uses a fresh approach by examining the attitudes of both the authorities and ordinary men towards same sex desire in a northern context and seeks to understand whether these two attitudes converged or were at odds. In today's terms, sexuality is a crucial element of men's identities and experience and one which *all* men have in common (regardless of what that sexuality constitutes). For many, it is the defining factor of who they are and how they present themselves to the rest of the world. This is particularly true for many gay men whose own personal struggles or their awareness of their antecedents' struggles for political and social recognition ensure that their

sexuality is key to their sense of self. This has not always been the case and as will be shown, for many men in the north has only been a recent development.<sup>1</sup>

There has been a significant amount of research undertaken over the past forty years into the history of homosexuality during the late-Victorian period and into the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Yet the history of homosexuality in Britain during this period has been focused on the capital and has been skewed towards middle and upper class men, more often than not with literary tendencies that have

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<sup>1</sup> It is necessary here to add a note regarding the terminology used in this thesis. Deciding what language to use when describing men who had relationships with other men, particularly when I am arguing for a lack of sexual identity in this period, has been difficult and much considered. I have chosen to use a variety of terms including homosexual/homosexuality which I am aware has many connotations associated with a medicalised sexual identity. It is still used by most modern scholars (such as Brady, Cocks, Cook and Tamagne) and I have used it mainly when referring to the authorities, official documents and men who seem to have had a clear sense of sexual identity. I have also used it to remain faithful to the language of the period of study. Where I have discussed men who do not seem to have had a particular sexual identity (the majority of men in this thesis) I have used terms such as 'men who had sex with other men' and 'same-sex desire' to highlight their lack of a homosexual identity.

<sup>2</sup> Examples of some of the most prominent studies are as follows: H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Other Love: An historical and Contemporary Study of Homosexuality in Britain* (London, 1970); Timothy d'Arch Smith, *Love in Earnest: Some Notes on the Lives and Writings of English 'Uranian' Poets from 1889 to 1930* (London, 1970); Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London, 1977); Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800* (London, 1979); Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey Jr. (eds), *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York, 1989); Colin Spencer, *Homosexuality A History* (London, 1995); Patrick Higgins, *Heterosexual Dictatorship: Male Homosexuality in Postwar Britain* (London, 1996); Hugh David, *On Queer Street: A Social History of British Homosexuality 1895-1995* (London, 1997); Alkarim Jivani, *It's Not Unusual: A History of Lesbian and Gay Britain in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1997); Shaun Cole, *'Don We Now Our Gay Apparel' Gay Men's Dress in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford and New York, 2000); Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England Since 1830* (London, 2000), Paul Baker, *Polari - The Lost Language of Gay Men* (London, 2002); Paul Baker and Jo Stanley, *Hello Sailor! The Hidden History of Gay Life at Sea* (London, 2003); H.G.Cocks, *Nameless Offences: Homosexual Desire in the 19th Century* (London and New York, 2003); Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality 1885-1914* (Cambridge, 2003); Graham Robb, *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 2003); Mark W. Turner, *Backward Glances: Cruising the Queer Streets of New York and London* (London, 2003); Sean Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861-1913* (London, 2005); Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (London and Chicago, 2005); Matt Houlbrook, Harry Cocks (eds), *The Modern History of Sexuality* (London, 2005), Morris B. Kaplan, *Sodom on the Thames: Sex, Love and Scandal in Wilde Times* (New York, 2005); Florence Tamagne, *History of Homosexuality in Europe: Berlin, London, Paris 1919-1939, Vol. I & II* (New York, 2006); Matt Cook, Robert Mills, Randolph Trumbach, H.G.Cocks, *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Men Since the Middle Ages* (Oxford and Connecticut, 2007).

ensured the survival of letters, memoirs, diaries and autobiographies.<sup>3</sup> The history of men from the provinces and men who were working-class has often been ignored or marginalised and this oversight has the potential to present an inaccurate picture of how ordinary men experienced their sexuality. After all, this group - non-metropolitan workers (and not middle-class Londoners or Forsterian men of letters) represented the majority of men living in England for the first half of the twentieth century. This thesis aims to address this issue and responds to the assumption that the regional study of homosexuality 'will be of considerable interest for the history of social attitudes' and will 'establish geographical nuances'.<sup>4</sup>

Sexuality should not be a separate category of study, rather a complementary facet of social and cultural experience that when considered presents a fuller and more nuanced reading of the past. Therefore, this thesis will examine sexuality as one element of working men's experience and use it to provide new interpretations of working-class culture, masculinity and the varied social ties between all elements of working-class communities. In turn, this will shed light on the impact of the growth of a national culture (and thus the weakening of

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<sup>3</sup> Here are examples of such, the majority of which were published after decriminalisation. In some cases (particularly Lehmann's) these works combine fiction with autobiography: J.R. Ackerley, *My Father and Myself* (New York, 1999, first published 1968); Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams, Being Autobiographical Notes* (London, 1916); Quentin Crisp, *The Naked Civil Servant* (London, 1996, first published 1968); Tom Driberg, *Ruling Passions* (London, 1991, first published 1977); Christopher Isherwood, *Christopher and His Kind* (Minneapolis, 2001, first published 1976); Christopher Isherwood, *Lions and Shadows: An Education in the Twenties* (Minneapolis, 2000, first published 1938); John Lehmann, *In the Purely Pagan Sense* (London, 1985, first published 1976); Paul Levy (ed.), *The Letters of Lytton Strachey* (London and New York, 2006); Stephen Spender, *World Within World* (London and Boston, 1991, first published 1951); Stephen Spender, Lara Feigel and John Sutherland (eds) *New Selected Journals, 1939-1995* (London and Boston, 2012); Peter Wildeblood, *Against the Law* (London, 1955). A notable exception to this middle-class dominance was that of Harry Daley, a London policeman who knew E.M.Forster, J.R. Ackerley, Duncan Grant and Raymond Mortimer and moved in decidedly literary circles, Harry Daley, *This Small Cloud* (London, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> Tamagne, *History of Homosexuality in Europe*, p.9.

regionality), changing relationships between working-class communities and authority, establishment ideas of, and attitudes towards, homosexuality, and increasing affluence on the lives of working men. The period studied includes events of great magnitude such as the two world wars and the depression and although not obviously linked to the study of sexuality their impact will be considered alongside the broader social, political and cultural context of the times. To achieve these aims a wide range of source materials has been used including newspapers, personal letters, memoirs, oral history interviews, political papers, police and court records and psychological and anthropological research. This introduction will discuss the scope and aims of the thesis, summarise the overall arguments, analyse the existing historiography and finally discuss the sources and methodology used.

## Sexuality

The history of homosexuality in Britain has been seriously studied since the mid 1970s when Jeffrey Weeks's pioneering *Coming Out* issued the challenge to other British academics to continue the work that he had started. On reassessing this work in 2012, Weeks has recognised that early theoretical work had focussed 'on the evolution of the category of the homosexual' and lent weight to the idea of a homosexual/heterosexual binary that coloured how we viewed the sexual past and present.<sup>5</sup> Many subsequent histories used this theoretical framework to focus on the impact of the sexologists, the medicalisation of homosexuality, middle-class experience and the experiences of famous homosexual men such as Wilde and Carpenter. Although much of

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<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, 'Queer(y)ing the "Modern Homosexual"', *Journal of British Studies*, 51:3 (2012), pp.523-539, p.526.



this work was groundbreaking and set the precedent for the field as a whole, this kind of approach proved limited for understanding the experiences of men that did not fit into the categories deemed appropriate by fashionable sexual theory. This meant that working-class men, men without a clear sexual identity and men outside the capital (in fact the majority of men who had had some form of sexual experience with other men) were largely overlooked thus leaving a significant gap in our understanding of male sexuality. Weeks further acknowledged that his original approach and that of his contemporaries in the 1970s and 1980s was based in the politics of gay liberation: writing the history of gay men and reclaiming a legitimate past was a political act that sought to emphasise the importance and solidity of sexual identity.

The historiography evolved throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and though its focus on social constructionism was seen by many as limited, it began to challenge these categories of identity and analysis. A special issue of the *Journal of British Studies* from July 2012 has assessed the state of current British queer history. Queer history is 'dedicated to disrupting sexual identities and hetero/homo binaries' and in doing so provides a platform for the study of the millions of men who have previously been written out of the queer past.<sup>6</sup> It allows for the diversity of experience amongst men who have had sex with other men that has been explained away rather than embraced in the past. In engaging with this theoretical approach Weeks has written:

What do we mean when we speak of "British queer history"? Are we concerned with a history of same-sex desire, in all its complexities, or of specific sexual formations and cultures? Is it a history of attitudes

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<sup>6</sup> Brian Lewis, 'Introduction: British Queer History', *Journal of British Studies* 51:3 (2012), pp. 519-522, p.520.

toward homosexuality, and perhaps also of gender nonconformity, or should its focus be the evolution of lesbian and gay and transgender subjectivity? Is it a history of the structuring binarism between heterosexuality and homosexuality or of sexual diversity? Are we speaking of a history of regulation and control or of transgression, resistance, and agency?.....Is queer history about content or approach, empirical detail or theory, a past that is irredeemably other or a living history at the heart of current politics?<sup>7</sup>

There are clearly many questions that need to be asked when undertaking this approach but its greater fluidity and inclusivity is a great attraction; it sidesteps some of the restrictions of social and psychological theory that have perhaps kept the field outside of the mainstream in the past.

The main proponents of what has been christened by Chris Waters as the 'New British Queer History' are Matt Houlbrook, Harry Cocks and Matt Cook.<sup>8</sup> In their pioneering work, they have looked less at the medical and legal theories of the past in isolation and more at the actual experiences of the men involved. Cocks has challenged the primacy given to the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act in the development and persecution of a homosexual identity by placing it and the high profile trials preceding and succeeding it back into the wider context of the experiences, both legal and personal, of men who desired other men throughout the nineteenth century. He does not try to locate 'antecedent identities' in the past and finds a focus on 'acts' and 'identities' unhelpful in analysing the evidence of same-sex desire that his exhaustive research has unearthed.<sup>9</sup> This approach has challenged the idea that a homosexual identity emerged in the late nineteenth century along with the idea that the Wilde trials

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<sup>7</sup> Weeks, 'Queer(y)ing the "Modern Homosexual"', p.523.

<sup>8</sup> Chris Waters, 'Distance and Desire in the New British Queer History', *GLQ A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 14:1 (2007), pp.139-155, p.139.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p.142-143.

launched homosexuality from the private closet into the public discourse. It successfully argues that throughout the nineteenth century homosexual men were a part of the public discourse and the impact of this had far reaching implications for Victorian masculinity and society as a whole. Cook takes a different approach, located in cultural analysis and in some places literary theory. However, he comes to the same conclusion as Cocks and Houlbrook, that ‘there was no Gay London, either in 1885 or in 1914. Rather, there were men from various walks of life, some who would have recognized the others, some who would not’.<sup>10</sup> All three studies emphasise the point that if a researcher attempts to locate a coherent and uniform sexual identity in the past, they will be disappointed and this does not just apply to the capital as Cocks begins to highlight with his use of some non-metropolitan source material.

In *Queer London*, Houlbrook’s separate analysis of working and middle-class experiences explicitly acknowledges that they were generally different - both materially and emotionally.<sup>11</sup> This approach highlighted the two key issues that have guided the focus of this study: that class had a huge impact on how men experienced their sexuality and enacted their desire for other men, and that the majority of men who had sex with other men either had little understanding of issues of sexual identity or if they did, it had little impact on their material and emotional life. His ‘astute attentiveness to the nuances of class reveals the potentiality of a cultural system in which “normality” was not equivalent to “heterosexuality” so that “there was nothing to stop men”— regardless of formulations of self-understanding—from “finding sexual pleasure and intimacy

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p.147.

<sup>11</sup> Most studies assume that sexual preference is a category in itself and enough to link men and their experiences to each other, thereby disregarding key issues such as class and region.

with other men”<sup>12</sup>. These ideas are key to understanding working-class sexuality during the first half of the twentieth century (applied both to the capital and the north) and they indicate the widespread potential for a fluidity, both sexually and emotionally, that has previously been subsumed into arguments centred around methodology and critical theory. Perhaps where the northern and London stories begin to diverge is in the postwar period. Houlbrook states:

By the 1940s...the boundaries between queer and “normal” were hardening . . . [and] it was increasingly difficult for men to engage in homosex or emotional relationships with other men whilst considering themselves—and being considered by others—as “normal”<sup>13</sup>

I would suggest that did not happen until the mid to late-1950s in the north due to the cultural and commercial differences that this thesis will address.

This thesis is a critical intervention in the ‘new British queer history’. It builds on the work done by the historians mentioned above, particularly Houlbrook, by applying similar methodology and an understanding of the past to reconstruct and analyse the lives of the northern men who, on the whole, did not subscribe to a (homo)sexual identity. As Cook stated about London, there was no gay north either and it is unwise for the historian to try to find it. In order to understand the sexual and emotional lives of northern, working-class men in the period it is necessary to rethink the working-class and work-place cultures in which they lived rather than applying inappropriate notions of sexuality to them. This thesis also builds on the work of Houlbrook, in particular, by exploring the

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<sup>12</sup> Laura Doan, ‘Review of Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918–57. By Matt Houlbrook’, *Twentieth Century British History* 17:1 (2006), pp.134–136, p.135. Embedded quotes refer to Houlbrook, *Queer London*, p.171.

<sup>13</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, p.270.

role of the city and the authorities on how northern, working-class men experienced their lives and it is here where it can offer a more nuanced picture than one solely based on the capital. In fact this thesis suggests that, in the north, the city often had little relevance to the expression of same-sex desire and the police had no real role in defining how men saw themselves or their preferences in the period in question.

The approach of the British queer historians is not something that is specific to British history, in fact it has been influenced by the work of historians in the USA, where the historical study of sexuality has (until recently) been most prolific. George Chauncey's landmark *Gay New York* was perhaps the first full length study to challenge the victim/persecution binary that had existed in relation to pre-decriminalisation life for western homosexual men.<sup>14</sup> Its mixture of theory and archival research which enabled the stories of many individuals to be told ensured that it was seen not only as groundbreaking in its field but has become a staple of American social history in general. It also raised questions about the interaction between class, sexuality and respectability that both *Queer London* and this thesis have expanded upon. John Howard's *Men Like That* is the second highly influential study that has helped to change the focus of the historiography. Its introduction sets the tone of what follows:

In the second half of the twentieth century male-male desire was well enmeshed in the patterns of everyday life. Men interested in intimate and sexual relations with other men found numerous opportunities to act on their desires, and did so within the primary institutions of the local community - home, church, school and

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<sup>14</sup> George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940* (New York, 1994).

workplace. Never inherently hostile to homosexual activity, these institutions repeatedly fostered it.<sup>15</sup>

Not only did Howard explore the possibilities enjoyed by men that did not fit into a homosexual/heterosexual binary, he explored the lives of men that lived outside the unique conditions of cities like London and New York. In doing so, he uncovered a whole, new 'queer' way of life tied to community and workplace that has been crucial to the development of this thesis. The most recent study that had built upon these approaches is *Mates and Lovers: A Gay History of New Zealand*.<sup>16</sup> Brickell uses a similar approach to the historians discussed above with his analysis responding to the experiences of the men studied rather than being fully guided by theoretical interpretations. His findings suggest that the attitudes and experiences of men in the small industrial towns and cities of New Zealand again had more in common with the northern men discussed in this thesis than those that lived and loved in London.

There is a seemingly obvious yet under-explored link between male sexuality and masculinity that this thesis seeks to analyse.<sup>17</sup> This is particularly apparent when studying working-class men, yet again in a lively historiography

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<sup>15</sup> John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago and London, 1999), p.xi.

<sup>16</sup> Chris Brickell, *Mates and Lovers: A Gay History of New Zealand* (Auckland and London, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Karen Harvey and Alexandra Shepard, 'What Have Historians Done with Masculinity? Reflections on Five Centuries of British History, circa 1500–1950', *Journal of British Studies* 44:2 (2005), pp.274-280.

surprisingly little has been written specifically about working-class masculinity.<sup>18</sup>

In his contribution to the recently released *What is Masculinity?*, John Tosh lamented that 'the study of working-class masculinities has more or less ground to a halt in Britain, in part because working-class sources hold little appeal for the prevalent modes of cultural analysis.'<sup>19</sup> He is referring here to the fact that a theoretical approach guided by the cultural turn has put the focus of historians of masculinity on the representations of masculinity in the past rather than the lived experiences of actual men. Martin Francis has also emphasised the need for the analysis of the lives of ordinary working-men to gain a broader picture of modern masculinity.<sup>20</sup> Tosh reproduces calls by Michael Kimmel, Karen Harvey and Alex Shepard to refocus emphasis on these lived experiences and social relationships between men and of men with women.<sup>21</sup> In part, this thesis will address this call, both when dealing with working-class masculinity and with sexuality. The only full length study to present a history of masculinity influenced by queer theory is Sean Brady's *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861-1913*.<sup>22</sup> Brady explores the often complex relationships between homosexual desire, marriage and masculinity in this period but often neglects issues of class and region in his analysis. This thesis will argue that issues of

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<sup>18</sup> Although many of the following make reference to working-class men, the main focus remains firmly on the middle-class: Lesley Hall, *Hidden Anxieties: Male Sexuality. 1900-1950* (Cambridge, 1991); Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Airforce, 1939-1945* (Oxford, 2008); Frank Mort, *Cultures of Consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in Late Twentieth Century London* (London, 1996); Michael Roper, John Tosh (eds) *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London, 1991); John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven, Connecticut, and London, 1999); John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-century Britain* (London, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> John Tosh, 'The History of Masculinity: An Outdated Concept?' in John Arnold and Sean Brady (eds), *What is Masculinity?: Historical Dynamics from Antiquity to the Contemporary World* (London, 2011), p.24.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Francis, 'The Domestication of the Male? Recent research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity', *The Historical Journal* 45:3 (2002), p.652.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p.25.

<sup>22</sup> Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain*.

class and regionality are vital in understanding working-class attitudes to both same sex desire and masculinity.

### Why the North?

Studies of homosexuality in this period have almost entirely neglected the north of England.<sup>23</sup> There are several reasons for this including the wealth of source material relating to London and the apparent dearth relating to the north, and also the difficulty of defining what and where the north is. As a starting point, a useful definition of the north has been given by the leading scholar of the region, Dave Russell. Russell divided the north into two areas, far north and near north (far and near being in relation to London).<sup>24</sup> Far north encompassed the area from North Yorkshire up to Northumberland and the near north encompassed the West Riding, taking in Lancashire and Cheshire and running down to South Yorkshire. The fact that the Northern and North-Eastern Assizes Court records have proved to be an invaluable source for this study mean that the counties included within these circuits have guided the definition. Those counties match up with Russell's assessment with the exclusion of the majority of Cheshire, which in legal terms usually formed part of the Chester and Wales Assizes Circuit during this period. It is relatively easy to create geographic divisions between north and south but it is the social and cultural divisions that prove most enlightening for this study.

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<sup>23</sup> Cocks, *Nameless Offences*, pp.157-198; H.G. Cocks, 'Safeguarding Civility: Sodomy, Class and Moral Reform in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *Past and Present*, Number 190, February 2006, pp.121-146.

<sup>24</sup> Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the National Imagination* (Manchester, 2004), p.xii.



There is a very real divide, both in contemporary life and historically, between the north and south of England and between London and the provinces. This divide is emphasised by differences in language, dialect, culture, class and historical experience. This sense of 'difference' has been studied in the fields of literary criticism, sociology and in history.<sup>25</sup> Academic interpretations of northernness may be very different in terms of character and ideas but they generally agree on the fact that historically, people in the north experienced life differently from those in the south, particularly in the capital, and that this is because of the specific nature of the rapid industrialisation that took place during the nineteenth century and the urban communities that this phenomenon created in modern Britain. Using the definition detailed here, the north represented a population of at times almost double the capital. This highlights the fact that the experiences of working men living in the north should not be ignored if a more rounded picture of how men experienced their sexuality in this period is to be achieved. Conditions in the capital were unique, therefore assumptions should not be made about non-metropolitan men based on evidence gathered from the capital.

Of course northernness itself changed over the period studied, and a shared sense of northern consciousness was very different in 1895 when the area was still distinctively affected by the impact of the industrial revolution and almost totally separate to the capital, from in 1957 when a nationalisation of the media

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<sup>25</sup> Helen M Jewell, *The North-South Divide: The Origins of Northern Consciousness in England* (Manchester, 1994); Ian Taylor, Karen Evans and Penny Fraser, *Global Change, Local Feeling and Everyday Life in the North of England: A Tale of Two Cities; A Study in Manchester and Sheffield* (London, 1996); Frank Musgrove, *The North of England: A History From Roman Times to the Present* (Oxford, 1990); Russell, *Looking North*; Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848-1914* (Cambridge, 1991); Dennis Smith, *Conflict and Compromise: Class Formation in English Society 1830-1914: A Comparative Study of Birmingham and Sheffield* (London, 1982).

and culture was well under way and the industrial north had begun to feel the impact of affluence and consumerism. Yet the strength of regional ties and ties to particular towns and cities will be reiterated throughout this thesis. During the period of study, particularly the inter-war years, the north had a strong place in the national consciousness and even came to represent the suffering of the working-classes throughout the depression. In fact the north became an imagined community used by many different people to many different ends. In his 1934 bestseller *English Journey*, J B Priestley spoke of three Englands, the old England of cathedral cities, the country squire and Oxbridge, the new England of Woolworths, dance halls and the wireless and the England of the industrial north, depressed and dirty yet somehow honest and innately different to the other two.<sup>26</sup> He saw traditions and a sense of community set amongst the slums and unemployment that somehow set the area apart from the rest of the country.

Other middle-class writers such as George Orwell, Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, J.L. Hodson and Mary Ellen Chase famously visited the north and wrote about their experiences albeit with the attitude of observing animals in a zoo.<sup>27</sup> Their writing emphasised the differences between north and south, using almost gleeful descriptions of the poverty, ugliness and apparent vulgarity that they witnessed to provide a suitably jarring contrast to their, in comparison, genteel lives. The north was distinctive in different ways and at different times but this was nowhere made more apparent to the rest of the country than in the 1930s

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<sup>26</sup> J. B. Priestley, *English Journey* (London, 1984, first published 1934), pp. 371-375.

<sup>27</sup> Mary Ellen Chase, *In England Now* (London, 1937); Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Week-End : A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1939* (New York, 1963, first published 1941); J.L. Hodson, *Our Two Englands* (London, 1936); George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London, 1989, first published 1937).

when these books were written. Philanthropists such as Seebohm Rowntree alongside government officials and sociologists conducted various studies of the northern working-classes in relation to poverty, housing, health and employment throughout the period, in fact there seemed to have been a near obsession with mapping the northern provinces both in terms of gleaning 'truth' about the masses and documenting their experiences.<sup>28</sup> During the 1930s, the Mass-Observation movement focussed on the northern working-classes who were seen as being as 'obscure as .... the most exotic tribespeople'.<sup>29</sup> The need to study this distant tribe persisted throughout the period and confirms the fact that the industrial poor were seen as somehow different; that studying them would tell the metropolitan elites something that they did not know, something that they could not find in London.<sup>30</sup>

Working-class culture and community were particularly strong in the industrial north during the 1890s and continued to be so right into the 1950s. This was not only recognised by contemporaries, but is still recognised by historians and

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<sup>28</sup> Juliet Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History* (London, 2010), pp.52-66.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Gurney, "'Intersex" and "Dirty Girls": Mass-Observation and Working-Class Sexuality in England in the 1930s', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 8:2 (1997), pp.256-290, p.257.

<sup>30</sup> N. Dennis, F. Henriques, and C. Slaughter, *Coal is our Life: An Analysis of a Yorkshire Mining Community* (London, 1969, first published 1956); W. Hannington, *The Problem of the Distressed Areas* (London, 1937), Pilgrim Trust, *Men Without Work: A Report made to the Pilgrim Trust* (Cambridge, 1938); Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty, a study of town life* (London, 1901); Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty and progress: a second social survey of York* (London, 1941); Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty and the welfare state: A third social survey of York dealing only with economic questions* (London, 1951); St Philips Education and Research Society, *The Equipment Of The Workers: An Enquiry By The St Philip's Settlement Education And Research Society Into The Adequacy Of The Adult Manual Workers For The Discharge Of Their Responsibilities As Heads Of Household, Producers And Citizens* (London, 1919); Ferdynand Zweig, *Men in the Pits*, (London, 1948); Ferdynand Zweig, *The Worker in an Affluent Society* (London, 1961).

sociologists alike who speak of an 'a very resistant culture, a culture that controlled itself'.<sup>31 32</sup> Sidney Pollard wrote of South Yorkshire in particular:

There is a consistency in the defence of the weak against the strong, the poor against the rich, the under-privileged against those who have usurped power, pelf and privilege, and these represent some of the finest expressions of the human spirit. But there is a consistency here also of opposition to central authority as against the region.<sup>33</sup>

The specific conditions of proletarian and artisan dominance in the city of Sheffield led to a tradition of radical politics, auto-didacticism and non-conformist religion. It also led to a feeling of independence from the dictates of metropolitan mores, society and manners. This sense of defiance bled into attitudes towards state sponsored forms of social control such as the police force which was seen 'as an official agency attempting to impose the values of the middle-class elite on working people' due to its numerous forays into eradicating traditional gambling, sports and attempts to regulate private life through the monitoring of drinking and sex.<sup>34</sup> This interference was not welcomed by a culture that believed what people did in their own homes and communities was no business for official regulation: intervention was met by habitual 'fear and dislike'.<sup>35</sup>

It has been assumed that a middle-class dominated nationalisation of culture took place during the inter-war years. The rise of the cinema as the most

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<sup>31</sup> Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, Connecticut and London, 2001).

<sup>32</sup> Taylor et al, *Global Change, Local Feeling and Everyday Life in the North of England*, p.39.

<sup>33</sup> Sidney Pollard and Colin Holmes (eds), *Essays in the Economic and Social History of South Yorkshire* (Barnsley, 1976), pp.5-6.

<sup>34</sup> Louise A Jackson, *Child Abuse in Victorian England* (London, 2000), p.36.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Roberts, *The Classic Slum* (London, 1971), p.100.

popular leisure activity for the working-classes, the popularity of the radio, the circulation of the national press overtaking that of the provincial presses and the music and magazines that were becoming readily available have all been cited as factors that chipped away at regional identities.<sup>36</sup> Although it is clear that all these factors had an impact on the lives of working people in the north, the strength of the cultural foundations of these northern communities should not be underestimated. Russell refers to the north's response to this as "national/provincial", typified by an awareness of wider currents but proud of local achievement and anxious to see "national" life as something experienced close to home'.<sup>37</sup> In fact, northern towns and cities retained distinct regional attitudes until 'full employment and post-war regional policies dulled the regionalist sentiments of the pre-war period'.<sup>38</sup> A clear illustration of this resistance to a London-centric national culture (even by the 1950s) was demonstrated by some northern attitudes to the coronation - an event commonly portrayed as one that unified national pride. Mass-Observation responders in Sheffield and York saw the event as 'a London coronation' and felt detached both from the event itself and its nationalistic connotations.<sup>39</sup> The sources analysed within this thesis only serve to reinforce the argument that a specifically northern working-class culture survived throughout the period, particularly in the context of sexuality and sexual experience.

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<sup>36</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life* (London, 2009, first published 1957); Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures, England 1918-1951* (Oxford and New York, 2000, first published 1998), pp.186-187.

<sup>37</sup> Dave Russell, 'The Heaton Review, 1927-1934: culture, class and a sense of place in inter-war Yorkshire', *Twentieth Century British History* 17:3 (2006), pp.323-349, p.323.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p.348.

<sup>39</sup> M-O A: TC Royalty, 69/5/M, Pre-Coronation Diaries, Sheffield, 21 April 1953, and M-O A:TC Royalty 69/5/L, Interviews Regarding Coronation Souvenirs, May 1953, quoted in Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (New Haven and London 2010), p.31.

Although the study will use sources from all across the region, Sheffield (and South Yorkshire) and Manchester (and Lancashire) have been used as particular case studies to base the thesis around. Excluding Liverpool, which was a port city and therefore an anomaly in itself, these were the two biggest cities in the region. Sheffield was a city built on the steel industry and South Yorkshire represented the steel and mining heartland of the industrial revolution. Manchester was built on the cotton industry and Lancashire was, for part of the period, the centre of weaving in Britain. Between them they contained the core occupations that through the industrial revolution helped to create the industrial north. Both cities have also traditionally had links with the history of homosexuality: Sheffield through its ties to Edward Carpenter and Manchester for being the site of the first homosexual, commercial network in the north (although its recognition as such began long after the end of this study).

### Periodisation

The thesis examines the six decades from 1895 to 1957 in an attempt to explore patterns of change over a broad period. The starting point is 1895, the year that Oscar Wilde was tried on charges of gross indecency. In his groundbreaking 1977 work *Coming Out*, Jeffrey Weeks highlighted this moment when viewed alongside the legal changes of 1885 as key in the shaping of a homosexual identity.<sup>40</sup> Wilde had been the first high profile victim of the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act and it seemed likely that there would be a backlash against homosexual men stirred up by the virulent articles that

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<sup>40</sup> Weeks, *Coming Out*, p.2.

appeared daily in the capital's newspapers. Later studies by Harry Cocks and Matt Cook have demonstrated that this was not the case but it cannot be denied that the Wilde trials played an important role in shaping the image of homosexual men in public discourse.<sup>41</sup> Unlike the contemporary scandals of the Cleveland Street Affair and the Fanny and Stella trial, it was made obvious what Wilde had been doing and with whom.<sup>42</sup> He was not protected by the state and in turn he chose not to protect himself. In fact he gave an impassioned defence of both himself and 'the love that dare not speak its name'. Therefore this moment provides an opportunity to see if this newfound public discourse (and short-lived media panic) on the topic of sex between men had an impact away from the capital and in the traditionally insular north of England.

The thesis proceeds by studying three distinct timeframes: 1895-1918, 1919-1938 and 1939-1957. The first period, 1895-1918 covers the years from the Wilde trials to the end of the First World War. In the north, these were years of relative prosperity. The population movements of the early phase of industrialisation had settled into established cities and employment was generally high due to high levels of manufacturing that were further encouraged by the coming of the First World War. However, traditional patterns of working-class sociability and male affection remained strong and prosecutions for homosexual offences were strikingly low - perhaps surprisingly, the impact of the war did little to challenge this. Industrial cities like Sheffield felt the impact of the war in contradictory ways; steel-workers were classed as working in a reserved occupation and thus many of the male inhabitants of the city were

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<sup>41</sup> Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality*, p.120.

<sup>42</sup> For full discussion of the Cleveland Street and Fanny and Stella trials see: Kaplan, *Sodom on the Thames*.

protected from being called up to the armed forces (as demonstrated by the *Equipment of the Workers* survey).<sup>43</sup> However, the Pals' Battalions mostly came from northern towns and cities and their decimation on the Somme forced the Army High Command to stop recruiting in this way due to the impact of losses on individual towns and cities. Such contradictory experiences seem to have had little impact on the fabric of working-class life in the north and any changes caused by wartime conditions (for example, a temporary increase in prosecutions for homosexual offences) seem to have evened out as soon as peace time returned.<sup>44</sup>

The second period, 1919-1938 covers the turbulent inter-war period. This was a period of national unrest that began with millions of soldiers returning from the war, many of whom were injured or shellshocked, to face unemployment and the women who had, for the duration, been living lives of unprecedented freedom and independence. These issues combined to form what has been seen as a crisis of masculinity and potentially changed how men would understand themselves in the postwar world.<sup>45</sup> Adrian Bingham indicates that the growth of the consumer society, mass unemployment, the increased influence of psychological and psychoanalytical ways of thinking, suburbanisation and the expansion of the national media all had dramatic effects on British society in the interwar period.<sup>46</sup> While not all these issues had a particular impact on the northern working classes, the decisive development

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<sup>43</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>44</sup> See Chapters Two and Five.

<sup>45</sup> Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford, 2004), p.2; Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London, 1996), p.13.

<sup>46</sup> Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press*, p.2.



for the north during this period, in terms of the effect that it had both on everyday life and on the national perception of the area, was the depression and the associated mass unemployment. The twenties and early thirties have been seen as a bleak time in the history of the north and in consequence the history of the country itself. The slums that lined the road to Wigan Pier came to represent the experience of the working-classes throughout Britain. However, little changed in how men interacted both sexually and socially. Recent research by Charlotte Wildman has highlighted that this negative national image of the north led to many northern cities steadfastly attempting to modernise and transform their centres to reinvent themselves as sites of modernity, leisure and respectable sociability.<sup>47</sup> Inadvertently, this marked the first real shift in how the authorities dealt with men who had sex with other men (*not* however how men viewed their encounters with other men), leading to localised changes best demonstrated by the case of the Altrincham trial detailed in Chapter Three.

The final period, 1939-1957 covers a further time of social upheaval. The Second World War caused much emotional and material damage in Britain. Many northern cities were bombed due to their importance to the war effort. Liverpool, Sheffield, Manchester and Leeds were all badly hit and this, combined with the policy of the post-war Labour government, ensured that by the end of the 1950s the majority of remaining slums were cleared and the social landscape of working-class life in these cities was irrevocably altered. The emergence of the welfare state after the war began to improve the quality of life for the working classes and it has been argued that the continuation of

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<sup>47</sup> Charlotte Wildman, 'A City Speaks: The Projection of Civic Identity in Manchester', *Twentieth Century British History* 23:1 (2012), pp.80–99, Charlotte Wildman, 'The "spectacle" of Interwar Manchester and Liverpool: Urban Fantasies, Consumer Cultures and Gendered Identities', PhD thesis (University of Manchester, 2007).

the nationalisation of culture that began in the interwar period and the impact of affluence began to break down old modes of working-class life.<sup>48</sup> In the period of reconstruction after the war, the family was prioritised as the cornerstone of stability and happiness that would help rebuild the country.<sup>49</sup> It has been suggested that this in turn helped to further marginalise those outside the boundaries of this way of life: homosexuals, single mothers and those who chose to remain single.<sup>50</sup> By the early 1950s, homosexuality had become a common topic of discussion in the press and the Croft-Cooke, Gielgud and Montagu trials followed by the establishment of the Wolfenden inquiry into homosexuality and prostitution ensured that a new prominence was given to the topic.<sup>51</sup> If men cared to look, this new focus ensured that they could find an identity linked to their sexuality in the pages of the daily paper. Much of this coverage promoted a medicalised view of homosexuality - that homosexual men were mentally ill rather than criminals - and it was this pathologised view of homosexuality combined with record high prosecution rates that has helped the 1950s to be seen as the nadir of life for homosexual men in England.<sup>52</sup> The study of this period will address the impact of these developments on the north of England and assess whether they led to changes both in how men viewed themselves and how the authorities reacted to men who desired other men.

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<sup>48</sup> Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*.

<sup>49</sup> Laura King, 'Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, c.1918 – 1960', PhD thesis (University of Sheffield, 2011), p.3.

<sup>50</sup> Katherine Holden, *The Shadow of Marriage Singleness in England, 1914-1960* (Manchester and New York, 2007), pp.1-25.

<sup>51</sup> Higgins, *Heterosexual Dictatorship*, pp.5-6, 267-305.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

The end point for the study is 1957 and this has been chosen for two reasons: it was the year that the Wolfenden Report was published and recommended the decriminalisation of homosexuality and it seems to be the beginning of a new affluence among the northern working-classes. It is not within the remit of this study to look at the impact of the well-documented move towards decriminalisation as it is the earlier period that lacks attention in the historiography. A key argument of this thesis is that it was the impact of affluence on northern working-class communities (and associated social change) rather than a discourse of sexuality and identity that fundamentally altered the way in which men viewed themselves and their sexual and emotional relationships with other men. 1957 saw the publication of Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* which was soon followed by Ferdynand Zweig's study tracing the impact of affluence on English workers: their insistence on the changes to working-class life that affluence precipitated have become benchmarks in the study of class history. Here, this interpretation will be reframed to help understand how social and sexual norms could have changed so much from the end of the decade onwards.

Although the majority of sources remain within the boundaries of the period, there are instances when sources are used from before the beginning and slightly after the end of the timeframe. When this has been done, it is to achieve context and to allow the full development of an argument. For example, Ferdynand Zweig's *The Worker in an Affluent society*, although published in 1961, contains material from surveys conducted in 1958. This is not to suggest that 1957 was the year that marked a definitive shift in how northern men viewed and experienced their sexuality - there were continuities that can be

found into the 1960s and beyond - but rather it marks the beginning of a shift into a different way of life for working people. A study that began here and took in the 1960s and 1970s would be totally different in its outlook and conclusions. Finally it should be acknowledged that a sixty year time period has been chosen to allow the many subtle changes and continuities that occurred in the private lives of working men to be highlighted and fully explored.

## Class

Issues of class are very important in understanding how men experienced their sexuality both in the north and in the wider context of Britain and further afield. It has already been noted that the work of various historians has highlighted how working-class men had a different experience of their sexuality than their middle-class counterparts. This demonstrates that class could transcend other factors in providing shared experience - in fact, at times, shared morals, attitudes and assumptions linked the experiences of working men as far afield as north of England, London, New York, Mississippi and New Zealand.

Similarities between working communities in these geographically diverse locations can be explained by attitudes towards work, pleasure and the agency of the individual that were located in class. In the case of New Zealand, it is interesting to note that many immigrants to the country that were instrumental in setting up the industrial towns discussed by Brickell were from northern England and took their values with them as well as their working skills.

Class has gone in and out of fashion as a concept to guide historical study and there has been a tendency amongst some historians to play down its

importance to social and cultural history.<sup>53</sup> It has already been noted that Houlbrook has firmly placed the issue of class back into interpretations of queer history. As well as this, the importance of class to understanding social history, particularly the postwar period is currently being re-examined.<sup>54</sup> In histories of heterosexual love and romance, Claire Langhamer has placed class at the forefront of her arguments about how love and marriage have been experienced during the twentieth century.<sup>55</sup> Kate Fisher, in her own work and that done with Simon Szreter, has also emphasised the how differently romantic and sexual lives were experienced depending on what class people belonged to.<sup>56</sup> While these are all examples of historians from different fields using class to formulate and add nuance to their arguments, issues of sexuality (homosexuality in particular) rarely come up in social histories of class. Although much has been written about the working classes during the period of this thesis, in both a northern and national context, only two studies - McKibbin's *Classes and Cultures* and Bourke's *Working-Class Cultures* - deal in any depth with working-class sexuality and only *Classes and Cultures* talks about

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<sup>53</sup> For an overview, see: Geoff Eley and Keith Nield, *The Future of Class in History* (Michigan, 2007).

<sup>54</sup> Stephen Brooke, Gender and Working-Class Identity in Britain During the 1950s, *Journal of Social History* 34:4 (2001), pp.773-795; Stephen Brooke, "Slumming" in Swinging London? Class, Gender and the Post-War City in Nell Dunn's *Up The Junction* (1963)', *Cultural and Social History* 9:3 (2012), pp.429-449; Selina Todd, 'Affluence, Class and Crown Street: Reinvestigating the Post-war Working Class', *Contemporary British History* 22 (2008), pp. 501-518; Mike Savage, 'Affluence and Social Change in the Making of Technocratic Middle-Class Identities, 1939-55', *Contemporary British History* 22 (2008), pp.457-476.

<sup>55</sup> Claire Langhamer, 'The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History* 40:2 (2005), pp.341-362.

<sup>56</sup> Kate Fisher, *Birth Control, Sex, and Marriage in Britain 1918-1960* (Oxford, 2006); Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England 1918-1963* (Cambridge, 2010).

homosexuality.<sup>57</sup> McKibbin falls victim to the assumptions that have long been made by historians outside the field of the history of sexuality about working-class and non-metropolitan attitudes towards homosexuality and same sex desire. He paints a bleak picture of life for homosexual men where ordinary people saw their preference as 'disgusting' and where 'metropolitan upper and upper middle-class male homosexuals were able to survive more successfully than men in other social classes [and presumably places]'.<sup>58</sup> This thesis challenges such assumptions about working-class sexual practice and attitudes towards same sex desire.

What the majority of these diverse histories agree on is that throughout the period of this thesis, class affected all parts of day-to-day life for ordinary people, particularly in the north of England. Ideas of identity, belonging and community were rooted in class and working-class culture was often a driving force for how working people lived their material and emotional lives. It has often been assumed that working-class masculinity in this period was rooted in a culture of violence, drinking and womanising and this has obscured the prevalence of sexual fluidity that seems to have been common for many

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<sup>57</sup> Examples of traditional studies of the working-classes as opposed to more specialist work in the primary fields outlined above: Brad Beavan, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men in Britain, 1850-1945* (Manchester and New York, 2005); Bourke, *Working Class Cultures*; Andrew Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working-class culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939* (Buckingham and Philadelphia, 1992); Trevor Griffiths, *The Lancashire Working Classes c.1880-1930* (Oxford, 2001); Stephen Humphries, *Hooligans or Rebels? An Oral History of Working-Class Childhood and Youth 1889-1939* (Oxford, 1984, first published 1981); Benjamin Jones, 'Neighbourhood, Family and Home: the working-class experience in twentieth century Brighton', PhD thesis (University of Sussex, 2008); McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*; Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*; Mike Savage and Andrew Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working Class 1840-1940* (London and New York, 1994); Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1982* (Cambridge, 1998, first published 1983).

<sup>58</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, pp.321-322.

working-class men in the north.<sup>59</sup> For the men and women that lived in the north in this period, class was not simply an economic consideration nor was it a category of division linked to left-wing politics. Working people's emotional lives as well as their attitude towards authority and the state were almost unconsciously shaped by their class, as were their moral codes and standards. A respect for the privacy and primacy of the individual was rooted in the kind of lifestyle that left very little opportunity for privacy and pleasure on a day to day basis. Daily material worries and the hardships of day-to-day life ensured that there was generally little time or space for moral or philosophical conflicts linked to issues of sexuality and private behaviour.

Intrinsically linked to ideas of class and working-class identity was work itself. The importance of the workplace, workplace culture and the homosocial environment that this created cannot be underestimated when attempting to understand how working men saw themselves in this period. Although this has been acknowledged before, what has been overlooked are the emotional and sexual implications of the workplace in a working man's life.<sup>60</sup> This is demonstrated in this thesis by the prevalence of sexual and emotional relationships between men from the same workplace and in the workplace itself. In a non-sexual context, it also becomes clear that before and sometimes after marriage, the workplace was the emotional focus of a man's life and his mates could often provide him with the sort of emotional and physical support that was not provided by a wife or girlfriend.

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<sup>59</sup> Humphries, *Hooligans or Rebels?*, pp.17-18.

<sup>60</sup> Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures*, pp.44, 130-135. Bourke acknowledges that work was central to working men's notions of their own masculinity but does not go on to analyse what impact this could have had on the emotional and sexual lives of men.

## Sources and methodology

This thesis draws on a wide range of source materials to investigate how working men experienced their sexuality in this period. The very nature of the research means that the type and location of sources has been a work in progress throughout the study. A large and diverse source base has been investigated and although a full examination of the advantages and disadvantages of each type of source material is impossible here, a short overview of the methodological approach to each type is needed. This thesis focuses on five main source types: court records, press material, oral history interviews, published social research and the Edward Carpenter archive. It has a particular focus on achieving a balance between solid archival research and how men experienced their lives both in and out of the shadow of the law.

### Court records

Court records relating to homosexual offences have been used to form the backbone of this thesis. In the early stages of research, it became clear that not only was it impossible to cover the local Magistrates' Court and Quarter Sessions records for such a large geographical area, but that after using Sheffield as an example little evidence would be found there. For example for the ten year period from 1895 to 1905, no cases involving homosexual offences were tried at Sheffield Magistrates' Court or Quarter Sessions. The reason for this was that the vast majority of homosexual cases were sent to be tried at the



Assizes Courts due to the perceived severity of the crime.<sup>61</sup> The Northern Circuit was held at Manchester, Liverpool and Lancaster and the North-Eastern Circuit was held at Leeds, York, Durham, Newcastle and occasionally Northumberland. Men from these cities and the surrounding counties who were prosecuted for committing homosexual offences were sent to the nearest Assize Court for trial. Judges from the capital would travel around the country to sit at these courts but juries would be made up from local people.

The survival of records from these Assizes is sometimes patchy. Indictment files survive throughout the period except for the years 1891 to 1923 for the North-Eastern Circuit where the files were destroyed in the Second World War. No Crown Minute books survive for the North-Eastern Circuit for the years 1890 to 1920 having also been erroneously destroyed during the Second World War. Deposition files relating to homosexual cases (which contain the most detail relating to the circumstances of individual cases) remain elusive until the end of the period. Depositions relating to murder, infanticide and riot are available throughout the period but it is not until the end of the 1940s that the odd buggery or gross indecency case has survived. Out of those that remain from the period, eight have been available to analyse with two of those being irrelevant as they related to cases of bestiality. Those that were unable to be accessed are closed under the Freedom of Information Act and will remain so

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<sup>61</sup> Little has been written about the structure and workings of the Assizes Court Circuits, particularly in the twentieth century. On the establishment of the Assizes Circuits in England, see J.S. Cockburn, *A History of the English Assizes, 1558-1714* (Cambridge, 1972). For a brief explanation of the context and workings of the Victorian Assize Circuits see David Bentley, *English Criminal Justice in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1998), pp.51-56.

until the dates specified on the files for release.<sup>62</sup> For the earlier part of the period, Home Office records that collate all the Assizes Court cases for each year were available making research slightly more straightforward. For the 1930s onwards, access to these records has been denied therefore the same information has been taken directly from the indictment files (and on one occasion from Crown Minute Books) for later years.

Because of the nature of the indictment files - they are not catalogued or sorted and are kept in boxes in no particular order - and the volume of material I have sampled the records at five year intervals. The sample years used are as follows: 1895, 1900, 1905, 1910, 1915, 1920, 1929, 1935, 1940, 1945, 1950, and 1955. The year 1929 has been used instead of 1930 due to records relating to 1930 being in use by a separate government department during research trips made to Kew. There is no reason to believe that this will affect the quality of the data collected. For the year 1955, when findings from the Northern and North-Eastern Circuits did not fit the pattern that had developed, the records for the Chester and Wales Circuit was cross checked to ensure the accuracy of the findings. For each of these years, every record has been examined and only those relating directly to homosexual offences have been used. Distinctions in the records between, for example, indecent assault on a male or female or buggery with a man, woman or animal are clear. From the Home Office records it was possible to glean the name, age, occupation and mental ability of the men charged along with the type of offence committed, where and when it was

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<sup>62</sup> I have submitted three separate Freedom of Information Act requests to have these documents opened but have been turned down on all occasions. Until the men involved and their immediate families have died, access will not be granted. The references for the requests are as follows: F0024987 29 April 2010, F0028114 & F0028115 19 April 2011 and F0031561 13 June 2012.

committed and the outcome of the trial. The indictment files provided the same information except the age, occupation and mental ability of the prosecuted. The 1915 Indictments Act, 1915 5 & 6 Geo. 5c. 90, was enacted to simplify Indictment documents and in some areas this had the effect of limiting the already small amount of information included on the document.<sup>63</sup>

A problem that must be surmounted when dealing with legal records, particularly when researching sexuality, is that relating to the criminalisation of the subject. On their own, these records (depositions notwithstanding) seem to offer little relating to the experience of men outside the confines of the legal system. Therefore, one must not get caught up in the act committed and the punishment given. Where age and occupation information are available, a picture can be drawn of the type of men that were being prosecuted, where location information remains, it can be seen where men went to meet and have sex with other men: was it only in big cities? It can be seen whether underage boys were involved or whether the encounter was consensual. On later indictments, the witnesses involved in the case are recorded on the back of the documents so it can be seen whether the men were caught by the police, whether there had been a complaint from a member of the public or whether a man involved in the case had made a complaints. In those cases involving underage boys, it can be seen whether a parent or family had complained to the police.<sup>64</sup> Court records provide a starting point that can then be fleshed out with

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<sup>63</sup> This was the case in infanticide cases where the location of the crime could not be pinpointed see Daniel Grey, 'Discourses of Infanticide in England, 1880-1922', PhD thesis (Roehampton University, 2009), p.8. However, in the case of homosexual offences, this does not seem to be the case as individual towns, cities and even villages are named in the documents.

<sup>64</sup> In these cases, the list of witnesses is usually large and includes family members and a long list of unidentified names. This suggests the type of community policing in working-class areas discussed by Louise Jackson in *Child Abuse in Victorian England*.

other sources. Newspapers are vital to this task as in many cases, the court reports that were printed in their pages provide the only surviving details of what is described in the indictment files.

### Newspapers

Newspapers have proven to be a surprisingly rich source for this thesis. Much has been written about the absence of discussion about homosexuality in the press until the post-Second World War period yet information is visible before this period when one looks in the right places.<sup>65</sup> Most existing research has focussed on the national press but it is the local press where a wealth of information relating to homosexual trials can be found. Newspapers have been used in three ways in this thesis: to study local reaction to the Wilde trials, to gauge normal levels of coverage relating to homosexuality in the north in the national and local press and to follow up on particular cases found in the Assizes Court records. They have been used to get a picture of the kind of public discourse on homosexuality that northern people accepted and as a rich source of detail to accompany that gleaned from the archives.

To evaluate the impact of the Wilde trials in the north, *The Manchester Guardian* was researched using rigorous keyword searches and the *Manchester Times*, *The Sheffield Telegraph*, *The Evening Telegraph and Star* and *The Sheffield Independent* were researched on microfilm, day by day throughout the period of the trials. To get a picture of how often news relating to homosexuality appeared in print throughout the period the *Manchester Guardian* was researched for the

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<sup>65</sup> Although, as stated previously, the work of Harry Cocks has already disproven this notion for the nineteenth century.

entire period, again using rigorous keyword searches and the *News of the World* was researched with the help of the cataloguing done by archivists at LAGNA. It is notoriously difficult to locate information relating to homosexuality in the press pre-1950s without being aware of the language of euphemism. Keyword searches included: buggery, sodomy, indecency, unnatural offences, gross indecency, effeminate, effeminacy and various names and places found within the court records. LAGNA has a library of 200,000 newspaper cuttings from the 'straight' press relating to LGBT history. Those from 1937-1969 have been indexed and catalogued by regional area to which they relate. This has allowed me to see many relevant articles from the *News of the World* relating to the north of England. With more time, it would be of immense benefit to visit the archive to see the un-indexed articles from pre-1937 but that has not been possible. As the local press is held on microfilm, it was outside the time constraints of the thesis to examine each paper for the entire period, therefore I sampled the *Manchester Times*, *The Sheffield Telegraph*, and *The Sheffield Independent* in the years 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931, 1941, 1951.<sup>66</sup> For these years, every page of each newspaper was examined. To gain further information on individual trials, all the above newspapers were utilised as well as *The Rotherham Advertiser* and *The Barnsley Chronicle*. It is acknowledged that newspapers could be guided by the motives of owners, editors or individual journalists and the reader's motivations for reading and what they both read and understood varied.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> In 1938, *The Sheffield Telegraph* and *The Sheffield Independent* merged into *The Sheffield Telegraph and Independent*.

<sup>67</sup> The problem of establishing what people read and how they received it in using newspapers as an historical source is an accepted trial of the field, see Adrian Bingham, *Family Newspapers? Sex, Private Life, and the British Popular Press 1918-1978* (Oxford, 2009), p.8.

Newspapers are an important source material, particularly for the period covered here. It can be argued that they had an impact on shaping the public's ideals and opinions relating to family life, gender and sexuality.<sup>68</sup> Economic circumstances were not a barrier to people having access to newspapers and the vast majority of adults read a paper regularly - with two thirds of adults seeing a paper every day by the 1930s.<sup>69</sup> By the early 1920s, the circulation of national daily newspapers had overtaken that of the local press and peaked at 16.71 million by the end of the period in 1957.<sup>70</sup> However, the importance of the local press in northern working-class communities must not be underestimated. Many northern towns and cities remained isolated from the capital and national culture well into the twentieth century.<sup>71</sup> This often resulted in a distrust of and lack of interest in the national press and a tendency to prefer the more localised news of the provincial papers. With circulation figures and a crowded marketplace in mind, national newspapers had to bear their readership in mind when deciding what content to publish.<sup>72</sup> After all, if content did not match the views and aspirations of the readership, people could choose to stop buying a paper altogether. This was even more important for local newspapers that had smaller circulations and a closer link to and understanding of the community in which they were trying to sell their product. If attitudes expressed within the pages of local papers proved unpopular enough to affect readership, this could have been disastrous for the continuing success of the business.

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<sup>68</sup> On the importance of the press and its relation to these areas, see Bingham, *Family Newspapers?*, pp.1-10,15-28; Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press*, pp.8-12.

<sup>69</sup> Bingham, *Family Newspapers?*, p.16.

<sup>70</sup> Colin Seymour-Ure, *The British Press and Broadcasting Since 1945* (2nd edn, London, 1996), pp.16-18.

<sup>71</sup> Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, pp.345-346.

<sup>72</sup> Bingham, *Family Newspapers?*, pp.8-9.

## The Edward Carpenter Archive

The Edward Carpenter Archive is familiar to many historians working in the field of sexuality and much has been written about Carpenter himself.<sup>73</sup> However, the archive contains a wealth of information written about and *by* Carpenter's working-class friends and lovers. What also becomes clear when reading the letters and unpublished material in the archive alongside Carpenter's published works is the importance of the north to both Carpenter and his vision of sexuality as laid out in *Towards Democracy*, *Homogenic Love* and *The Intermediate Sex*.<sup>74</sup> The vision of same-sex love and affection that he sent out into the world in these texts was rooted in his immersion in and respect for the working-class culture and traditions that he had experienced in the north. His idealised notion of the working man transformed into Forster's idealised worker in *Maurice*; this in turn became the idealised working-class boy that Isherwood, Spender and Auden searched for in Weimar Germany, before being transformed into the rough trade that became the sexual holy grail for men like Montagu and Gielgud in 1950s London. This enticing and enduring stalwart of gay culture began his life in industrial South Yorkshire.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Tony Brown (ed.), *Edward Carpenter and Late Victorian Radicalism* (London, 1990), Emile Delavenay, *D.H.Lawrence and Edward Carpenter: A Study in Edwardian Transition* (London, 1971), Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter, A Life of Liberty and Love* (London and New York, 2008), Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks, *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* (London, 1977), Chushichi Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter 1844-1929: Prophet of Human Fellowship* (Cambridge, 1980),

<sup>74</sup> In particular see Carpenter's unpublished reminiscences of his early days in Sheffield, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 253, 254; Edward Carpenter, 'George Merrill: A True History and Study in Psychology', unpublished manuscript, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 363-17 and letters to his University friend Charles George Oates, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 351-30 to 351-64.

<sup>75</sup> See Chapter Two.

The letters written to Carpenter by his two serious working-class lovers, George Hukin and George Merrill, other friends, casual flings and working men who had been inspired by his writing tell a unique story in authentic voices. It is unusual in this period to hear the voices of working-class men who were involved in relationships with other men. They usually just appear as characters and conquests in the stories of middle and upper-class writers mentioned previously. The analysis of these pieces of correspondence provides an understanding of how some northern working-men at the time were able to experience their sexuality and what this meant to their sense of self and place within the community. Uncatalogued within the archive is a copy of a government document from 1906 relating to surveillance of Carpenter and Merrill that was ordered by the Metropolitan Police and grudgingly carried out by local police. This provides an invaluable snapshot of local attitudes towards homosexuality. A myriad of press cuttings relating to Carpenter and his memory have also been preserved in the archive, again these provide snapshots of local opinion of Carpenter and the unusual way that he and Merrill lived their lives.

### Social research and oral history interviews

To complement the research done using court records and the press, social research and oral history interviews have been analysed. These types of sources give rich insight into how people lived their lives and offer a level of personal detail that cannot be found in more institutional and public records. Using the two types of source together helps to mitigate the inherent problems that can occur when they are used separately. Oral histories provide an opportunity for individuals' voices to be heard (although the influence of the



interviewer must be remembered) while social research gives a picture of a greater number of people, usually from the same community or workplace. As well as indicating individual experiences, this sort of research often highlights and explores the complex ties inherent in working-class society and culture.

In terms of social research two main studies have been selected for use in this thesis: *The Equipment Of The Workers: An Enquiry By The St Philip's*

*Settlement Education And Research Society Into The Adequacy Of The Adult Manual Workers For The Discharge Of Their Responsibilities As Heads Of Household, Producers And Citizens* and *The Worker in an Affluent Society*.<sup>76</sup>

The former was conducted between 1917 and 1919 in Sheffield to attempt to understand how working-class people in the city understood themselves and their place in society. The latter was undertaken in 1958 to attempt to understand how affluence had affected the lives of working-class people in five locations. Two of these were northern, one of them being the River Don Works of the English Steel Corporation Ltd in Sheffield.<sup>77</sup> As many of the men interviewed in *The Equipment Of The Workers* worked in the steel industry, the Zweig survey provides an excellent follow up to understand the impact of the intervening forty years, and the emergence of affluence, on these men and the local community as a whole.<sup>78</sup> The depth of information in these studies gives an unique view of how working-class communities operated in two distinct periods of time and helps to illustrate how men responded to ideas of class and

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<sup>76</sup> St Philips Education and Research Society, *The Equipment Of The Workers*; Zweig, *Worker in an Affluent Society*.

<sup>77</sup> Zweig, *Worker in an Affluent Society*, p.ix.

<sup>78</sup> As the interviews for *The Equipment Of The Workers* were undertaken between 1917 and 1919, the majority of men questioned were those that remained at home due to working in a reserved occupation at the steel works. Of course, those men of fighting age that worked elsewhere and were fit would have been conscripted to the army.

masculinity in often unforeseen ways. They also serve to highlight strands of continuity as much as those of change.

Oral history interviews can be problematic yet are invaluable when writing the history of homosexuality in this period. When studying working-class men, it is unlikely that many of them would have chosen to write down their thoughts and feelings about having sex with other men, particularly at a time when such evidence would have been incriminating in court and, as this thesis argues, when they did not subscribe to a conscious identity or way of thinking about their sex lives. Where love letters have survived as part of criminal evidence in Metropolitan Police files, the same cannot be said of the north. As mentioned before, such supplementary evidence from the northern Assizes has been destroyed - leaving the researcher frustrated when newspaper reports of large trials refer to love letters and photographs. A reasonably large collection of interviews have been published by historians, film makers, sociologists and gay groups and some working-class northern voices have reappeared thanks to their efforts.<sup>79</sup> It must be recognised that many of the men interviewed were in old age and this raises questions regarding the clarity of their memories and the potential to view youth with rose-tinted glasses and with the experiences of the

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<sup>79</sup> Paul Baker & Jo Stanley, *Hello Sailor! The Hidden History of Gay Life at Sea* (London, 2003); Bob Cant & Susan Hemmings (eds), *Radical Records: Thirty Years of Lesbian and Gay History* (London, 1988); Hall Carpenter Archives Gay Men's Oral History Group, *Walking After Midnight: Gay Men's Life Stories* (London, 1989); Steve Humphries & Pamela Gordon, *A Man's World: From Boyhood to Manhood 1900-1960* (London, 1996); Steve Humphries & Pamela Gordon, *Forbidden Britain: Our Secret Past 1900-1960* (London, 1994); Steve Humphries & Pamela Gordon, *A Secret World of Sex* (London, 1998); Jivani, *It's Not Unusual*; National Lesbian and Gay Survey, *Proust, Cole Porter, Michelangelo, Marc Almond and me: Writings by Gay Men on Their Lives and Lifestyles* (London, 1993); *Tales From Out in the City: An Anthology of Memories* (Manchester, 2009); Jeffrey Weeks and Kevin Porter (eds), *Between the Acts: Lives of Homosexual Men 1885-1967* (London, 1998). In the cases of the Steve Humphries collections, *Between the Acts*, *Walking After Midnight* and *Hello Sailor!*, the original transcripts and recordings of many interviews are available to access in the Carpenter Hall Archives, the British Sound Archive and at Testimony Films. There are also a number of relevant interviews with old soldiers at the Imperial War Museum. Using the original interviews was outside the scope and time frame of this thesis but would be a future line of research to pursue.

intervening years borne in mind. However, Szreter and Fisher have noted in their own study based entirely on oral history interviews that 'the dialogue with the present' that is a part of oral history interviews can be a positive thing. They argue that having an interviewee engage with the facts of the past and how things have changed in the present can tell the historian much about what has both changed and stayed the same - particularly relating to sensitive topics such as sex.<sup>80</sup>

### Other sources

Finally, in order to understand whether homosexuality was a topic of concern to northern authorities, Hansard records and police reports have been researched. As the Hansard records are now available online, I was able to examine the contributions to the House of Commons made by every MP from Sheffield and Manchester during the period. This ensured that any references to homosexuality or related issues could be found. In order to see how northern police forces responded to homosexual men and any dictates from the capital, Sheffield's annual police reports were analysed.<sup>81</sup> The only surviving volumes from this period cover the years 1935-1958 with 1941-1946 missing due to a break in production during the war. However, these are the years when the most changes seem to have occurred both in styles of policing and numbers of prosecutions - such documents give vital clue as to why these changes occurred.

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<sup>80</sup> Szreter and Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution*, pp.11-14.

<sup>81</sup> City of Sheffield Police and Auxiliary Services Annual Reports 1935 - 1940 (Sheffield Local Studies Library 352.2S), these are the only surviving volumes of the document. Police Constables Reports 1948 - 1958 (Sheffield Local Studies Library), 1948 is the earliest surviving volume.

## Structure

This thesis is divided into three sections 1895 to 1918, 1919 to 1938 and 1939 to 1957, with two chapters per section. One chapter in each section will deal with the responses of the authorities and the media to homosexual issues (through analysing the press, court records and policing methods) and one chapter will deal with the more personal experiences of men who desired other men (through letters, oral histories, social research and a closer reading of the official documents mentioned previously). Chapter Two analyses the responses of the northern press to the trials of Oscar Wilde and assesses the homosexual prosecution statistics for the period. Chapter Three examines northern masculinity at the start of the period, the working-class circle of Edward Carpenter and looks more closely at the personal detail that can be gleaned from the press and court records. Chapter Four analyses the relatively unknown piece of social research *The Equipment of the Workers*, considers the impact of the depression on northern men and their social landscape and takes an in depth look at the 1936 Altrincham trial - one of the largest (if not the largest) trial for homosexual offences in modern British history. Chapter Five looks at inter-war policing in the north, prosecutions for homosexual offences and how the local press continued to write about such cases. Chapter Six analyses two large trials that took place in South Yorkshire in 1954 and a variety of oral history interviews and life stories that shed light on the personal experiences of northern men. Chapter Seven examines changes in local policing, court records and prosecution statistics (including the only surviving deposition files for the period), the local and national press and the work done by Richard Hoggart and

Ferdynand Zweig. And finally, Chapter Eight reflects on the thesis and offers some conclusions.

### Summary

This thesis places the interaction between sexuality, masculinity, class and the primacy of work at the heart of how working men understood themselves in the period. The seemingly surprising way in which many men interpreted a fluid meaning of sexuality was rooted as much in their class as in the region in which they lived. Class allows for some similarities between the experiences of men but a northern identity highlighted just as many differences to the men living in the capital or further afield. Amongst northern working men, 'normality' and 'good character' was not necessarily disrupted by same sex desire. As long as a man was a good, reliable worker, many other potential transgressions could be forgiven or overlooked. This type of tolerance of (or ambivalence to) same sex desire was shaken by affluence and the increased visibility of men with a clear sexuality from the 1950s and into the era of decriminalisation. As Houlbrook has argued, the strength of identity and desire for visibility that men newly displayed ensured that old understandings of and attitudes towards men who had sex with other men were wiped away.<sup>82</sup> It could be argued that this was even more the case in the north, where restraint and privacy were valued in working-class communities and amongst homosexual men alike.<sup>83</sup> This thesis will argue that it was perhaps not the fact that working-men had sex with other working-men on a seemingly regular basis that transgressed the moral and societal codes of the

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<sup>82</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, p.270.

<sup>83</sup> Cant and Hemmings (eds), *Radical Records*, p.76.

northern working-classes, but rather that it was the emergence of a sexual identity challenging the primacy of work in the creation of a man's selfhood that undermined old patterns of acceptance and indifference. Naming and attaching thoughts, actions and meaning to same sex desire ensured that apparent traditions of sexual fluidity could no longer exist quietly and in parallel to those of family and heterosexual relationships. By the end of the 1950s and 1960s, men were forced to choose where their desires lay, it was no longer possible or desirable to act on instinct without considering the implications of those actions to one's sexual and masculine identity.

## **Chapter Two: 'The love that dare not speak its name'? Public understandings of same-sex desire in the north, 1895 - 1918**

The period between 1895 and the end of the First World War has been seen as crucial to understanding the development of both sexuality and masculinity and alongside this, it has also been convincingly argued that 'the early twentieth century was a time of crisis and transition in masculinity and femininity'.<sup>1</sup> As noted in Chapter One, the trials of Oscar Wilde are often cited as a key moment in the shaping of a homosexual identity.<sup>2</sup> For the first time a man was portrayed in the most public manner as more than the sum of his sexual acts. He was not just a 'sodomite' as the Marquis of Queensberry accused, he was a particular sexual type, a man who built his life around loving other men. What he wore, how he spoke, what he read and how he decorated his rooms were just as important to this categorisation as what he got up to in the bedroom.<sup>3</sup> After the trials finished green carnations, velvet drapes and incense became signifiers of sexual practice rather than examples of eccentric home decor. By partaking in this kind of visual culture, men were given the opportunity to become part of a subculture and identify themselves with Wilde and his circle.<sup>4</sup> However it is clear that these options would not have been available to working-class men with little money or privacy: outside the choice of his sexual partners Wilde's world was one of luxury and money.

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<sup>1</sup> Alison Oram, *Her husband Was a Woman: Women's gender-crossing in modern British popular culture* (London and New York, 2007), p.17.

<sup>2</sup> Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914* (Cambridge and New York, 2003), p.119; Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London, 1977), p.2. Cook references both Alan Sinfield and Ed Cohen as proponents of the view that Wilde's conviction provided a key moment of definition for homosexual men.

<sup>3</sup> Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality*, p.118.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, pp.120-121, Philip Hoare, *Wilde's Last Stand, Decadence, Conspiracy & The First World War* (London, 1997), p.5.

Alongside work done by sexologists, this creation of Wilde as both myth and prototype homosexual has been seen as the impetus that many other men needed to begin creating their own sexual identities.<sup>5</sup> Cocks has confirmed this interpretation:

The 1890s represent a key moment in the history of homosexuality, when, it is generally argued, what had been a nameless crime became visible, identifiable as modern, and subject to new scrutiny and investigation.<sup>6</sup>

This reading of the period suggests that men who desired other men came into contact both with new public discourses about homosexuality through the newspapers and the output of the sexologists, and the kind of subculture that Wilde made infamous. This could have been the case for men in London and those of the middle and upper-classes outside the capital with the ability to access its nightlife and the expensive and often privately printed volumes of Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis. But what about working-class men in the north of England where no commercial subculture was available and access to such expensive and controversial books was almost impossible (and potentially undesirable)? Cocks has argued that the focus on Wilde and his decadent contemporaries has obscured 'other sources of knowledge and identity and has concentrated on the combination of sexual science and an effeminate Wildean archetype as the epitome of the "modern homosexual"'.<sup>7</sup> This focus has meant

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<sup>5</sup> H. G. Cocks, *Nameless Offences, Homosexual Desire in the 19th Century* (London and New York, 2003), p.158.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.158-159. This argument follows on from Sinfield's assertion that 'the Victorian explorations of diverse models of same-sex relations' were cut off by Wilde's emergence as a typical homosexual in Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment* (London, 1994) p.125.



that the 'modern homosexual' was created in the metropolitan, upper-class image of Wilde. His experiences 'provided historians with the paradigm of the persecuted homosexual' and the categories of "renters", sodomites and their clients'.<sup>8</sup>

How useful then is this reading of the period when applied to the north of England? Cocks has acknowledged the dangers of such a focus on metropolitan experience and has begun to rectify this with his analysis of a group of middle-class men from Bolton, Lancashire who saw themselves as disciples of Whitman and Carpenter.<sup>9</sup> Their letters show a different understanding rooted in the apparently chaste, comradely and intensely idealistic version of love between men that was displayed by Whitman in his poetry. These men were about as far from Wilde and his friends as it was possible to get. However, the lives and restrained loves of the Bolton Whitmanites prove to be problematic when considering how the majority of northern men with an attraction towards their own sex led their lives. It is doubtful whether any of the circle acted on their desires, it seems that they chose to spend their time talking about and justifying same-sex love rather than experiencing it. As the rest of this thesis will show, many northern working men seem to have acted on their desires and spent little time analysing them. Although discussion of this group highlights a non-metropolitan experience of sexual identity that can run counter to that linked to Wilde, it offers little insight into how working men experienced their sexuality. Chapters Two and Three will argue that the Wilde trials and the work of the sexologists had very little impact

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<sup>8</sup> Cocks, *Nameless Offences*, p.159.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, pp.157-199.

on working-class men and that they were generally able to have sex with each other without disrupting traditional notions of male identity and with little interference from the authorities.

The impact of the Wilde trials outside of the capital has never been properly considered. This chapter will analyse the local press coverage of the trials in Sheffield and Manchester to address this gap in the historiography. In doing so, it will argue that the northern reporting of the Wilde trials and the sexual and social issues they raised was distinctive and responded to local concerns and preoccupations. Following this both the focus of the police forces and the levels of prosecution for homosexual offences in the north will be considered. This will make it apparent how important regionality was to how men experienced their sexuality and to how the authorities prosecuted them for it. This chapter will also assess whether the aftermath of the trials had any impact on levels of prosecution or whether, as in the capital, the number of men that were arrested remained unaffected by the scandal.

### The role of the press

In the period before the First World War, national newspapers were not the most popular form of print media in the provinces. The local press was still dominant in both shaping and reflecting the views of particular areas and it was not until 1923 that the combined circulation of the national press passed that of the local press.<sup>10</sup> This was particularly pertinent in the north, where at this stage, different regions were demarcated by their own specific cultures. The values and

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<sup>10</sup> Adrian Bingham, *Family Newspapers?: Sex, Private Life, and the British Popular Press 1918-1978* (Oxford, 2009), p2.

traditions inherent in the inhabitants of individual towns and cities could make a small geographical distance between them seem both difficult and undesirable to cross.<sup>11</sup> Rose's study delivers many accounts of the insularity of northern, working-class towns during this period. It was common for people to never leave their own communities and for many, leaving the county was a real stretch. Even by the late 1950s when Hoggart was writing and modes of transport had become affordable for most working-class people, many travelled infrequently and stayed close to home.

Newspapers were important in shaping and reflecting the culture of cities, especially regarding sexuality as no other information was readily available during this period.<sup>12</sup> In order to gather a more nuanced reading of how northern newspapers reported on the Wilde trials, newspapers in Sheffield and Manchester have been examined. In 1895 (and for decades after), Sheffield was a self-contained and insular city with a tradition of 'independence of spirit... rebelliousness [and] opposition to central authority'.<sup>13</sup> It has been called the 'largest village in England' and sociologists and historians alike have commented on the pronounced sense of working-class community and the "enclave mentality and what was certainly a very resistant culture, a culture that controlled itself" that has dominated the city.<sup>14</sup> Manchester was more cosmopolitan, with links both to the capital and further afield due in part to the

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy, Aspects of Working-Class Life* (London, 2009, first published 1957), pp.45-57; Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, Connecticut and London, 2001), pp.343-350.

<sup>12</sup> Bingham, *Family Newspapers?*, p.3.

<sup>13</sup> Sidney Pollard and Colin Holmes (eds), *Essays in the Economic and Social History of South Yorkshire* (Barnsley, 1976), pp.5-6.

<sup>14</sup> Ian Taylor, Karen Evans and Penny Fraser, *Global Change, Local Feeling and Everyday Life in the North of England: A Tale of Two Cities; A Study in Manchester and Sheffield* (London, 1996), p.39.

number of foreign migrants who settled there. This led to both a less well defined local world view and the position of the city as the 'capital' of the north and the only northern city that could have attempted to challenge London's dominance in politics and the arts.<sup>15</sup> This perceived aping of the capital set Manchester apart from and against the other cities of the north and these regional tensions can still be felt today.<sup>16</sup>

Many of the capital's newspapers did not take kindly to being forced to let the 'love that dare not speak its name' out of the metaphorical closet. During the late Victorian period, apart from a few well known scandals, there was consensus amongst the press to remain almost silent on homosexual matters.<sup>17</sup> The editors as well as the political establishment were convinced that unleashing what were perceived as dangerous levels of sexual knowledge on the general populace would lead to a decline in morals; and an upsurge in men, who once aware that they could sleep with other men, would have dashed off to try it.<sup>18</sup> In fact, in 1896 after the dramatic levels of press coverage of the Wilde trials, the Lord Chancellor, Lord Halsbury presented the Publication of Indecent Evidence Bill to the House of Lords in an attempt to make the publication of details relating to trials for homosexual offences illegal.<sup>19</sup> Ironically, the bill was rejected due to worries that making the issue public would only serve to

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<sup>15</sup> Dave Russell, *Looking North, Northern England and the national imagination* (Manchester and New York, 2004), pp.20-21.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Sean Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861-1913* (Basingstoke and New York, 2009, first published 2005), p.27. The scandals referred to here are of course Cleveland Street and the Fanny and Stella trial.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.42.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

highlight homosexuality and encourage more men to try it!<sup>20</sup> It was decided that the unofficial policing of content that the press had been carrying out was the safest way to proceed. What this almost comedic situation highlighted was the deep-seated belief held within the establishment that *any* man was susceptible to desiring another man.<sup>21</sup> The authorities knew well that sex between men was far more prevalent than the newspaper scandals suggested but it was only when these incidents were reported along with evidence of sexual identity (as in the case of Wilde) that they provided a challenge to English masculinity and social order. This acknowledgement that all men had the potential to desire other men alongside other, more traditional expressions of their sexuality and masculinity will be revisited throughout the thesis.

The vitriolic press coverage in many of the capital's newspapers led to a wave of public outcry against anything seen as effete or unmanly. This press-driven outrage did not, however, lead to an increase in arrests under the Criminal Law Amendment Act although it did make it harder for men to continue to meet and engage in homosexual activity since the beady eyes of the general public were arguably now looking to catch them at it.<sup>22</sup> The major London papers carried editorials and reader's letters condemning Wilde and his vices and they also printed in gleeful detail Mr Justice Will's fire and brimstone summing up that it was 'the worst case that I have ever tried' and that the maximum sentence of two years hard with labour was 'totally inadequate' as punishment.<sup>23</sup> But what did northern newspapers make of the scandal? Was Wilde portrayed as an

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p.43.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>22</sup> Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality*, p120.

<sup>23</sup> H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (New York, 1973), p.272.

example of metropolitan vice or were the trials ignored in an illustration of complicit press silence?

### Sheffield's newspapers and the trials of Oscar Wilde

In 1895, there were three major daily newspapers in circulation in Sheffield, *The Sheffield Telegraph*, *The Evening Telegraph and Star* and *The Sheffield Independent*. The *Telegraph* was founded in 1855 and in 1864 was taken over by two heavyweights of the Conservative party who aimed to popularise the party amongst the working classes, a difficult aim in such a traditionally radical area. Its political aims were certainly not fulfilled but its financial success was complete. By 1898 it was claiming to circulate 125,000 copies per week.<sup>24</sup> The *Independent* was situated at the other end of the political scale and had been a popular radical paper since 1819. It became a daily in 1861 and was the only other publication to challenge the high circulation of the *Telegraph*.<sup>25</sup> *The Evening Telegraph and Star* was a broadsheet that began life in 1887 and carried a slightly gossipy tone. Due to the lack of comment in current literature about the impact of the Wilde trials outside London, it could be inferred that there was little coverage in the provincial newspapers and that what coverage there was would paint Wilde's indiscretions as an example of metropolitan vice and as something neither seen nor heard of in the provinces. This was not the case. All three papers carried detailed coverage of the trials with a surprising amount of candour and lack of open judgement. There was also surprisingly little to differentiate between the tone of the coverage. Regardless of which

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<sup>24</sup> Clyde Binfield, David Hey, Richard Childs, David Martin, Roger Harper and Geoffrey Tweedale (eds), *The History of the City of Sheffield 1843-1993: Images* (Sheffield, 1993), p.26.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

newspaper was bought or read, the reader would have seen a similar representation of proceedings, although the material in the *Star* was a trifle more salacious.

Before this coverage is examined, the trials need to be put into context.

Although the level of detail pertaining to the case was unusual, the reporting of stories involving transgressive sexual behaviour was not. As will be discussed in the analysis of the *Star*, cross-dressing men and women featured fairly regularly in the local press.<sup>26</sup> Heterosexual impropriety was reported on a regular basis but, perhaps surprisingly, language that has come to be associated with homosexual cases was often used to describe it. For example, readers were told of a church minister's 'grave conduct' and 'grave impropriety'.<sup>27</sup> These 'grave' offences were committed with a woman. Other 'grave offences' that were reported during the period included child abuse, infanticide and being in possession of an army stove. However, sex between adult men was not described this way. In fact, such cases seem hardly to have been reported before the 1920s.<sup>28</sup> This could have been a conscious choice made by the local press to echo the national press but it could also point to the small number of northern men who were actually prosecuted for homosexual offences in the period. It could also be evidence of local feeling that consensual sex of whatever type was not viewed as a real crime - a view that will be further

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<sup>26</sup> Alison Oram has written about the prevalence of stories in the popular press around women dressing (and passing) as men. The style of the stories in the local press follow many of the conventions Oram discusses. Oram, *Her husband Was a Woman*.

<sup>27</sup> *The Sheffield Daily Independent*, 21 May 1895, p.6.

<sup>28</sup> I refer here to a lack of evidence in the newspapers viewed in my sample as outlined in Chapter One. The only mention that I found was in the *Independent* which referred to a local man who had been charged with a 'criminal offence' but had been found not guilty and discharged. Of course, this may not have been a homosexual offence but the use of euphemism suggests that it was. *The Sheffield Daily Independent*, 27 November 1911, p.8.

evidenced in later chapters. In this respect Wilde's case was unusual but it represented a multi-layered scandal as well as a sexual act. There was opportunity here for the local press to take the moral high ground. Wilde's excesses could have been portrayed as an example of metropolitan vice as opposed to the virtuous provinces, however, this idea was never mentioned.

The trials were reported either as a news item or through the 'London Letter' features that were popular in each newspaper. These were supposed to reflect what was happening in the capital and what was fashionable or controversial. They were ostensibly written by a London-based correspondent and wired over to Sheffield daily so that readers benefitted from breaking news. In the *Telegraph's* 'London Letter' of 6 April, readers were informed that Wilde had been arrested and that:

It is also held that the official practice of allowing a criminal suspected of odious practices an opportunity of escape to avoid the pollution involved in a public trial does not apply to the case of Oscar Wilde, inasmuch as it was already before the public. As to the police view, I heard one competent authority drily remark this afternoon that while they were walking across from the Treasury to Scotland Yard, there was plenty of time for Oscar to escape.<sup>29</sup>

Here the writer of the piece made the extraordinary suggestion that it was 'official' practice to allow well-heeled men arrested for homosexual offences to escape the law. Presumably this was either to avoid scandal or because many policemen felt that there were criminals more deserving of their time. Of course, another route of escaping the law was suicide. This was usually (but not exclusively) found amongst the middle and upper-classes. Two famous examples of this were the MP Lord Arthur Clinton and Edward Brittain. Clinton

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<sup>29</sup> *The Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 6 April 1895, p.3.



was living with Ernest Boulton and became embroiled in the Boulton and Park scandal when love letters between the two men were to be used as evidence in court. He died on the day after receiving his subpoena for the trial - officially of scarlet fever but more probably he committed suicide.<sup>30</sup> Brittain, the brother of the writer Vera Brittain, officially died in battle in Italy in 1918 but in investigating her brother's death, Brittain found out that Edward had been sleeping with his men, and evidence of this had been found in the form of letters between him and another officer. It is likely that he was warned by his superior officer and committed suicide during the battle rather than facing the inevitable court martial afterwards.<sup>31</sup>

The real crime was located in the making public of something that should have remained private and not the act itself. Discretion and restraint were prized above punishing transgressive forms of sexuality. Of course, this was not possible in the case of Wilde as his scandal broke in the very public domain of the courtroom and could therefore not be covered up. David Vincent has argued that the Wilde scandal was such an annoyance to the authorities because it made it clear not only that men were having sex with other men, but that the authorities knew that men were having sex with other men.<sup>32</sup> It briefly exploded the institutionalised secrecy of the Victorian state where matters of sex were concerned. As previously stated, Sheffield's inhabitants were known to be independent and fiercely protective of privacy and individual agency so this reading of the situation would likely have resonated with the local population.

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<sup>30</sup> Graham Robb, *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 2003), p. 101.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Berry and Mark Bostridge, *Vera Brittain: A Life* (London, 1996), p.131.

<sup>32</sup> David Vincent, *The Culture of Secrecy: Britain, 1832-1998* (Oxford and New York, 1998), p. 130.

Later in the chapter and in Chapters Four and Five, the relationship between the northern working-classes and police authority will be further explored but in cities like Sheffield it was unlikely that much of the population would support the authorities in the prosecution of any but those that committed the most serious of crimes.<sup>33</sup>

In Sheffield at least, Wilde was not portrayed as a monster. He was presented as a man who, in prison, had become 'very pale and appeared to be careworn' and as the trial progressed, became more 'ill' and 'weary'.<sup>34</sup><sup>35</sup> By the 24 April, there were still advertisements on the front page for "Oscar Wilde's successful play "An Ideal Husband"" when Wilde's name had already begun to be removed from playbills and theatres in the capital.<sup>36</sup> 1 May brought a large column detailing Wilde's evidence with all the classic quotations that we have come to expect from the trials laid out for the provincial public to enjoy. His claim that his affair with Lord Alfred Douglas was 'a love not unlike that of David and Jonathan' was printed and Douglas's eponymous poetical line 'I am the love that dare not speak its name' followed.<sup>37</sup> Within the reporting of the evidence, readers were also told of the cheers from the crowd that greeted Wilde's literary, cultural and overtly homosexual references. He was shown at his dazzling best as a public speaker and not the defendant in a hideously depraved court case. This sensible and measured tone was reflected throughout the beginning of

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<sup>33</sup> In such communities, homosexuality did not tend to be classed as a serious crime unless it was combined with child abuse.

<sup>34</sup> *The Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 12 April 1895, p.2.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 20 April 1895, p.2.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 24 April 1895, p.1.

<sup>37</sup> *The Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 1 May 1895, p.1.

May after the trial collapsed due to disagreement within the jury. This disagreement culminated in the mention of the dangers of press coverage to a high profile trial. By the 8th when Wilde has been released on bail, there was worry that the third trial has been prejudiced before it could even begin. 'Letters from London' on 2 May referred to the 'tainted evidence' of the prosecution, Wilde's own clever turn on the stand and how Wilde has 'suffered acutely since his arrest and his hair has turned quite grey'.<sup>38</sup>

The overriding feeling was that the treatment Wilde received far outweighed the crime that he had allegedly committed. When the guilty verdict was delivered in the paper on 27 May, the Judge's verdict of Wilde's prison sentence being 'utterly inadequate punishment for the offences of which the prisoners have been convicted' was printed.<sup>39</sup> However, this summing up was reported alongside a large double column that pointed to 'unclean relations and appetites on both sides [referring to Alfred Douglas]'.<sup>40</sup> It also quoted a letter from Wilde to Douglas that celebrated 'the madness of kissing' that they had indulged in and highlighted the subsequent hypocrisy that allowed Douglas to escape unscathed.<sup>41</sup> It was reported that there was 'much surprise at the outcome' and that there were 'cries of "shame, shame" and hissing from the court'.<sup>42</sup> This was not a one dimensional account of the verdict. It condemned Wilde (as he had been condemned in law) but in turn measured this with the fact that not everyone was happy with the verdict and that the case was not a clear cut one.

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 2 May 1895, p.3.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 27 May 1895, p.3.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*.

As mentioned above, the *Star* had a more salacious tone. In fact between 1 April and 3 April (the first mention of the Wilde trials) the reading public had already been exuberantly told about ‘Sexmania in fiction’, ‘Masquerading as a man’ and ‘Man in woman’s attire’<sup>43</sup><sup>44</sup><sup>45</sup>. Despite this tone of ill-concealed glee at the unusual sexual elements of everyday life, the newspaper still carried a measured and intelligent reporting of the trials. There were only three editorial features in any of the papers relating to the trials and all of these appeared in the *Star*. The first was on the 5 April under the title ‘Mud Ponds’. This was the edition that carried the not guilty verdict of the first trial and the aftermath of this decision.<sup>46</sup> Page two’s ‘Chit Chat’ section, censured two London newspapers, *The London Chronicle* and *The St James Gazette* for ‘Hushing the case up’ and ‘in view of the turn the case has taken [from libel to prosecution for gross indecency] decline to publish reports of it’.<sup>47</sup> The editorial piece took up this censure and, bravely for its day, stated that the press had a duty to report all cases in the public interest, even those of a ‘disgusting and loathsome character’.<sup>48</sup> Importantly this was still seen to be the case, even if such coverage ‘opens the eyes’ of people who never knew that such vice existed and

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<sup>43</sup> *The Evening Telegraph* and *Star*, 1 April 1895, p.4.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 2 April 1895, p.2.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 3 April 1895, p.2.

<sup>46</sup> The first trial being the libel trial against the Marquis of Queensberry.

<sup>47</sup> *The Evening Telegraph* and *Star*, 5 April 1895, p.2.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*.

therefore publicly legitimated what had only been considered in private.<sup>49</sup> This was a very modern idea that built on the liberal tradition of the press and politics in the city and suggested a certain level of freedom of thought and a certain acceptance of the truth of everyday life that was shared by journalists and readers alike.

The second came on 13 April under the title 'British Hypocrisy'. It referred to the fact that theatre managers had been removing Wilde's name from their playbills but keeping his sell-out plays on at their theatres. In essence, they were benefitting financially from Wilde's newfound notoriety while he received neither financial nor artistic credit. This issue had already been addressed in the 'Chit Chat' section of the paper on the 8th which defended Wilde's plays as 'amusing and harmless' and urged readers to 'judge a man by what he is and an artist by what he produces'.<sup>50</sup> The editor stated that 'managers should not profit, if Wilde gets no credit' and lamented the hypocrisy that allowed actresses to get raised salaries for the exposure that they received in divorce cases, and the celebration of Admiral Nelson and Lord Byron, whilst allowing Wilde and his works to be condemned.<sup>51</sup> The 'London Letter' of the same issue attacked the 'folly and meanness of trying to disguise the authorship of the play they are exploiting'.<sup>52</sup> Again this was a very modern argument. It portrayed the artist and their art as separate from the man and suggested that what a person did in their

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* There could have been an element of self-interest in this stance. The *Star* had positioned itself as bearer of the truth and set itself in opposition to the questionable London press. This would have played on the feelings of readers about the strength of local identity as compared to the capital and could have emphasised a sense of superiority that was uncommon for provincial readers to come by. It also gave the paper justification for printing salacious details that would no doubt have sold extra copies.

<sup>50</sup> *The Evening Telegraph and Star*, 8 April 1895, p.2.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 April 1895, p.4.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

private life should not affect their public talents and career. This kind of liberal viewpoint again fitted with the radical and individualist tradition in the city. Evidently there was more sympathy for Wilde in the provinces than the metropolitan authorities would have liked.

The third and final editorial relating to the trials was written on the 30 May, after Wilde had been sentenced to hard labour. It questioned the validity of hard labour as a punishment in general and particularly in relation to Wilde. The *Star* asked what was the point of setting a talented and intellectual man like Wilde to mindless and menial tasks? It suggested that he (and all others undergoing the same punishment) should be set to some useful employment which used their skills and lamented the waste of talent that was being enforced on Wilde.<sup>53</sup> This was important as it located Wilde and his situation within the humanitarian arguments of the day. In keeping with this attitude, there was no reprinting of the judge's summing up condemning Wilde, just confirmation of the verdict and updates of his ill health in prison. This was a highly unusual course of action to take as a full report of the judgement of the court was nearly always provided at the end of court cases. Following the conventions of court reporting it was seen as both necessary to deter the public from attempting to commit similar crimes and as justification for printing what were usually salacious details.<sup>54</sup>

Coverage of the Wilde trials in the *Star* was extensive but this was not just due to the unprecedented nature of the case. Scandal involving the upper-classes was a draw for newspapers regardless of its origin. It also seems that sexual

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 30 April 1895, p.3.

<sup>54</sup> Bingham, *Family Newspapers?*, pp.132-133.

scandal was a common topic in the provincial press. Other cases have already been mentioned and amongst the details of boys in Wilde's bed and gifts of gold cigarette boxes there was also a taste of the implications of the trials' unwanted publicity on London's homosexual world. Two cases in particular illustrated the kind of culture that was active in the capital and had been brought to the attention of the authorities in the aftermath of Wilde's trial: 'London club raided - in Shaftesbury Avenue, 20 men arrested' and 'A Lodger's Rights to Entertain Guests'.<sup>55</sup><sup>56</sup> The former was the story of a police raid on a homosexual bar and the second was a case that asked whether it was acceptable for a young man to entertain a number of other young men in his room (luckily for him, in this case the answer was yes and he was acquitted). It is easy to imagine local readers being perplexed by the idea of a specific meeting place for homosexual men and by the idea that the authorities had any right to tell a man who he could associate with in his own rooms.

When things went quiet in Wilde's courtroom drama, his column inches were given to a society divorce scandal that was dealt with in much the same way by the local press. The Russell divorce case appeared in the press on and off until 1901 but was particularly relevant alongside the Wilde trials, as amongst claims of adultery and cruelty, accusations of homosexuality were directed at Earl Russell by his wife.<sup>57</sup> The case fascinated the public because the behaviour of the Russells transgressed just about every moral and societal code. They acted out the disintegration of their marriage in public and and made the often lax

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<sup>55</sup> *The Evening Telegraph* and *Star*, 9 April 1895, p.4.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 13 April 1895, p.4.

<sup>57</sup> Ann Sumner Holmes, "'Don't Frighten the Horses': the Russell Divorce Case", in George Robb and Nancy Erber (eds), *Disorder in the Court: Trials and Sexual Conflict at the Turn of the Century* (New York, 1999), pp.140-163.

morality of the aristocracy clear to the masses. Lady Russell accused Earl Russell of being sent down from Oxford for indecency and of sleeping with a man named Roberts. She probably hoped to capitalise on the anti-homosexual feeling generated by the Wilde trials but this backfired. Earl Russell gained the sympathy of the court and the public and Lady Russell was ostracised. Here was an example that accusations of homosexuality were not enough to ruin a man's position in society. In all other respects (whether the accusations were true or not), Russell conformed to the masculine expectations of Victorian society.

Ostensibly there was no difference between how the two cases were represented in the press. Both were examples of the upper classes bringing their private lives spectacularly into the public domain. Other examples that would have been fresh in the public consciousness were the Boulton and Park and Cleveland Street scandals referred to in Chapter One.<sup>58</sup> Both of these cases were referred to within the coverage of the Wilde and Russell trials as incidents that the provincial public would have been familiar with. Wilde's downfall was referred to as 'a worse scandal than Boulton and Park ..... On this occasion it is associated with art and culture and music and literature' and thereby presented the popular and widespread belief that homosexuality was linked to the four branches of the arts listed above.<sup>59</sup> This was also the view that was popularised by Edward Carpenter who wrote about the artistically inclined 'intermediate sex' where 'artistic' and 'musical' became euphemisms for

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<sup>58</sup> Morris B. Kaplan, 'Did "My Lord Gomorrah" Smile?: Homosexuality, Class and Prostitution in the Cleveland Street Affair' in Robb and Erber (eds), *Disorder in the Court*, pp.78-99; Morris Kaplan, *Sodom on the Thames: Sex, Love and Scandal in Wilde Times* (New York, 2005); Charles Upchurch, 'Forgetting the Unthinkable: Cross Dressers in British Society in the Case of the Queen Vs Boulton and Others', *Gender and History* 12:1 (2000), pp.127-57.

<sup>59</sup> *The Evening Telegraph* and *Star*, 8 April 1895, p.2.



homosexual. The fact that such pursuits were linked with homosexuality in the press had no impact on how they were viewed by working people. Chapter Five will show that many working men indulged in such pursuits and that they were seen as indicators of respectability and not of sexual deviance.

The tone of the *Independent* was slightly more thoughtful than that of the other two papers and although it carried considerable amounts of courtroom coverage of the scandal, it also took an openly sympathetic attitude towards Wilde both as a man and an artist. On 6 April, after the Marquess of Queensberry had been found not guilty of libel and Wilde was to be prosecuted for gross indecency, the paper ran a two column spread in summary of the trial that commended his brilliance in the dock and as a writer. It stated 'it is sad to think that a life of such brilliant promise in many ways has been practically brought to a close by the present episode' and went on to discuss Wilde's career, books and his debt to the aesthetic bible *A Rebours*.<sup>60</sup> The *Independent* took an unashamedly cultural viewpoint in its coverage and referenced books and authors, presumably with the assumption that a significant percentage of its readers would understand.<sup>61</sup> There was a high level of self education amongst workers in the city and this was particularly supported by the political left.<sup>62</sup> In a nod to the appreciation of the individual that Sheffield had been famous for, the paper celebrated the stand that Wilde had chosen to take with the words 'He has become notorious by carefully choosing to be different from other people and has remained

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<sup>60</sup> *The Sheffield Daily Independent*, 6 April 1895, p.6.

<sup>61</sup> Bingham, *Family Newspapers?*, pp.8-9.

<sup>62</sup> Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, pp.187-236. This was not just restricted to Sheffield. There seems to have been a high value attached to adult education and autodidacticism throughout the industrial north - particularly in communities based around traditional industry such as mining, steel working and weaving.

different from them until the end.<sup>63</sup> On 8 April a 'London Letter' feature described how the huge crowds wanting to see Wilde's plays in the capital had kept the theatres open through Holy Week, a highly unusual state of affairs. It also hinted that what Wilde was accused of doing, at this stage, did not stop the general public enjoying his plays. Most interestingly, this edition carried an explanation of the maximum penalty for the 'full offence [gross indecency]' of which Wilde was accused under the title 'The Penalty'.<sup>64</sup> This piece assumed an understanding by the Sheffield public of what Wilde was accused of but *not* an understanding that it was a crime and the severity of the punishment attached to it.

Throughout the coverage of the trials, the *Independent* showed a high level of concern for Wilde's health. Readers were told of him in the dock, looking 'paler and thinner' and then of him being incarcerated in Holloway and suffering 'severely with depression' and being 'seized with a somewhat severe illness..... [that] necessitated several visits from the prison doctor'.<sup>65</sup><sup>66</sup> By 22 April, the paper tackled the prickly question of bail being granted to Wilde that had been so highly contested in the capital's press. It gave the local view on the matter in that 'The view that the judge is bound to grant bail on a charge which only amounts to a misdemeanour is said to be supported by two decisions though there is an instance in which it was disallowed by a High Court Judge, the magistrate however can exercise his discretion in such a matter.'<sup>67</sup> The writer

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<sup>63</sup> *The Sheffield Daily Independent*, 6 April 1895, p.6.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 8 April 1895, p.4.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 12 April 1895, p.6.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 22 April 1895, p.5.

seemed to imply that Wilde's crime was not particularly severe. He also thought that in homosexual cases, magistrates could use their discretion regarding punishment and this is confirmed by evidence in other trials within the period in the local area that are detailed in following chapters. When Wilde was granted bail in May the language used to report the event was that of the wrongly imprisoned being freed. On 7 May readers were told 'it is anticipated that the prisoner will be liberated in the afternoon' and on the 8th Wilde was 'restored to liberty' and 'neither at the prison gate or at Bow St was there the slightest demonstration'.<sup>6869</sup>

A further unique feature in the *Independent* was a piece on 25 April dedicated to 'Lord Alfred's Attitude'. Alfred Douglas had written a letter in defence of Wilde to a 'contemporary' that had ended up being circulated in some of the capital's press. It was printed by the *Independent* in full and was remarkably candid for its time:

I should like to point out that the offence with which Mr Wilde is charged was only made an offence some eight or nine years ago, by a clause in the Criminal Law Amendment Act, inserted by Mr Henry Labouchere M.P., who may thus justly claim to be the inventor and supporter of the modern system of blackmail as practised in London by a very large professional gang, a distinction of which I hope he is proud.<sup>70</sup>

Neither of the other newspapers featured this attack on the law of which Wilde fell foul and it rang true with the free-thinking attitude of the *Independent* that it should be published there. The paper balanced the judge's diatribe in summing

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 7 May 1895, p.2.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 8 May 1895, p.1.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 25 April 1895, p.2.

the case up against ‘the pronouncement of the sentence was followed by hisses in the gallery, which the ushers failed to suppress’ and the fact that Wilde wished to address the gallery but was not allowed.<sup>71</sup> As a final point, readers were told that there was a ‘natural prejudice’ around such cases and that in Wilde’s case, it was the class of men that Wilde had associated with that caused his downfall. Issues of class bias were used by a left-leaning newspaper with working-class readership to achieve a measured reading of the trials. It is possible that this would have been an issue of more contention to readers than Wilde’s sexual preferences.

To finish the analysis of the trials in the Sheffield press, it must be considered how Wilde’s sexual transgressions were documented. Cocks has noted that although the medical and legal language of male/male sex was never printed in the press during this period, the wealth of detail available in such cases was.<sup>72</sup> This detail would have made it possible for the majority of readers to understand the nature of the cases without explicitly breaking the press’s conventions that kept homosexuality out of the public domain.<sup>73</sup> It could be argued that this was particularly the case in a working-class culture that included the ribald music hall, penny dreadfuls and the harsh realities of the streets. Across all three newspapers readers were informed about Wilde buying working-class boys gold cigarette cases, champagne and dinner in exchange for them staying with him at the Savoy and of him taking Freddy Atkins to Paris, sharing a room with him and having the boy’s hair curled. A classic Wilde-ism

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 27 May 1895, p.5.

<sup>72</sup> Cocks, *Nameless Offences*, pp.81-82.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*.

was gleefully printed, 'Did you ever kiss or embrace Granger? - No, he was ugly' and assignments in 'dark scented rooms' with men in 'ladies' attire' became public knowledge.<sup>74</sup> Even Wilde's love letters to Douglas were reprinted.<sup>75</sup> It has been argued that only certain, more sexually knowledgeable, parts of the population (for example men rather than women who gained more varied sexual knowledge from the workplace) could recognise terms such as 'odious practices' or 'indecenty', while other readers could glean that something sexual had happened but not what; it might be more persuasive to argue, though, that it is unlikely that many adults would not have recognised the above details for what they were.

The *Star* continued to push the boundaries of what was acceptable fodder for publication. It was delighted to print a column entitled 'Revolting Revelations' that went on to detail boys being caught 'indecently' in Wilde's bed.<sup>76</sup> A further column, 'Extraordinary Revelations' declared that two other men involved in the case called Taylor and Mason were 'married', Mason was the 'husband' and that they enjoyed a delightful wedding breakfast after the event.<sup>77</sup> It was made clear that Wilde 'several times slept with Taylor at 13 Little College St and at 3 Chapel St', that a masseuse at the Savoy had caught a young man in Wilde's bed and that a housekeeper saw a boy in his bed and had to change the 'dirty bedlinen'

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<sup>74</sup> *The Sheffield Daily Independent*, 5 April 1895, p.1.

<sup>75</sup> *The Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 4 April 1895, p.2. Readers were informed that Wilde had had a love affair with Douglas and that was demonstrated by the passionate excerpts that were reproduced. Wilde was asked by the prosecution whether the letter mentioned was a love letter. He replied, 'Is that a love letter? - It is a letter expressive of love'.

<sup>76</sup> *The Evening Telegraph and Star*, 10 April 1895, p.3.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 19 April 1895, p.1.

on several occasions.<sup>78</sup><sup>79</sup> Through this kind of coverage, the public had been made familiar not only with the seedy side of Wilde's exploits, but also the idea that two men could be in love and even 'married'; indeed this seems to have almost been taken for granted given the casual way in which it was discussed. This relative candour makes it even more remarkable that none of the three Sheffield newspapers chose to judge or condemn Wilde (or the other men mentioned throughout the trials) when it would have been so easy to do.

### Manchester's newspapers and the trials of Oscar Wilde

In Manchester, two newspapers have been analysed, *The Manchester Times* and *The Manchester Guardian*. *The Manchester Times* was a slightly left leaning newspaper whose circulation figures were beaten by *The Manchester Guardian* which was the most popular newspaper in the city at this time. The *Guardian* was also more conservative in its views on sexual morality and under C.P. Scott, was willing to sacrifice potentially lucrative stories to reinforce the paper's moral code.<sup>80</sup> Although it supported mild radicalism and later came to support the Suffragette movement, its stance on issues of a sexual nature was usually one of condemnation or silence and it is with this newspaper that the analysis begins. The striking thing about the coverage of the trials in such a large and popular publication was the fact that it was almost entirely absent. The case was mentioned three times in total. In March, readers were informed of 'Mr Oscar Wilde's Charge Against Lord Queensberry' and of an envelope that

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 26 April 1895, p.3.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 29 April 1895, p.2.

<sup>80</sup> Mark Hampton, *Visions of the Press in Britain, 1850-1950* (Illinois, 2004), p.135. This conservatism could also have roots in the non-conformist background of the paper.

contained a 'libel' but nothing else.<sup>81</sup> In April, readers were informed that Queensberry had been found not guilty and that Wilde was to be prosecuted.<sup>82</sup> There was no indication (even euphemistically) of what he was to be prosecuted for. The final mention of Wilde in 1895 was in November when readers were informed that Wilde was 'at the Bankruptcy Court'.<sup>83</sup> This lack of discussion of the scandal of the year is extraordinary when one considers the pages devoted to the story in many metropolitan and local newspapers. If readers had only read the *Guardian*, they would have had no idea what Wilde had done and the can of worms that his actions had opened. This seems to reflect a clear policy of silence that was adopted by the editor, C.P. Scott and his journalists in order to protect the public.<sup>84</sup>

*The Manchester Times* did not follow the silent approach. In fact there was an amount of detail comparable to that in the Sheffield press which would have left no doubt in the mind of the public as to what Wilde had been charged with. Coverage began somewhat coyly in March announcing that the Marquis of Queensberry had left a card on which was written 'some most offensive and indecent words' but these words were not elaborated on.<sup>85</sup> The newspaper soon became bored with this level of discretion as by 5 April readers were being treated to quotes from letters to Bosie and Wilde was defending such letters by being allowed to exclaim 'It was a letter expressing love'.<sup>86</sup> This was the first

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<sup>81</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 11 March 1895, p.7.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, April 6 1895, p.8.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 13 November 1895, p.6.

<sup>84</sup> Hampton, *Visions of the Press*, p.135. Scott felt that it was the duty of journalists to protect public morals.

<sup>85</sup> *The Manchester Times*, 15 March 1895, p.8.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 5 April 1895, p.4.

outright mention of love between men in the Manchester press and it was left to the reader (as well as the jury) to decide what this love meant. A turning point when the *Times* began to differ significantly from the Sheffield papers was on the 12 April in a large piece that explored the collapse of the initial libel case and Wilde himself being prosecuted. It carried the benign headline 'The Extraordinary libel case' but launched into a long and elaborate piece describing Wilde's clothes, what he ate in his police cell, how it was furnished and how he behaved. Underneath all this description was a strong undercurrent of distaste.<sup>87</sup> There was a sense that Wilde was decadent and morally suspicious that was certainly not present in the coverage from Sheffield. By May, all attempts at euphemism had disappeared and there was mention of 'gross indecency', 'procuring' and direct reference to 'acts of indecency' occurring with young men in the dark, perfumed rooms of legend.<sup>88</sup>

The difference between the way that this information was presented in the Manchester press as opposed to the Sheffield press was that in the latter this detail was interspersed with editorial comment of a sympathetic nature and updates on the failing health and nerves of the defendant. The only marginally sympathetic views that were expressed in the *Times* were firstly the printing of a few words from the Rev Stewart Headlam who stood surety for Wilde's bail. He expressed his fear that 'the public mind has been prejudiced before the case began' and Wilde's 'extreme prostration' was mentioned.<sup>89</sup> Secondly, after Wilde had been degraded and imprisoned it was reported that he was ill and

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 12 April 1895, p.3.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*; 3 May 1895, p.3.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 10 May 1895, p.7.



descending into madness.<sup>90</sup> This sort of ending to a morality tale seemed to suit late Victorian audiences and perhaps reflected the idea that Wilde got what he deserved both legally and morally. The column inches that *The Manchester Times* saved by avoiding editorial comment, it more than used in the reporting of the summing up of the trial and the judge's verdict. Whereas this was published in a more concise form in the Sheffield press, it was published in its full form in the *Times*. The damning conclusion that the judge would 'rather try a most shocking murder case than one of this description' cannot have been taken lightly by readers.<sup>91</sup> According to the judge 'that Wilde had been guilty of acts of a hideous kind it was equally impossible to doubt' and he wished to 'pass the severest sentence which the law allowed him and which was totally inadequate to such a case as this'.<sup>92</sup> These are by now infamous words but what has not been considered is the impact that they had on the provincial public through the medium of the local press. It has already been acknowledged earlier in the chapter that prosecutions for homosexual acts did not increase in the capital after Wilde's imprisonment. The rest of the chapter will consider whether the trials affected the number of prosecutions in the north and whether the differing press representations had any impact on the level of prosecutions in the two northern assizes courts circuits.

### Prosecutions for homosexual offences

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 7 June 1895, p.2.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 31 May 1895, p.3.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*.

During the period 1895-1918 the population of the north of England as defined in Chapter One stood at approximately eleven million people.<sup>93</sup> This represented approximately thirty percent of the population of England and Wales.<sup>94</sup> The population grew steadily on a yearly basis regardless of whether the industrial economies were in boom or bust.<sup>95</sup> To take 1901 (the first census year within this period) as an example, the northern population was almost double that of the capital.<sup>96</sup> It could be expected that the size of the northern population would have been reflected in the number of men in the area prosecuted for homosexual offences. This will be examined in two ways: the number of men prosecuted will be compared to the capital and the prosecutions in each assizes will be compared to each other. The circumstances in which men were prosecuted will also be analysed. In many ways, this approach is the most important. It is unwise to use criminal statistics without looking at why men were arrested, what their *actual* crime was and in what circumstances they became known to the police. These additional pieces of information help to piece together an understanding of the way in which men who had sex with other men were viewed, not only by themselves but by the authorities that had the power to arrest and imprison them. This will be approached in Chapter Three.

### Arrests that went to the assize courts

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<sup>93</sup> B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1988), p.38.

<sup>94</sup> Russell, *Looking North*, p.18. The north as defined by this study represented twenty five percent of the population of England and Wales in 1801, thirty percent by 1861 and thirty three percent by 1921.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics*, pp.30-38. The population of the northern counties was 10,598,000 and that of London and all related areas was 6,339,500.

Prosecutions for homosexual offences during this period covered a wide variety of offences including sodomy, buggery, attempted sodomy, attempted buggery, gross indecency, indecent assault on a male person and indecency with a male. Gross indecency was made into a specific, illegal act by the infamous Section 11 of the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act. It could include anything from cruising to any sexual act short of penetration. The most serious was buggery or sodomy which carried a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.<sup>97</sup> The other offences could be punished by anything from a fine to up to ten years' imprisonment with or without hard labour. One of the striking things about the prosecution of such offences is the remarkable disparity in punishments that become apparent depending upon where the accused was tried, by whom and what their crime was classed as when bringing it to court. There was such a wide scope in the penalties that could be inflicted for homosexual offences that individual policemen and judges had potentially more influence on the outcome of these cases than in any other type of criminal prosecution.

As discussed in Chapter One, the current benchmark for understanding the levels and circumstances of arrests and prosecutions in the capital lies with the British queer historians.<sup>98</sup> Cook in particular has researched the number of arrests and convictions for homosexual offences in the capital during the period

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<sup>97</sup> *An Act to consolidate and amend the Statute Law of England and Ireland relating to Offences against the Person*, 6th August 1861, [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1861/100/pdfs/ukpga\\_18610100\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1861/100/pdfs/ukpga_18610100_en.pdf) [accessed 24/10/2011]. The 1861 Offences against the Person Act replaced the death penalty with this maximum term.

<sup>98</sup> Cocks, *Nameless Offences*; Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality*; Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (London and Chicago, 2005); Kaplan, *Sodom on the Thames*.

1880-1915.<sup>99</sup> These statistics have been compiled from the annual reports to parliament of the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police and they can be compared with the numbers of men that were arrested and prosecuted in the north.<sup>100</sup> The table below illustrates how the two areas compared.

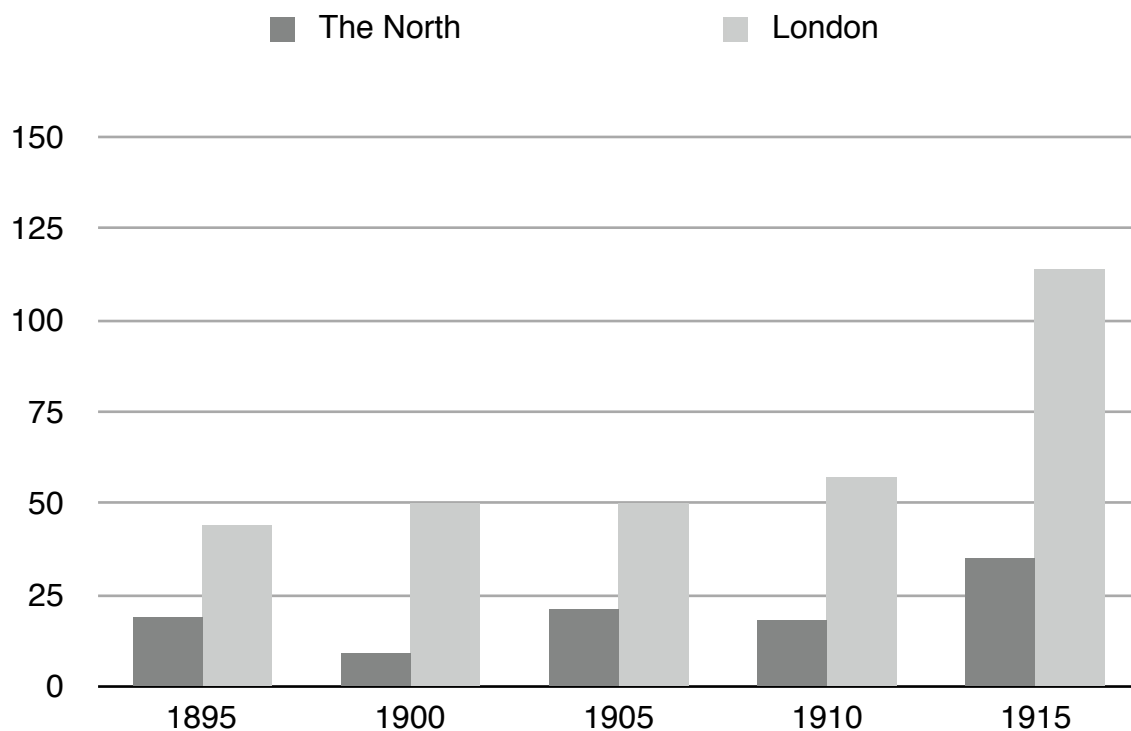


Figure 2.1: A comparison of men in London and the north who appeared in court for homosexual acts, 1895 - 1918.<sup>101</sup>

The results of this comparison are striking. The number of cases in the capital were always at least double, if not triple those in the north. In 1900, northern prosecutions did not even reach double figures out of an approximate

<sup>99</sup> Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality*, p.151.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, p.152.

<sup>101</sup> Home Office: Calendar of Prisoners: HO 140/161, HO 140/165, HO 140/201, HO 140/205, HO 140/241, HO 140/ 245, HO 140/ 281, HO 140/ 285, HO 140/ 321, HO 140/325 at The National Archive (Kew). All incidents cited here can be confirmed as homosexual acts. The information in the documents is sufficient to be able to distinguish between for example; buggery and bestiality or indecent assault on a male or female. They also include inter-generational encounters and what we would now class as child abuse and any aggravated encounters that included violence. The London statistics are taken from Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality*, p.151.

population of ten and a half million people.<sup>102</sup> At this moment in time, you would have been unlucky enough to be literally one in a million if you were prosecuted for committing a homosexual act in the north of England.<sup>103</sup> Prosecution figures in London rose steadily or remained static throughout the sample period whereas the northern figures show no distinct pattern as they rise and fall throughout the sample. Both areas show a fairly dramatic increase in prosecutions in 1915 and this seems to reflect claims about how the First World War impacted on morality in England and the ensuing panics about promiscuity, venereal disease, prostitution and homosexuality.<sup>104</sup> Given the population of the north was almost double that of the capital why do the prosecution figures not reflect this?

This thesis will suggest a number of reasons for the disparities in the figures. It is well-documented that by 1895 (and for many years before) there was a flourishing, commercially based homosexual subculture that included bars, bath houses and brothels in London.<sup>105</sup> This subculture was surprisingly visible and had been made so by various scandals that began with the Molly Houses in the eighteenth-century, encompassed Cleveland Street and Fanny and Stella in the nineteenth-century and finished spectacularly with the downfall of Oscar Wilde.

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<sup>102</sup> Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics*, p.38.

<sup>103</sup> In London, the odds were higher but still made it very unlikely to be prosecuted. The chances would have been around nine in a million.

<sup>104</sup> For discussion of the numerous moral panics unleashed by the First World War see: Joanna Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960* (London and New York, 1994), pp.28-29; Lesley Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain since 1880* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 82-98; George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (London and New York, 2002), pp. 32-66; Hoare, *Wilde's Last Stand*; Russell James, *The Maud Allen Affair* (Barnsley, 2008); Angus McLaren, *Twentieth-Century Sexuality: A History* (Oxford, 1999), pp.9-22.

<sup>105</sup> Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality*; Kaplan, 'Did "My Lord Gomorrah" Smile?'; Rictor Norton, *Mother Clap's Molly House: Gay Subculture in England, 1700-1830* (London, 1992); Graham Robb, *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 2003).

As has been shown, many of these scandals received enormous amounts of press coverage, especially in the capital. This coverage detailed the world of rent-boys, cross-dressing and same-sex socialisation that those in the know could have access to. Because of the visibility of these social transgressions, the Metropolitan authorities had to acknowledge them and in turn had more opportunity to police them. This subculture in the capital was also concentrated into a much smaller geographical space. When reading one of the very few homosexually themed books available at this point, *Sins of the Cities of the Plain*, one could have used it as a guide for a walking tour of the sites where men who desired other men could meet each other.<sup>106</sup> It also makes clear how visible male prostitutes were in the various spaces in the city in which they operated. All accounts of the period seem to mention the ‘painted boys’ of Piccadilly or the accommodating guardsmen of Hyde Park.<sup>107</sup> It is unsurprising that such a relatively high level of visibility should lead to a relatively high level of prosecution. It is perhaps surprising that prosecution levels remained as low as they did. What has also been well-documented is that various heads of the Metropolitan Police took a particular view on actively prosecuting homosexual crime and this coupled with a strong governmental desire to clean up the capital and make it a worthy figurehead for the Empire explains why London had the highest numbers of prosecution in the country.

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<sup>106</sup> Jack Saul, *Sins of the Cities of the Plain or Recollections of a Mary-Ann with short essays on Sodomy and Tribadism* (London, 1881).

<sup>107</sup> Cocks, *Nameless Offences*; Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality*; Matt Cook, Robert Mills, Randolph Trumbach, H.G. Cocks, *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Men Since the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2007); Hugh David, *On Queer Street: A Social History of Homosexuality 1895-1995* (London, 1997); Hoare, *Wilde's Last Stand*; Houlbrook, *Queer London*.

The north was different both geographically and socially to the capital. Its larger population was spread over a much larger area and individually, northern cities, although densely populated (with many living in slums in some ways similar to the East End of London) never came close to the size of the capital. For example, in 1901 the biggest city in the north was Liverpool with a population of 702,200 which was approximately one tenth of the size of London. It can be argued that populations of this size were not sufficient to support a distinct homosexual subculture like that of the capital. But this is too simple an argument to explain the situation in the north. As shall be seen in Chapter Three, sex between men seems to have occurred outside of the familiar circumstances of a commercial network with little indication of male prostitution being common. A 1910 study suggested that:

The skeptic [sic] has only to walk around London, around any English garrison centre, to stroll about Portsmouth, Aldershot, Southampton, Woolwich, large cities of North Britain or Ireland, to find the soldier prostitute in almost open self-marketing.<sup>108</sup>

This seemingly placed large northern cities inside the same sexual framework as the capital in regards to prostitution. The prosecution records do not seem to reflect this nor do the experiences of the northern men analysed in this thesis. It is possible that the military police dealt with such cases or the local authorities were more likely to turn a blind eye.

According to Weeks:

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<sup>108</sup> 'Xavier Mayne', *The Intersexes*, (Florence, 1910), p.220, quoted in Weeks, *Coming Out*, p. 37.

A sexual sub-culture is unlikely to arise when patterns of behaviour are acceptable within orthodox types of relationship. It develops in a response to the emergence of hostile norms: in the case of homosexuality, of a sharpening social oppression..... A subculture does not arise in a vacuum. There needs to be both the felt need for a collective solution to a problem (group sexuality in this case) and the possibility of its satisfaction.<sup>109</sup>

This thesis will argue that regardless of the size of northern cities, local cultures ensured that conditions were not right for the emergence of a specific homosexual subculture until the 1950s. It will be shown that it was not always unacceptable for working men to have sex with each other within the bounds of their other, more orthodox relationships. Low prosecution rates and previously unconsidered traditions of working-class tolerance meant that men who had sex with other men perhaps did not need the structure and support of a subculture to fulfil their desires. Chapters Six and Seven will show that even by the 1950s (and into the 1980s) when specifically gay spaces became available, many northern men found it difficult to commit themselves to both these spaces and an identity to match. This has been seen as highlighting the potentially homophobic atmosphere of the north but perhaps it can be seen as evidence of men looking back to traditions of privacy and uncategorised notions of desire.<sup>110</sup>

Because of these differences, men experienced their sexuality very differently in smaller, provincial areas and this is reflected by the lower prosecution figures. It would be misguided to assume the higher number of prosecutions in London occurred just because there were a higher number of homosexual men in the capital. It is true that the capital had a larger population of single men (and men who travelled without their families) attracted there by opportunities in both work

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<sup>109</sup> Weeks, *Coming Out*, pp.35-36.

<sup>110</sup> Taylor et al, *Global Change, Local Feeling and Everyday Life in the North of England*, p.191.



and play. Homosexually inclined men were also attracted to the contradictory experiences of anonymity and solidarity that could be found in the big city.<sup>111</sup> Even without a visible subculture, though, thousands of northern men acted on their desires for other men. The study of their lives through the sources used in this thesis will offer another understanding of how working men experienced same-sex desire and how it seems to have formed part of ordinary experience rather than being a distinct and marginalised aberration.

### Local policing, local attitudes

The population of London was more transient and cosmopolitan even than port cities like Liverpool and Hull and larger, more outward looking cities like Manchester. Northern counties and even individual cities had a strong sense of regionality that simply did not exist in London and this formed the basis of a northern, working-class culture that had a significant impact of the way that men experienced their sexuality. It also had an impact on how local authorities pursued the policing of homosexual acts. During the period 1895-1918, it can be argued that the Metropolitan police were the only police force in the country at such a high professional standard.<sup>112</sup> They also had access to funds, techniques and manpower that were not available to the rest of the country. Provincial forces had limited funds and therefore, in many areas, very limited manpower.<sup>113</sup> This led to decisions having to be made about which types of

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<sup>111</sup> Weeks, *Coming Out*, p.36.

<sup>112</sup> Clive Emsley, *The English Police: A Political and Social History* (2nd edn, London and New York, 1996), p.250.

<sup>113</sup> Manchester (753 men in 1870 and 1249 men in 1910) and Liverpool (1097 men in 1870 and 1508 men in 1910) had fairly large forces where Leeds (280 men in 1870 and 654 men in 1910) and Sheffield's (270 men in 1870 and 533 men in 1910) forces were tiny in comparison. Emsley, *The English Police*, pp.265-267.

crime to pursue and moral judgements being made as to what were the most important criminal issues actively to prosecute. To take Sheffield as an example, in this period its main criminal concerns were drunkenness, theft and prostitution and the rate of theft, burglary and juvenile crime far outstripped the possibility of police control.<sup>114</sup> The police were simply unable to manage the levels of crime in the city. These resource limitations were important in shaping decisions about whether men who had sex with men were suitable police targets. When crimes with clear victims and the potential for social disorder were common it may not have been possible or desirable to pursue men who on the whole were committing victimless and mainly invisible crimes. Provincial forces could operate fairly autonomously with little to no input from London.<sup>115</sup> At no time during this period was it a priority for northern police forces to prosecute homosexual men. This stance was reflected in the prosecution figures and will be further reflected upon when the circumstances of prosecutions are reviewed.

The northern police in this period often found that policing morality was an extremely unpopular and sometimes dangerous task. Drinking, gambling and prostitution were key issues that the authorities attempted to police and in working-class areas they usually took place on the street. These were often viewed by the communities in which they took place as legitimate leisure activities and encroachments by the police provoked tension and even violence.<sup>116</sup> This vibrant street life could cause concerns for legal and church

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<sup>114</sup> J. P. Bean, *Crime in Sheffield: From Deer Poachers to Gangsters 1300 to the 1980s* (Sheffield, 1987), p.61. Throughout the nineteenth century there were more prostitutes in Sheffield than in Hull, a major port. Astoundingly there were 172 to Hull's 100.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* p.250.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* p.75.

authorities as it disrupted notions of working-class respectability - Saturday nights could be rowdy affairs.<sup>117</sup> Due to the intense overcrowding of residential areas, young people in particular had to take to public spaces in order to socialise and ironically, to get any privacy for friendship or romantic interludes. In an evocative piece in the *Independent*, readers were warned by the Bishop of Sheffield against the pernicious influence of 'THE DEVIL'S MILE OF SHEFFIELD' where 'SHOCKING DEPRAVITY IN THE CITY' could be found.<sup>118</sup> If there was anybody in the city who hadn't visited the 'Devil's Mile' of Fargate and High Street to 'parade to and fro aimlessly' and 'pick up doubtful acquaintances', they probably did after reading those headlines.<sup>119</sup> However, attempts to regulate private life through the monitoring of drinking and sex were seen 'as an official agency attempting to impose the values of the middle-class elite on working people'.<sup>120</sup> Such feelings ensured that the working man's relationship with the police in this period (and throughout the early twentieth century) was generally one of 'fear and dislike'.<sup>121</sup> This resistance to authority in respect to private life had been building throughout the nineteenth century and seems to have formed a cornerstone of the working-class culture of the industrial north.

### Differences between the North and North-Eastern Assizes

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<sup>117</sup> Andrew Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working-class culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939* (Buckingham and Philadelphia, 1992), pp.89-138; Bryan D Hillerby, *The Lost Theatres of Sheffield* (Barnsley, 1999), p.10.

<sup>118</sup> *The Sheffield Daily Independent*, 30 December 1911, p.1.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Louise A Jackson, *Child Abuse in Victorian England* (London, 2000), p.36.

<sup>121</sup> Robert Roberts, *The Classic Slum* (London, 1971), p.100.

Thus far, the north has been treated as a distinct entity in order for it to be compared to London. In reality the differences between the Northern and North-Eastern assizes circuits were often as great as those with the capital. As mentioned earlier, regionality was key to a northerner's understanding of self in this period (as often it still is). For example, the rivalries between Lancashire and Yorkshire, or even cities like Leeds and Sheffield, have deep roots that are threaded throughout the history of northern, working-class culture.<sup>122</sup> These distinct local differences led to markedly different cultural climates alongside 'economic, political and cultural tensions'.<sup>123</sup> It has already been stated that Sheffield was an inward looking city and the same can be said for the other towns and cities represented by the North-Eastern circuit. However, in the Northern circuit, Liverpool and Manchester were far more open and outward-facing cities. The Northern circuit was much more heavily policed while the North-Eastern circuit had a fairly serious shortage of manpower. These differences led to areas in the north developing their own attitudes to crime, policing, punishment and the rights of the individual. These concepts become visible in the prosecution figure for the different Assizes.

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<sup>122</sup> Helen M Jewell, *The North-South Divide: The Origins of Northern Consciousness in England* (Manchester, 1994); Ian Taylor et al, *Global Change, Local Feeling and Everyday Life in the North of England*; Frank Musgrove, *The North of England: A History From Roman Times to the Present* (Oxford, 1990); Russell, *Looking North*, p.38; Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848-1914* (Cambridge, 1991); Dennis Smith, *Conflict and Compromise: Class Formation in English Society 1830-1914: A Comparative Study of Birmingham and Sheffield* (London, 1982).

<sup>123</sup> Russell, *Looking North*, p.19.

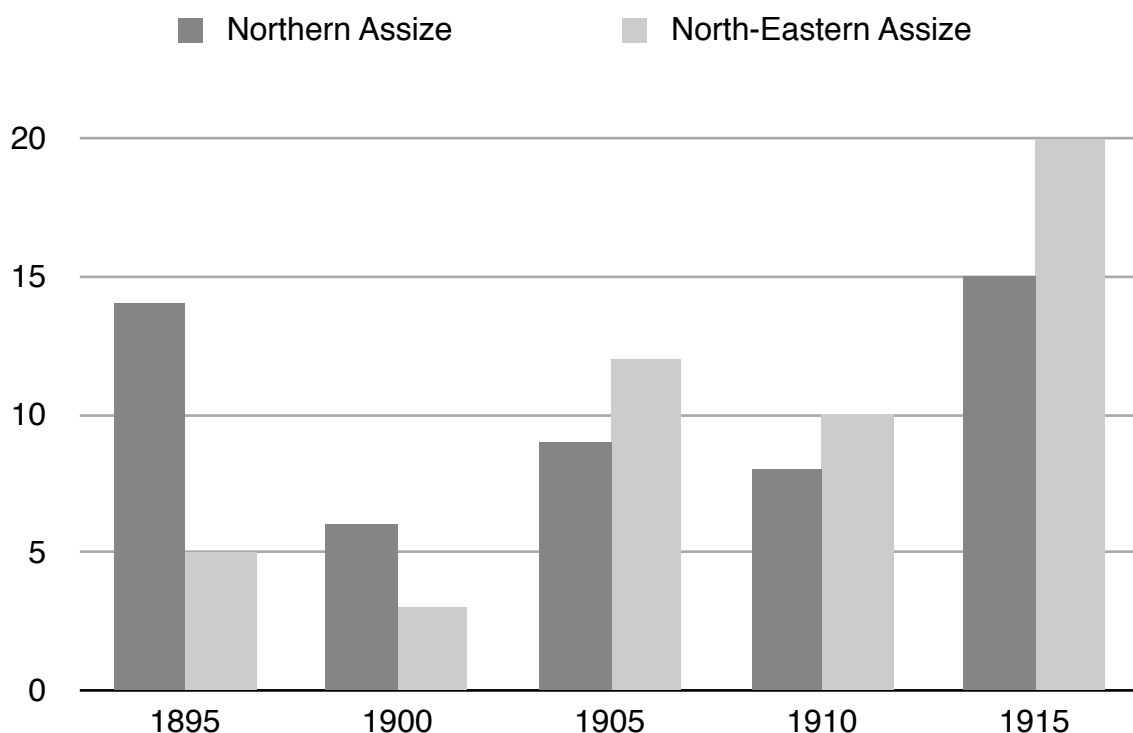


Figure 2.2: A comparison of prosecution figures for the Northern and North-Eastern Assize circuits.<sup>124</sup>

In 1895, the Northern circuit had nearly three times the number of prosecutions for homosexual offences of the North-Eastern circuit and in 1900 it had double. The population of the North-Eastern circuit was greater than that of the Northern circuit by a few hundred thousand people during this period so this discrepancy suggests a different policing strategy or a more tolerant cultural climate in the areas covered by the North-Eastern assizes. The impact of the trials of Oscar Wilde was felt more negatively in the Manchester press than in the Sheffield press and it could be argued that this more visible stance on homosexuality had an impact on the policemen and members of the public who brought homosexual men before the law. It is possible that with the damning comparison of the severity of homosexual acts to murder ringing in the ears of newspaper reading Lancastrians, prosecution rates temporarily reflected this. By 1905 and on to 1915, the North-Eastern circuit took the lead in prosecutions but the

<sup>124</sup> See footnote for Figure 2.1 for details.

difference between the two was never again as pronounced as in the first two sample years. This suggests that any negative impact brought about by the Wilde trials had ended by this point and prosecutions had begun to more accurately reflect the population levels. As reflected in Figure 2.2, prosecutions increased in both circuits during 1915, the result of more single men - namely soldiers and workers in the war industries - passing through northern towns and cities. The number of soldiers prosecuted was also more than in peace time. Hostels for such men sprang up by the dozen. The anonymous, boarding house culture that was prevalent in London and facilitated the easy availability of sex between men became available (for the duration of the war) in cities such as Sheffield, Manchester and Leeds. The new prevalence of military police and the concentration of civilian police in these areas could also be held responsible for the increase in prosecutions. However, in the North Eastern circuit, fourteen out of twenty men that were prosecuted were found not guilty. This implies that, although the unusual social and moral conditions of wartime had an impact on how the authorities viewed and policed sex between men, they were still treated the same way (if not more leniently) by juries.

### Guilty or not guilty?

The number of men brought before a judge is a helpful way to start a study like this but one cannot ignore the fact that not everyone who was prosecuted was found guilty. The percentage of not guilty verdicts indicates something not only about the court system but about the juries that men were tried before.<sup>125</sup> It is also interesting to examine, where possible, how many of those who were found

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<sup>125</sup> Juries were made up of people from the area local to the city in which the assizes was held.

guilty actually pleaded guilty as a defendant pleading guilty took away the necessity of a judge and jury passing judgement on a case. There were many reasons why men may have chosen to plead guilty: that there was overwhelming evidence against them, to bargain for a shorter sentence, because of a lack of understanding of the legal severity of what they had done or even because of their own guilt regarding their sexuality. Chapter Three will examine the circumstances of men's trials to see if it is possible to extract any of these reasons from the remaining information.

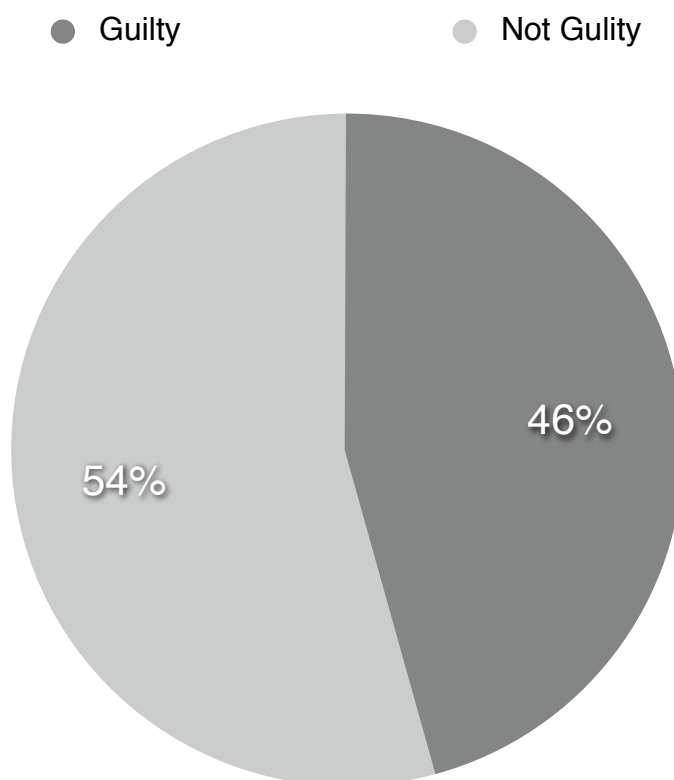


Figure 2.3: Guilty and not guilty verdicts in prosecutions for homosexual offences in London, 1895 - 1918.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> The statistics from the years 1895, 1900, 1905, 1910 and 1915 are taken from Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality*, p 151. The figures are as follows, 315 men were arrested in these sample years, 144 were convicted in a court of law and 171 were found not guilty.

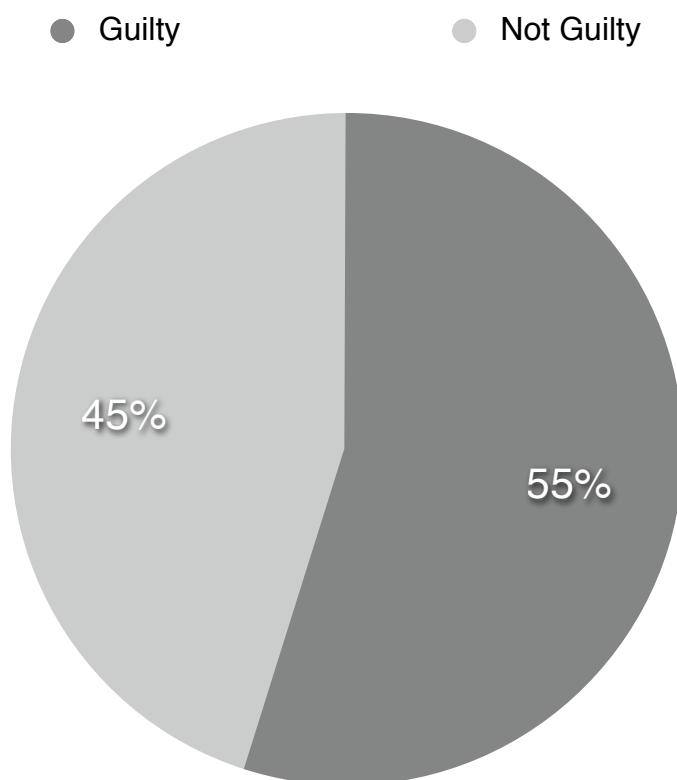


Figure 2.4: Guilty and not guilty verdicts in prosecutions for homosexual offences in the north, 1895 - 1918.<sup>127</sup>

Unfortunately, the numbers of men who pleaded guilty in the capital are not available but in the north, out of fifty six men who were actually convicted for homosexual offences in this period, fourteen pleaded guilty. This indicates that the men who chose to go through the legal system with a plea of not guilty felt that they had a reasonable chance of a fair hearing. In both London and the north, arrest certainly did not mean conviction and in the former men had a better than half chance of escaping punishment. In the latter, it was just shy of these odds yet almost three times the number of men were convicted in London as in the north. In both areas, this seems to indicate definite change from earlier in the nineteenth century when convictions were usually still lower than arrests

<sup>127</sup> Home Office Calendar of Prisoners: HO 140/161, HO 140/165, HO 140/201, HO 140/205, HO 140/241, HO 140/ 245, HO 140/ 281, HO 140/ 285, HO 140/ 321, HO 140/325 at The National Archive (Kew). The figures are as follows, in total in the sample years 1895, 1900, 1905, 1910 and 1915 there were 102 prosecutions. 46 of these men were found not guilty and the remaining 56 either plead guilty or were found guilty.



but not generally by more than a third.<sup>128</sup> Significantly, the prevalence of not guilty verdicts seems to show some kind of disparity between crimes the police felt were worthy of being brought to court and those a judge and jury were willing to convict. One must assume that there was evidence for the prosecution in each of the cases that went to trial (it is still on record where cases were thrown out of court due to lack of evidence) and in the case of around half, a jury was willing to disregard this in favour of the defendant. In many cases, the disregarded evidence had been supplied by police men themselves and northern juries were loathe to convict with only police witnesses to provide evidence against the accused. As stated previously, working-class communities often resented police infringement into their sex lives.

Finally, the differences in not guilty verdicts in north will be examined:

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<sup>128</sup> Cocks, *Nameless Offences*, p.23.

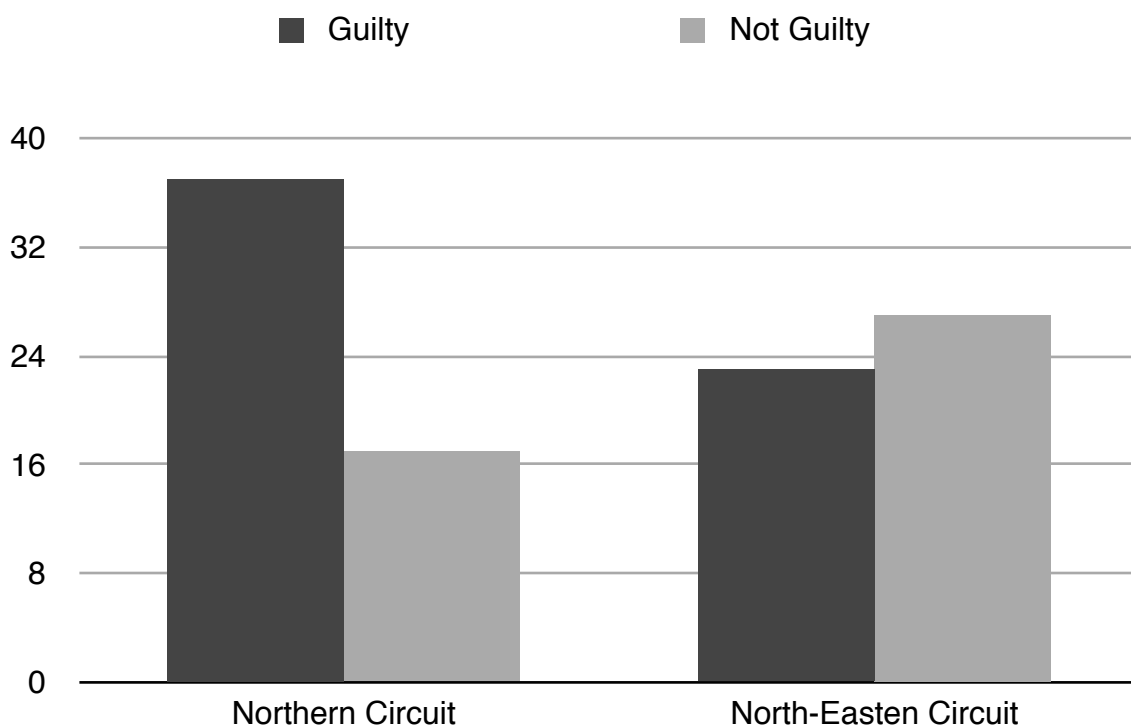


Figure 2.5: Guilty and not guilty verdicts in the two northern assize circuits.<sup>129</sup>

In percentage terms, thirty one percent of men were found not guilty at the Northern assizes and fifty four percent were found not guilty in the North-Eastern assizes court rooms. During this period then, one was more likely to be convicted of a homosexual offence if one was convicted within the boundaries of the Northern circuit and the possible reasons for this will be explored in Chapter Three.

### Conclusion

Although the Wilde trials have been established as a key moment in both the history of homosexuality and in the creation of a homosexual identity they had little impact on the everyday lives of working-class men who desired other men in the north. There was a slight increase in the number of prosecutions in the

<sup>129</sup> Home Office Calendar of Prisoners: HO 140/161, HO 140/165, HO 140/201, HO 140/205, HO 140/241, HO 140/ 245, HO 140/ 281, HO 140/ 285, HO 140/ 321, HO 140/325 at The National Archive (Kew).

Northern circuit in 1895 but this was short lived. It is possible that the unsympathetic press coverage of the trials in Manchester facilitated this and that the more considerate coverage in Sheffield helped to ensure that a similar situation did not occur in the North-Eastern circuit. Local authorities were not influenced by the anti-homosexual feeling in the capital and did not actively pursue men that had sex with other men. In analysing the numbers of men that were prosecuted in the north it becomes apparent that same-sex desire was not an issue for social concern. The numbers of men that came before the law were so small that they almost become insignificant when compared to the thousands of men that were prosecuted each year for other forms of sexual crime.

The importance of the statistics presented in this chapter lies in the challenge that they present to the established understanding of the way in which men who had sex with other men entered the legal system and the way in which they were treated once they were there. A prosecution did not mean a conviction. In certain northern areas, a not guilty verdict was the most likely outcome, particularly if the prosecution relied on police evidence in the court. They confirm that the highest number of men were arrested and convicted of homosexual offences in the capital but they also put forward a challenge to the dominance of the capital in the historiography of same-sex sexuality. The north was a larger geographical region with a larger population yet the levels of prosecution for homosexual offences were never more than half those of the capital. It is not enough to put this difference down to the presence of a subculture in the capital, the power of the Metropolitan police force or the concentration of unattached men in one city. Prosecutions were lower in the

north because of a particular northern understanding of masculinity and sexuality. This will be further explored in the next chapter.

### **Chapter Three: 'Well then, give me a kiss and say no more about it': Personal experiences of masculinity and same-sex desire in the north, 1895 - 1918**

The late-Victorian and Edwardian periods have often been characterised as a time when class distinctions in an already divided country were entrenched and the differences between rich and poor were at their most pronounced.<sup>1</sup> Much thought has been given to the middle and upper classes and the many prominent artists and writers who were active in this period (a significant number of whom were homosexual and left a copious paper trail behind them) and for this reason, working-class experience has often been neglected.<sup>2</sup> The undoubted hardships that many working people endured, as highlighted by studies such as *Poverty, a study of town life* and *Round About A Pound A Week*, have become the dominant mode of understanding working-class life in the period.<sup>3</sup> This obscures the fact that during this period, the northern working classes had a strong and deeply entrenched working-class culture and many different routes through which men could understand themselves. This chapter will begin by exploring northern traditions of masculinity and from there move on to Edward Carpenter's working-class friends and lovers and how they experienced their sexuality. The final section of the chapter will analyse a police investigation into the lives of Carpenter and his lover George Merrill and will

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<sup>1</sup> John Stevenson, *The Penguin Social History of Britain: British Society 1914-1945* (London, 1990, first published 1984), pp.30-43.

<sup>2</sup> For selected examples (although the the number of works about the Bloomsbury group and aristocrats seems endless) see: Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (London, 1991, first published 1968); Paul Levy (ed.), *The Letters of Lytton Strachey* (London and New York, 2006); Wendy Moffat, *E.M.Forster: A New Life* (London and New York, 2010); Virginia Nicholson, *Among the Bohemians: Experiments in Living 1900-1939* (London and New York, 2002); Juliet Nicolson, *The Perfect Summer: Dancing into Shadows in 1911* (London, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Maud Pember Reeves, *Round About A Pound A Week* (London, 1999, first published 1913); Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty, a study of town life* (London, 1901).

also consider the types of men that were being prosecuted and where these prosecutions happened.

### Northern Masculinity

Most working-class men in the industrial north were imbued with a strong sense of security in their own masculinity due to the nature of their work.<sup>4</sup> The period from 1895 to 1918 was one of relative economic stability and even prosperity for the north. Heavy industry reached its peak of productivity during the First World War. South Yorkshire in particular, with its dominance in the steel industry, benefitted during these years. Generally, unemployment was low and wages were adequate to support oneself or a family. Hard, manual work in the factories, steel works and mines provided men with a decent income and a masculine sociability that was specific to the heavy industries that grew out of the industrial revolution. Keith McClelland has emphasised how important work was to men's identities and one could take this further and say that it was crucial to a man's sense of self and his place in society.<sup>5</sup> During the same period, historians have written about the rise in young male working-class prosperity in London and the Midlands due to the increase of semi-skilled jobs in the 'new' consumer and service sectors.<sup>6</sup> This in turn led to something of a moral panic in these areas due to the new confidence and spending power of these 'culturally deprived' youths who seemed to be outside the sphere of

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<sup>4</sup> Joanna Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960* (London and New York, 1996, first published 1994), pp.130-131; Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford and New York, 2000, first published 1998), pp.127-131.

<sup>5</sup> Keith McClelland, 'Masculinity and the Representative Artisan', in John Tosh and Michael Roper (eds), *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London, 1991), p.82.

<sup>6</sup> Brad Beavan, *Leisure, citizenship and working-class men in Britain, 1850-1945* (Manchester, 2005), p.88.

influence of traditional working-class community and patterns of work.<sup>7</sup> The same cannot be said of the majority of the industrial north, where men tended to work within long-established factories and workshops and seemed to take pride in the rituals and traditions associated with their jobs.<sup>8</sup> They benefitted from prosperity in their industry but still remained within the bounds of established work and social life.

By the end of the Victorian period, when this study begins, there seems to be clear agreement amongst gender historians that working-class men and women operated in separate spheres.<sup>9</sup> In simplistic terms, the private world of the home was the domain of women and the public world of the workplace, pub and trades union was the domain of men.<sup>10</sup> In general terms, the experience of the northern working-class in this period fits this model however there were clear transgressions on both sides and these divisions can be felt more clearly in social life than work life. In Sheffield there was a tradition of support for female suffrage going back to the days of Chartism, and the 'Buffer Girls' (women who worked in the cutlery trade alongside men) were loud, visible and sometimes

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> See: John Burnett, *Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working People from the 1820's to the 1920's* (London, 1994); John Burnett, *Idle Hands: Experience of Unemployment, 1790-1990* (London, 1994); McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, pp.127-131; Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, Connecticut, and London, 2001); St Philips Education and Research Society, *The Equipment Of The Workers: An Enquiry By The St Philip's Settlement Education And Research Society Into The Adequacy Of The Adult Manual Workers For The Discharge Of Their Responsibilities As Heads Of Household, Producers And Citizens* (London, 1919).

<sup>9</sup> Sean Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861-1913* (Hampshire, 2005); John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Harlow, 2005), John Tosh and Michael Roper (eds), *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London, 1991); Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *The Historical Journal* 36:2 (1993), pp.383-414.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working-class culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939* (Buckingham and Philadelphia, 1992), p.30.

problematic figures in the social landscape of the city.<sup>11</sup> They were however a minority and the heavy steel industry remained a place for men alone. In Manchester and the textile towns of Lancashire and West Yorkshire there was a stronger female presence in the factories and mills and a tradition of working-class, female independence but this did not usually translate to the way that working people most commonly socialised.<sup>12</sup> The 'male bonding' that took place at work (presumably even in a workplace that included women) was 'dependant upon excluding women' and men would often choose a specific 'mate' with whom they would spend their evenings and weekends.<sup>13</sup> They would often talk about a girlfriend who could be real or fictitious to emphasise their masculinity but she never physically appeared to infringe on this male leisure time.<sup>14</sup> Even taking into account the presence of working women in some of the traditional industrial occupations, the industrial north was gendered as a masculine space.

If, as Tosh has suggested, 'the study of working-class masculinities has more or less ground to a halt in Britain' then it is also true that the study of working-class masculinities has never been given the same consideration as that of middle and upper-class masculinity.<sup>15</sup> Tosh credits this oversight to the fact that the sources available regarding working-class men are not as attractive to both

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<sup>11</sup> Ian Taylor, Karen Evans and Penny Fraser, *Global Change, Local Feeling and Everyday Life in the North of England: A Tale of Two Cities; A Study in Manchester and Sheffield* (London, 1996), p.43.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Gurney, "'Intersex' and 'Dirty Girls': Mass-Observation and Working-Class Sexuality in England in the 1930s', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 8:2 (1997), pp.256-290, p.272.

<sup>13</sup> McClelland, 'Masculinity and the Representative Artisan', p.82, McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, pp.127-131.

<sup>14</sup> McClelland, 'Masculinity and the Representative Artisan', p.82.

<sup>15</sup> John Tosh, 'The History of Masculinity: An Outdated Concept?', in John Arnold and Sean Brady (eds) *What is Masculinity?: Historical Dynamics from Antiquity to the Contemporary World* (London, 2011), p.24.



social and cultural historians.<sup>16</sup> When historians do write about working-class masculinities, the emphasis tends to be on narratives of respectability or depravity. Much has been written on working-men's sense of masculinity being dependant on their ability to be able to support a family and maintain a skilled job on the one hand or being linked to their sexual and alcohol consuming prowess on the other.<sup>17</sup> When men in the north in this period are mentioned, they tend to be mentioned as part of a respectable tradition of artisans or miners who valued the chance to provide for their families above all else.<sup>18</sup> In reality this striving towards respectable ideals of manhood ran parallel beside some more surprising and disruptive expressions of masculine society and the two were not always mutually exclusive.

It has long been assumed by historians of homosexuality that the molly houses of eighteenth and nineteenth-century London were unique to the capital. This was not the case. Cocks wrote of an incident in Warrington in 1806 where twenty-four men were apprehended (they were mainly working-class but also included a 'gentleman' worth £40,000 and a lawyer) for homosexual offences. This case implicated spaces in Manchester city centre, a country house and various commercial venues.<sup>19</sup> In the surprising venue of the 'upper room of a public house' in Doncaster in 1858, between twenty and thirty people were arrested for disorderly behaviour. They were mostly men, with a few women, but they were all 'masked and painted. The men were in women's clothes and the

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain*; Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain*; Tosh and Roper (eds), *Manful Assertions*.

<sup>18</sup> McClelland, 'Masculinity and the Representative Artisan', pp. 83-84.

<sup>19</sup> Harry Cocks, 'Safeguarding Civility: Sodomy, Class and Moral Reform in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *Past and Present*, 190 (2006), pp.121-146

women in men's<sup>20</sup>. This sounds like a classic description of a metropolitan molly house. It seems then, that the traditions of sexual and gender transgression personified by the London molly houses were present in the north and one would assume that if a systematic study was done of local police force records across the region, other examples would be found. During the Victorian period and later, many masculinities co-existed in the north and created a cultural diversity that is rarely recognised. In a recent article, Hera Cook has noted a distinct northern view of sex and sexuality in this period rooted in 'sexual constraint' and the 'inhibition of expression of feeling'.<sup>21</sup> This thesis will challenge the assumption that working-class men outside the capital had a difficult and often painful relationship with emotion, sex and sexuality. Although the 'respectable working-classes' were most definitely present throughout the north, middle-class notions of respectability had failed to reach many inhabitants of northern towns even by the start of the First World War.

Male affection, touch and a comfort with male bodies were key components of the masculine sociability that dominated both the working and private lives of working-class men in the north. The dirty nature of much traditional work meant that men were used to bathing communally at the workplace. Working-class homes of the period did not have bathrooms and therefore bathing also took place at local baths and in local parks. The erotic potential for this is demonstrated in the photograph below:

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<sup>20</sup> Doncaster Borough Police Force register, 17 May 1858, X147/1/1, Sheffield City Archives.

<sup>21</sup> Hera Cook, 'Emotion, Bodies, Sexuality, and Sex Education in Edwardian England', *The Historical Journal*, 55:2 (2012), pp.475-495, p.477.



Figure 3.1: Working-class boys bathing in Endcliffe Wood, Sheffield.<sup>22</sup>

Such public nudity had not gone without comment and various social purity campaigns took place questioning the challenge to mostly female morality that the sight of so much male flesh provided.<sup>23</sup> In Sheffield, Edward Carpenter was quick to defeat such campaigns using the argument that working men needed somewhere to get clean for the benefit of their health.<sup>24</sup> Miners often worked naked or in very scanty clothing due to the heat of their environment and similar situations occurred in the steelworks. This level of familiarity with the male body led to the acceptability of nearly naked sporting events that took place regularly in South Yorkshire.<sup>25</sup> It was only the purity campaigners who seemed to take issue with this level of openness.

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<sup>22</sup> The image dates from the 1890s and shows working-class men and boys bathing but also having fun. Note the row of men and boys on the left hand side of the picture watching the proceedings. Their clothing suggests that they were also working-class. Image used with permission from Sheffield Local Studies Library, [www.picturesheffield.com](http://www.picturesheffield.com).

<sup>23</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* (London, 2008), pp. 127-128.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* One presumes that Carpenter wanted to protect his opportunity to ogle attractive young men as well as the health of local workers.

<sup>25</sup> Carpenter's unpublished reminiscences of his early days in Sheffield, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 253, 254.

Male affection was a part of everyday life for northern working men and this formed the basis of the ideal of comradeship that was reinforced by middle-class intellectuals such as Carpenter and the sexologist Havelock Ellis. In his sexological work, Ellis wrote:

Among the working masses of England and Scotland 'comradeship' is well marked, though not (as in Italy) very conscious of itself. Friends often kiss each other, though this habit seems to vary a good deal in different sections and colonies. Men commonly sleep together, whether comrades or not, and so easily get familiar.<sup>26</sup>

Men were clearly not afraid to touch each other. Friendly kisses and sharing beds were normal occurrences and not evidence of dubious sexuality. It was common for men to dance together at local dances and parties if there were not enough women present.<sup>27</sup> These examples of male intimacy are echoed in the experience of troops in the First World War. Bourke has given examples of men kissing, dancing together, enjoying the spectacle of bathing together and sleeping together for comfort and warmth. This is explained by the absence of women in the army. However, similar behaviour was common in the north when there were plenty of women available to provide comfort, friendship and entertainment. It is possible that the working-class soldiers in the First World War gained comfort from continuing patterns of behaviour rather than the unique conditions of the war leading to new (and temporary) patterns of behaviour. The difficult and often dangerous experiences of men that worked in industrial trades could have helped to create an atmosphere of comradeship and shared hardship usually only found in times of war. Celebrations that

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<sup>26</sup> Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume II Sexual Inversion*, (New York, 1942), p.22.

<sup>27</sup> Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter*, p.109.

involved fancy dress often included men dressing up as women and this seems to have fallen within the boundaries of acceptable masculinity as it happened at public, family events.<sup>28</sup> This comfort with cross-dressing could be located within the popularity of the music hall as working-class entertainment. In the north, drag acts were by far the most popular acts until well into the 1920s.<sup>29</sup>



Figure 3.2: A fancy dress parade at Beighton, Sheffield.<sup>30</sup>

Workplace culture was often founded on friendship and the physicality of ‘horseplay’.<sup>31</sup> Even if men disliked their jobs, they were often able to find a sense of identity and belonging located in this type of environment. In this context, working-class, masculine culture in the north seems to have been heavily influenced by male intimacy and physicality. Of course, this does not mean that all working men were open to sexual encounters and relationships

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<sup>28</sup> Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men’s Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London, 1999, first published 1996), pp.127-137.

<sup>29</sup> Bryan D Hillerby, *The Lost Theatres of Sheffield* (Barnsley, 1999).

<sup>30</sup> Image used with permission from Sheffield Local Studies Library, [www.picturesheffield.com](http://www.picturesheffield.com).

<sup>31</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p.129.

with other men but it does help to explain the levels of indifference or tolerance that were displayed and are analysed throughout this thesis. It seems that the lines between ordinary forms of masculine intimacy and sexual forms of intimacy could be easy to cross - both literally and psychologically. This helps to explain the contemporary assumption that 'the working class was not particularly bothered by homosexuality'.<sup>32</sup>

The masculine nature of social life was emphasised in the north by the nature of the traditional forms of work and by the prevailing culture that favoured same-sex socialisation in working men's clubs, sports clubs, swimming pools and pubs. Male friendship and masculine society was often treated as an escape from unhappy marriages, poor living conditions or the congested character of the parental home.<sup>33</sup> This helped form the basis of the previously mentioned idealised 'comradeship' that Edward Carpenter wrote about in his famous prose poem *Towards Democracy*.<sup>34</sup> Little has been written about the fact that even outside of London there were varied spaces where men could meet for sex as well as companionship. To take Sheffield as an example, in this period, there was a small network of city centre urinals, Turkish baths such as the one on Glossop Road, coffee shops such as the one on Scotland Street run by Carpenter and his socialist friends, and pubs.<sup>35</sup> The Norfolk Arms in the steel quarter is still a gay pub today but the Grand Hotel in the theatre district, whose

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<sup>32</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London and New York, 1977), p.40.

<sup>33</sup> Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>34</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Towards Democracy* (London, 1883).

<sup>35</sup> Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter*, p.111. Carpenter set up the Commonwealth Cafe on Scotland Street as ostensibly a socialist meeting place however he ended up meeting sexual partners there. Other venues can be pieced together from the correspondence of Carpenter and his friends and from his unpublished reminiscences - all of which are located at the Carpenter archive in Sheffield.

bar had been a popular venue sadly no longer exists. The image below shows the hot room of the turkish baths at Glossop Road, there was also a public baths attached which were in use until the 1960s. George Merrill was an attendant at a similar baths (it is not specified exactly which one) in his teenage years and had a very happy (and probably erotic) time there.



Figure 3.3: The hot room at Glossop Road baths.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Image used with permission from Sheffield Local Studies Library, [www.picturesheffield.com](http://www.picturesheffield.com).



Figure 3.4: The affectionately named 'Iron Duke' urinal, 1908.<sup>37</sup>



Figure 3.5: The Grand Hotel, 1910.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Image used with permission from Sheffield Local Studies Library, [www.picturesheffield.com](http://www.picturesheffield.com). This was a popular city centre urinal located in a working-class area.

<sup>38</sup> Image used with permission from Sheffield Local Studies Library, [www.picturesheffield.com](http://www.picturesheffield.com).





Figure 3.6: The Norfolk Arms.<sup>39</sup>

What was distinctive about the commercial venues in Sheffield was that they were not exclusively for homosexual clientele, they were usually working-class venues used by all kinds of men for all kinds of reasons. What is also significantly different about northern cities such as Sheffield, Leeds and Manchester is a lack of evidence regarding male prostitution, when evidence of that thriving trade is so forthcoming for the capital. These striking differences suggests that working-class men in the north had a different view of sexual identity than their counterparts in the capital and this is illustrated further by the lives of the men in Carpenter's circle.

### Edward Carpenter and his northern comrades

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<sup>39</sup> Image used with permission from Sheffield Local Studies Library, [www.picturesheffield.com](http://www.picturesheffield.com).

Much has been written about Edward Carpenter over the years but little has been written about the northern working-class men that shaped both his own life and his vision of homosexuality that was embraced by homosexual men from all classes and all areas of the country.<sup>40</sup> His prose poem *Towards Democracy* became a milestone in the homosexual canon. It painted a picture of a beautiful, loving, working-class comrade with whom one could live a simple life full of sex and affection. Carpenter wrote *Towards Democracy* while living in the north and was inspired by the lovers he found there and the men he interacted with every day. He was particularly taken by the uncomplicated and tolerant nature of these men that he had not experienced anywhere else in England. As detailed in Chapter One, this fantasy of working-class perfection became the romantic holy grail chased by homosexual writers and diarists throughout the early twentieth century. It was a peculiarly northern ideal and could not have been created without Carpenter's experiences in Sheffield and the experiences of men that he observed whilst living there. For a time, South Yorkshire became the epicentre of the homosexual world for men who wanted a 'real' relationship. This was demonstrated by the poet Siegfried Sassoon's desire to move to the area after injuries removed him from the fighting in the First World War, 'I told them that I want to go as an ordinary worker in some works in a large town. (I have Sheffield in my mind's eye)<sup>41</sup>. Not only did Sassoon want to move north, he wanted to live his life amongst the workers as Carpenter himself had done.

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<sup>40</sup> Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter*, Sheila Rowbotham, and Jeffrey Weeks, *Socialism and the new life : the personal and sexual politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* (London, 1977); Chūshichi Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter 1844-1929 : prophet of human fellowship* (Cambridge, 1980).

<sup>41</sup> Siegfried Sassoon to Edward Carpenter, 15 August 1918, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 386.295.

Carpenter was from a wealthy family in Brighton and had had every opportunity in life. He arrived at his spiritual home near Sheffield via Cambridge University (and the church) and stints in the capital, neither place offering this sensitive, romantic and slightly neurotic young man what he craved, a friend and a lover combined. He wanted a real relationship with a man that did not include crippling guilt or a financial transaction. Carpenter was lucky enough to find this in the slums of Sheffield and to go on to live a life that became both legend and fantasy for metropolitan homosexuals - especially the novelist E.M.Forster, who committed this fantasy to paper in *Maurice* - until the decriminalisation of homosexual acts in 1967.<sup>42</sup> The Sheffield that Carpenter arrived at in the late nineteenth-century was filthy, with the steel industry shrouding the city in dirt, smoke and smog. Despite this lack of aesthetic appeal, Carpenter found the people warm, welcoming and without prejudice, and the students at his University Extension lectures to be bright and free-thinking.<sup>43</sup> He had not been there long when he wrote to his old Cambridge friend and confidant Charles Oates that 'I do not wish to leave Sheffield, as I have such a number of good friends here - of all classes but chiefly "the people"'.<sup>44</sup> When he had to return briefly to Brighton to settle his late father's estate, he wrote 'I have been living almost in a dead world since I came here.'<sup>45</sup> That this odd and presumably still priggish young man with a public school accent was accepted amongst 'the

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<sup>42</sup> E.M Forster, *Maurice* (London and New York, 2000, first published 1971), p.217. In his terminal note to the novel, Forster described Maurice as a 'direct result of a visit to Edward Carpenter at Millthorpe'. It has also been argued that D.H.Lawrence was heavily influenced by both *Maurice* and Carpenter's life when he wrote *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. This propelled the idea of the working man as sexual fantasy into popular culture for heterosexuals as well as homosexuals. Emile Delavenay, *D. H. Lawrence and Edward Carpenter: a study in Edwardian transition* (New York, 1971).

<sup>43</sup> Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter*, pp.60-61.

<sup>44</sup> Edward Carpenter to Charles George Oates, 27 November 1882, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 351.34.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 10 August 1881, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 351.30.

people' without question and censure speaks volumes about the custom of Sheffield's working-class people to accept individuals for what they were that Carpenter so admired.

The area clearly held an immense sway over Carpenter both as a physical home that he took delight in living in and as an idealised place to cultivate both relationships and his own vision of himself as a lover of men. Carpenter was driven by his longing for love and his libido, with all his major life decisions being controlled by these feelings and urges. The simple fact that he found it both easy and immensely satisfying to sleep with men in the area made him feel that he had found his place in the world. A dirty, poor, industrial city became nirvana for an upper-middle class homosexual through the open minded and pragmatic attitude of its young working men. Carpenter had had a difficult sex life until his move north. In Cambridge his youthful encounters were abortive due to the societal expectations of his (and his partners') class and the guilt that this generated. His dalliances with young male prostitutes in London, Italy and Paris, that were the norm for homosexuals of his class, left him cold.<sup>46</sup> The socialist in him was repelled by the element of sexual slavery that was present in these transactions and the romantic in him recoiled from the clinical nature of the sexual act devoid of emotion.<sup>47</sup> By the time he made the move north, he was on the edge of a nervous breakdown and almost convinced that he would never find love, his only glimmer of hope being in the abstract notion of mingling with simple, working people and finding a companion amongst them. This painful spark of hope was wonderfully dramatised in true Carpenter fashion in

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<sup>46</sup> Edward Carpenter, Autobiographical notes, 11 July 1911, C.F.S/W.W./E.C, p.61, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 188-201.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter*, p.60.

his autobiography *My Days and Dreams* 'it suddenly flashed upon me, with a vibration through my whole body, that I would and must somehow go and make my life with the mass of people and the manual labourers'.<sup>48</sup>

On following his heart and the vibration within, Carpenter was perhaps surprisingly not disappointed. He had casual but not impersonal encounters with all sorts of working-class men 'railway-men, porters, clerks, signalmen, ironworkers, coach-builders, Sheffield cutters' and with these men he found that he could 'knit up alliances more satisfactory to me than any I had known before'.<sup>49</sup> His years of nervous tension, depression and neurosis were washed away in the tide of all this open, uncomplicated affection mixed with sexual release and he felt that he had 'come into, or at least in sight of, the world to which I belonged, and to my natural habitat'.<sup>50</sup> The unusual thing about Carpenter's vast literary output is that there is no mention of any of his Sheffield encounters involving a financial element. There is no evidence that any of the men that Carpenter slept with in the north did so for money or gifts or that he ever faced the threat of blackmail from any of the men (or their families) whom he took to bed. This is highly unusual amongst the record left of the experiences of homosexuals throughout the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries, in particular the detailed record that we have of the large and visible network of homosexual prostitution in the capital. While Oscar Wilde trawled London's sexual underworld and enticed working-class boys into bed with champagne and gold

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<sup>48</sup> Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams, Being Autobiographical Notes* (London, 1916), p. 77.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p.101.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p.102.

cigarette boxes, Carpenter was achieving the same end seemingly free from the taint of money.

It seems that there was not the same attitude towards same-sex encounters in Sheffield as in the capital. This view was confirmed by the surprise contained in Carpenter's own letters sent in the August after the end of the Wilde trials. He was perturbed and baffled as to why his London publisher Fisher Unwin had refused to carry on printing his books after accidentally coming across a copy of his homosexually-themed pamphlet *Homogenic Love*. He wrote, 'there seems to be a perfect panic on this subject in London and you have to take your life in your hands if you broach it. But really..... I think they are all going out of their senses'.<sup>51</sup> Due to the anti-homosexual feeling of the capital and the visibility of the subject after the trials, Carpenter had to retreat north to continue the publication and distribution of his books. He was resigned to the fact that the attitude that he was used to in the north was not forthcoming throughout the rest of the country and he expressed this in a letter to Oates, 'And so I shall fall back on the Labour Press [based in Manchester], simply and shake the dust of London off my shoes!'.<sup>52</sup>

As discussed previously, the Sheffield that Carpenter lived in was an extremely masculine society where male friendship was encouraged in its pubs and amongst the socialist movement that flourished in the area. Middle-class morality had not yet made its way from the suburbs far out to the west of the city and some strange and intriguing proletarian customs still remained in place in

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<sup>51</sup> Carpenter to Oates, 26 August 1895, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 351.64.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 17 March 1896, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 351.6.

the city. Regular running races with working-class men as the participants took place through the middle of the city centre, drawing huge crowds that would bet on the outcome. Not strange in itself, but what was unusual about this custom was that the participants wore nothing but running shoes and a small loincloth (if that) and one can detect a slightly ironic tone in Carpenter's retelling of these undoubtably memorable events in that 'many of the runners being men and youths of fine physique and development, the effect was properly interesting'.<sup>53</sup> This was just one of the spaces in the city in which Carpenter picked up a working-class boyfriend (in this case a handsome, muscular young man who was also a very fast runner, called Joe Potter). He also met his partners at the pub, at socialist meetings, on the street and on a train.<sup>54</sup> Carpenter met one young private recuperating at the local military hospital during the First World War. What is clear from this eclectic list of meeting places, is that none of them were part of a specifically homosexual commercial network and they were not confined to a defined group of men, such as a group of homosexual friends or prostitutes. Carpenter picked up men in potentially dangerous, very public and predominantly heterosexual locations and he was both very successful at this and never fell foul of the law or of blackmailers.

### George Hukin

Amongst these more casual liaisons, Carpenter had two serious relationships and they both tell us a lot about how working-class men viewed love and sex between men at this time. The first of these was with a young razor grinder

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<sup>53</sup> Carpenter's unpublished reminiscences of his early days in Sheffield, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 253, 254.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

called George Hukin whom he met through the fledgling socialist movement in the city.



Figure 3.7: George Hukin in a sentimental pose with Edward Carpenter.<sup>55</sup>

Hukin was a typical specimen of working-class manhood: a steelworker, self educated and political and he had been married and widowed by his early twenties. Hukin grew up in and inhabited a male-dominated environment of the sort described previously. Affectionate physical contact was neither frowned upon nor unusual amongst the communities in which Hukin lived and this led him to a casual acceptance of sex and companionship between men in private that sat alongside as opposed to other forms of sexual expression such as marriage and fatherhood. The key word here is *private*. As noted there was no visible homosexual scene in Sheffield at this time and no visible blueprint for what a homosexual was. Sleeping with a man did *not* define the identity of the

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<sup>55</sup> Image used with permission from Sheffield Local Studies Library [www.picturesheffield.com](http://www.picturesheffield.com). Hukin is on the left.



men that Carpenter had relationships with, it was just something that they did alongside all the other sexual and romantic elements in their life.

We have no evidence of whether Hukin ever slept with men other than Carpenter but the only anxieties that his letters to the latter reveal were regarding the difference in their class and educational background not the fact that they were both men. He seemed to carry no guilt about their sexual relationship and at no point indicated that he worried whether what they were doing was wrong or even unusual. At the beginning of their relationship Hukin wrote:

I feel so mean and little beside you! Altogether unworthy of your friendship. It is not your fault that I feel so, I know. You have always tried to put me at my ease, to make me feel at home with you. Sorry I cannot come nearer to you.<sup>56</sup>

It is easy to see why Hukin could have been intimidated by his well educated and handsome new lover but this did not last long, he soon ended his letters with 'your loving Pippin'<sup>57</sup>, pleaded with Carpenter to visit him at home before socialist meetings and told him that 'It is so good of you to love me so. I don't think I ever felt so happy in my life as I have felt lately and i'm sure I love you more than any other friend I have in the world.'<sup>58</sup> It was clear that Hukin was deeply in love with Carpenter and Carpenter with him. Carpenter's - one might say - gloating letters to his homosexual (and unlucky in love) friend Oates, gleefully described his joy at having found the man of his Whitmanesque

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<sup>56</sup> George Hukin to Edward Carpenter, 8 July 1886, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 362.1.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 3 November 1886, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 362.6(1).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 28 October 1886, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 362.5.

dreams. He crowed 'My friend George has turned out too good almost to be true'.<sup>59</sup> This was followed by:

he does me good, being very easy going and comic and yet deep feeling underneath and I trust and help him too. He generally stays the night with me on Saturdays, either at Millthorpe or at my quarters in Sheffield.<sup>60</sup>

Carpenter even turned down a trip to Oates' villa in Italy because he didn't want to be parted from his lover. One gets a picture of Hukin as a warm, loving man who was an excellent foil to the highly strung Carpenter, an ideal comrade indeed.

There was a passionate, sexual love between the two men but unfortunately, Carpenter's giddy comment about Hukin being 'too good to be true' became an all too painful reality. This was due to their fundamental differences in viewing their relationship. Carpenter was a self confessed homosexual or to use his own terminology Uranian. His sexuality defined him, much as it does for many men today and he could be classed as one of the first modern homosexual men.

Hukin was just as invested in the affair as Carpenter but he was not homosexual, he did not view himself in this way and took his identity from his work in the steel industry and his socialist politics, not from his sexuality.

Because of this, he was able to fall in love with a woman and marry her while not seeing the marriage as an obstacle to his love for Carpenter.<sup>61</sup> It seems

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<sup>59</sup> Carpenter to Oates, 28 October 1886, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 351.30.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 20 December 1886, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 351.37.

<sup>61</sup> Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality*, p.199. Brady reproduces Tsuzuki's argument that Hukin was 'uneasy and even embarrassed' by his relationship with Carpenter and that he married to gain respectability. I have found no evidence to support this line of argument, in fact Hukin's letters seem to show his comfort both with himself and their relationship. He had been married previously and his second marriage could be a demonstration of his ongoing attraction to both sexes.

naive now that he thought such a menage could work but it speaks volumes about the sexual attitudes of the working-class communities in the area at the time. Hukin and his wife Fannie were willing to share their lives and their home with Carpenter, with Hukin still sometimes sharing his bed, but it was Carpenter who could not cope with sharing his lover.<sup>62</sup> The jealousy crippled him. He wrote of his heartbreak to the ever sympathetic Oates, and spoke of sleeplessness, physical pain and 'spasms of jealousy' but went on to add that 'he [George] was so lovely on Thursday morning and kissed me and looked into my eyes so lovingly - it seems awfully hard to have anything come between us'.<sup>63</sup> Hukin clearly did not want to lose Carpenter and even a year later Carpenter wrote 'I went for a walk with George last Thursday and slept with him at Baslow - just as affectionate and loving as ever. It is a funny business but I think I am getting used to it'.<sup>64</sup> Even within the confines of a marriage Hukin retained his love for and attraction to Carpenter and could happily live in the two worlds with no sense of guilt or dislocation.

For his part Hukin was eager to include Carpenter in his courtship of and later marriage to Fannie. In one way the two relationships were totally separate in his mind and could both exist without infringing on the other, but in another way he tried to link all three people together by his affection. In one letter he told Carpenter that:

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<sup>62</sup> It is not known how much Fannie knew about the true nature of Hukin's relationship with Carpenter.

<sup>63</sup> Carpenter to Oates, 27 August 1887, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 351.42.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 4 January 1888, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 351.44.

I should like to be with you just for one hour. It seems so very quiet and lonely in this room without you here. I miss you so much more than I thought I should; and I don't find it so nice sleeping alone as I used to think it was.<sup>65</sup>

He then went on to say that:

I have seen Fannie every evening since you left and I love her now more than ever!..... But don't think that we have forgotten you dear Ted! for if we didn't both of us love you so much, I don't think we should love each other as much as we do. I'm sure we both love you more than ever Ted and you really must come and live with us when we do marry.<sup>66</sup>

Hukin did not see why such an arrangement could not work as his own feelings encompassed both of his lovers without problem or guilt. This was confirmed by the fact that, after Carpenter in a fit of masochistic generosity, bought the young couple a new bed as a wedding gift Hukin wrote 'I do wish you could sleep with us sometimes Ted, but I don't know whether Fannie would quite like it yet and I don't feel that I could press it on her anyway'.<sup>67</sup> It is not clear what Fannie thought of this situation but she was known as an intelligent and astute woman and cannot have been entirely ignorant of her husband's feelings. She certainly accepted Carpenter and his many friends and lovers long after his relationship with Hukin ended and wrote to him sporadically even after her husband's early death. This acceptance of the situation by its working-class participants suggests that such scenarios may not have been as rare as we think.

### George Merrill

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<sup>65</sup> Hukin to Carpenter, 21 May 1887, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 362.10 (1).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 November 1887, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 362.16 (1).

After having his heart broken by Hukin, Carpenter was wary of entering into another serious relationship, but the man who won his heart (and kept it until his death) was an entirely different prospect altogether.



Figure 3.8: George Merrill as a young man.<sup>68</sup>

George Merrill was another working-class man but unlike Hukin he was not political, grew up and lived in the slums and had no particular trade, although he had jobs ranging from steel worker to waiter in a high class hotel. He was also not a part of the serious world of socialist meetings and coffee shops in which Carpenter had found his last lover. When they first met (when Merrill cruised Carpenter on a train), Merrill was a handsome, dreamy, sensitive young man who had grown up making clothes for dolls, 'knitting stockings' and looking after the neighbourhood children in the slum in which he lived.<sup>69</sup> He was also

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<sup>68</sup> Image used with permission from Sheffield Local Studies Library, [www.picturesheffield.com](http://www.picturesheffield.com). Note the dreamy expression and the loud tie.

<sup>69</sup> Carpenter, 'George Merrill'.

unashamedly homosexual and had enjoyed encounters with people as varied as the slum boys he grew up with, an Italian count, and an aristocrat who picked him up at a train station.<sup>70</sup> Merrill is a fascinating figure, because although he was as sexually self aware as Carpenter, he had never experienced the guilt or shame that Carpenter had had to battle before he could enter a meaningful relationship. Carpenter's issues stemmed from his upbringing and the societal and familial expectations attached to his class.<sup>71</sup> Merrill had none of these issues to contend with; he was brought up in a slum with an alcoholic father and in some ways he was already outside of respectable society. When he walked around Sheffield in his colourful clothes, refusing to conform to Victorian respectability his working-class neighbours left him to it and clearly trusted him enough to look after their children. Merrill's proclivities were obvious and his high sex drive confirmed them. Many of Carpenter's middle-class friends warned him against his lover's indiscretion but Merrill's community accepted him and he was never brought before the law for his homosexuality.

There was no danger of Merrill getting married and Carpenter had finally found his ideal comrade. The letters that Merrill wrote to Carpenter are a joy to read. They are warm, gossipy, sometimes needy and always littered with affection. A typical letter included something like the following, 'I shall be glad to see you back dear and have a good hug for I am wanting badly. I think of you every night and every morning and wish your arms where [*sic*] around me'.<sup>72</sup> They are full of little references to a shared life. Merrill's mother knew Carpenter and the

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, pp. 13-78.

<sup>72</sup> George Merrill to Edward Carpenter, 11 November 1896, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 363.5.

nature of his relationship with her son but she liked him enough to ensure that Merrill mentioned her in his letters, 'Mother sends her love to you'.<sup>73</sup> The two men shared friends and gossiped about their romantic entanglements, 'poor O [Charles Oates] its a shame he should be put about so with Cole, its too bad'.<sup>74</sup> Their life together was acknowledged by friends such as Oates and Hukin who always addressed their later letters to them both and asked after them as one would have treated any other married couple.<sup>75</sup> Even when Fannie wrote to Carpenter she sent her love to Merrill.<sup>76</sup> There was an element of play-acting in the letters: Merrill often referred to Carpenter as 'My dear faithful Dad'<sup>77</sup> and signed the letters 'your affectionate sonny'<sup>78</sup> or 'Your devoted son George'<sup>79</sup>. This could suggest an element of the almost condescending, cross-class relationships that Wilde and his circle engaged in. However, it seems more likely that these were just affectionate pet names that allowed Carpenter to indulge his fantasy of taking care of someone and Merrill his of being taken care of. The only gifts that Carpenter gave Merrill were cigarettes and the odd book and he spent many hours helping Merrill to find work. Merrill was made redundant from the hotel in which he worked and he was distraught when he wrote to Carpenter that this lack of work 'rather upsets our future plans'.<sup>80</sup> At this stage, their life together depended on them both having an income. Merrill was certainly not a kept boy.

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 8 April 1897, Sheffield City Archives MSS 363.10.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 26 October 1896, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 363.3.

<sup>76</sup> Fannie Hukin to Edward Carpenter 25 May 1904, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 362.125.

<sup>77</sup> Merrill to Carpenter, 20 October 1896, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 363.2.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 26 October 1896, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 363.3.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 11 November 1896, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 363.5.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 8 November 1896, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 363.4(2).

Merrill and Carpenter eventually set up home together at Millthorpe just outside of Sheffield and became icons in the closed world of homosexual life throughout the country (as mentioned previously, inspiring and being the models for Maurice and Alec in E.M. Forster's *Maurice*).<sup>81</sup> They also became a central part of the local community, drinking at the pubs with friends and holding social events and dances on their land for their neighbours. What is even more remarkable is that although Carpenter and Merrill's relationship and lifestyle were an open secret among many in the city, they never fell foul of the law or experienced the level of hostility that one would perhaps have expected.

Rowbotham reproduces many anecdotes about Carpenter that were collected by a journalist in the 1980s. At parties, Merrill would dress up like a cat and rub 'round people's legs'.<sup>82</sup> Carpenter was remembered as 'a kindly old gentleman who had a remarkable number of gentlemen to visit' whereas Merrill was remembered rather differently.<sup>83</sup> In fact, 'Mr Merrill had a name it was openly spoken about... we knew there was something queer about Merrill'.<sup>84</sup> Millthorpe seems to have been something of a nudist colony and local children made a habit of peeping through the hedges and observing the strange goings on.<sup>85</sup>

Presumably, they went home and told their parents at some point but despite all this, Millthorpe and its inhabitants were never associated with indecency in the press or legal records.

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<sup>81</sup> Forster, *Maurice*, p.217. In Forster's 'Terminal Note' to the book he (now famously) remembered that on his third visit to Millthorpe, George Merrill 'touched my backside - gently and just above the buttocks' and that it 'seemed to go straight through the small of my back into my ideas, without involving my thoughts'.

<sup>82</sup> Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter*, p.287.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, p.288.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, p.287.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, p.377.



## The O'Brien incident

The only incident that challenged their idyll happened in 1909 while they were having an extended holiday around the Mediterranean. A local man named M.D. O'Brien launched a one man campaign against both Carpenter's homosexuality and his socialism.<sup>86</sup> He delivered a pamphlet that he had written lengthily titled *Socialism and Infamy: The Homogenic or Comrade Love Exposed: An Open Letter in Plain Words For A Socialist Prophet to Edward Carpenter M.A.* by hand to as many doors as he could reach. It accused the residents of Millthorpe of naked dancing, corrupting youths and morbid appetites although what the neighbours made of such exuberant revelry he declined to mention.<sup>87</sup> He also went on to make the astonishing claim that men such as Carpenter and Merrill could get away with it in Sheffield because 'these charges are not pressed home' and that if the men of Sheffield were left to their own devices 'they would turn from their wives to their male "comrades" who are more capable of satisfying their unnatural appetites' making the city the new 'Sodom'.<sup>88</sup> He stepped up his attack by writing open letters to the *Sheffield Telegraph* along the same lines. One could have anticipated serious consequences from such accusations but they did not occur. Carpenter was sensible and learned from Wilde's misfortune in that he did not press libel charges. He also benefitted from the fact that O'Brien attacked a local vicar and the entire parish of Holmesfield

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, p.285. O'Brien was a member of the right-wing Liberty and Property Defence League and was 'obsessively hostile to both socialism and homosexuality'.

<sup>87</sup> M.D. O'Brien, *Socialism and Infamy: The Homogenic or Comrade Love Exposed: An Open Letter in Plain Words For A Socialist Prophet to Edward Carpenter M.A.* (privately printed in Sheffield, 1909), pp.104-108. As seen above, he may have been right on the charges of naked dancing.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, p.21.

where Millthorpe was situated, thereby uniting the entire locality on the side of Carpenter. Hukin updated them throughout the scandal and noted that although Fannie had heard stories of a small group of women who wanted to ‘mob’ Carpenter on his return, in general ‘very few people have mentioned the subject to me but Nichols told me yesterday that all to whom he had spoken about it were disinclined to believe anything against you’ and that a group of local youths had threatened to attack O’Brien should he be seen in the area again.<sup>89</sup> Characteristically the locals were more disturbed by a middle-class man of dubious politics telling them what to think and questioning the morality of their city than by Carpenter living his life in private.

O’Brien did not stop with his localised attempt to persecute Carpenter and Merrill. He took his campaign further and wrote to the Metropolitan authorities in an attempt to get *Homogenic Love* banned for indecency. Alongside this, he claimed that he could provide the evidence that would be needed to prosecute Carpenter, and by default, Merrill for homosexual offences. The local police were ordered to investigate O’Brien’s accusations and interview the men that he claimed had been approached by Carpenter and Merrill. The ensuing police document is crucial to understanding working-class attitudes towards sex between men at the time.<sup>90</sup> Strangely, this incident is not mentioned in recent studies involving Carpenter.<sup>91</sup> Tamagne mentions the document in a footnote yet does not consider what the document says about the culture in which

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<sup>89</sup> Hukin to Carpenter 11 April 1909, Sheffield City Archives, MSS 362.101.

<sup>90</sup> HO 144/1043/183473 held at the The National Archive (Kew).

<sup>91</sup> It is not mentioned in either Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain*; Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter or Weeks, Coming Out* although the O’Brien pamphlet incident is discussed at length in each.

Carpenter and Merrill lived.<sup>92</sup> Merrill, in particular, had clearly been very busy and had left behind a long list of failed conquests (not to mention the men who had actually been seduced by his earthy charms). Carpenter had been sexually successful with working-class men but it is perhaps most interesting to examine how men who were not sexually interested responded to having male/male sex thrust (almost literally) into their faces. In fact the most enlightening part of the document is the reaction of working men to Merrill's crude and exuberant advances. Although they often took place in public, they were seen as a matter of private concern that should not have been of concern to the authorities. The respect for individual privacy and gruff tolerance discussed earlier was given voice in the report.

The document is a catalogue of silence and discomfort with police intervention into private matters. It was written by Captain Holland the local Chief Constable and began by stating that he had received a list from O'Brien of men that had been propositioned by Carpenter and/or Merrill. The first was a twenty-three year old named Allsopp who had apparently told O'Brien what had happened to him. However, when Allsopp was approached by the police he refused to make a statement:

[Allsopp] positively refuses to make any statement on the matter. but says the statement made by O'Brien is true to a certain extent. and that what he said at the Wolstenholme Cafe was in *a confidential conversation* with O'Brien and others. and *he expected it would have been treated as such*. He states that the incident referred to by O'Brien took place about two years ago. *but there was no impropriety or*

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<sup>92</sup> Florence Tamagne, *History of Homosexuality in Europe: Berlin, London, Paris 1919-1939, Vol. I & II* (New York, 2006), p.87.

*attempt took place*..... He refused to give any further information, or attach his signature in a written statement.<sup>93</sup>

Allsopp had been willing to discuss the sexual overtures made to him in private but absolutely refused to do so with the police. In fact, he seemed angry that a private conversation had been forced into the public realm. He was also adamant that no 'impropriety took place' when judging by Merrill's other attempts it probably did. What did this mean? Perhaps the advances made towards Allsopp were not out of the ordinary, if they were a part of everyday life then he may not have responded to them but he equally may not have seen them as improper.

The evidence suggests that Merrill's advances were an everyday occurrence. Fred Pearson had given Merrill a lift in his cart where he had grabbed his thigh. Pearson had heard of Merrill's proclivities and asked him to leave the cart - he did not however report the incident to the police. William Platts stated that ten years previously, when the two had been working in the fields near Millthorpe, Merrill had 'exposed his person to him'. Platts made no complaint about the incident originally and refused to do so then.<sup>94</sup> Joseph Gratton had been invited to Millthorpe for a drink in 1906. It is tempting to admire Merrill's optimism and confidence when it was revealed what happened next:

Merrill brought a glass of wine and a cigar. and then left the room. shortly afterwards he returned and suddenly drew a curtain across the door. and lowered the light. and immediately sat upon Gratton's knee. Gratton

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<sup>93</sup> HO 144/1043/183473. The odd punctuation is faithful to, and repeated throughout, the original document but the Italics are my own.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

at once repelled him and left the house. He states no indecency took place. nor was any suggestion made by Merrill.<sup>95</sup>

One would assume that the suggestion of indecency was made by the mood lighting and lap sitting. Although Gratton was not interested in sleeping with Merrill, he did not report the incident and refused to do so later. This was unlikely to be a case of Gratton wanting to exonerate himself from a possible crime as he also attempted to exonerate Merrill from the implications of his sexual behaviour. If he had wanted to, he could have incriminated Merrill whilst removing himself from the situation. James Markham, Richard White, John Wint and John Walker were all interviewed but refused to give any information.<sup>96</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting testimony came from a farmer named George Levick and referred to two incidents: one that occurred in 1901/1902 and one that had occurred in around 1907. In the former incident, Carpenter had asked Levick if he could drive a friend that had been staying at Millthorpe to Chesterfield station. He agreed and Merrill accompanied them on the journey. Merrill was as subtle as ever in his advances:

On the way back. Merrill said "I want to tiddle pull up George. if I don't get out and tiddle just when I want to it makes it swell." I pulled up and he got out of the trap and just walked across the road to a gate and began making water. and then he turned round and walked back to the trap and said "see how it has made it swell" his person was fully exposed and he was shaking it about with his hand. He then got into the trap and I drove on. Merrill then took hold of my thigh and said "does it ever make yours swell when you want to tiddle". I told him that he must not try anything of that sort with me and he said no more then.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

This was the sort of blatant come-on that one would expect could have lead to a punch. However, Levick sounded indifferent to the whole encounter. He knew what Merrill wanted and although he did not want it himself, he sounded neither angry not surprised by the overture. He also continued giving Merrill his lift home after the incident occurred and the two remained friendly acquaintances. Levick's retelling of the event gave the impression of an ordinary encounter.

The nonchalant way in which Levick responded to Merrill encouraged his tenacity in 1907 when he made another attempt to get him into bed. The two men bumped into each other outside the Traveller's Rest pub in Barlow one evening. They made small talk which was followed up by an even more blatant attempt to pick Levick up:

he then said "I have been to Dronfield, Sheffield and Chesterfield and can't light a bit of xxxxx nowhere". I said a "bit of what." he said "you know" he said "just look here, see how it's swollen". He unfastened his trousers and pulled his person out and took hold of it with both his hands and was wagging it about. He said "take hold of it and feel at it" I replied I am not going to feel at that. He kept shaking it about and I came through the gate and closed it. and he then put it through the gate bars and wanted me to feel at it. Again I refused and he then said "Well then give me a kiss and say no more about it" I told him I should have something different to kiss than him and left him. He said before I left him "don't say anything about it to anyone". I said alright and bid him goodnight.<sup>98</sup>

Again, Levick seemed unperturbed by such an aggressive attempt to get him into bed and he certainly did not report the incident to the police. He was not shocked by Merrill's behaviour and Merrill clearly felt that he could tell Levick that he had been out looking for sex and ask for a kiss. Levick's response to this

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid. The xxxx refers to a word that has been crossed out but seems to have just been a spelling mistake. I presume that it should read 'can't light of a bit nowhere' and that this means that Merrill had been to Dronfield, Sheffield and Chesterfield looking for sex but had not found any.

was not one of revulsion and he engaged in some banter with Merrill, 'I told him I should have something different to kiss than him'. Although Levick did not tell the authorities about the incident, he did tell the landlord of the Traveller's Rest and this suggests that Merrill's escapades were common knowledge in the area. This makes it all the more remarkable that nobody other than O'Brien made a complaint to the police.

Whether these men were comfortable with same-sex love or not, they were even less comfortable with the idea of the state intervening into private life. However eccentric or aggressive Merrill's overtures, they were not to be punished by law or by social ostracism. Carpenter seems to have been tame in comparison. He was barely mentioned in the report. The only one to do so was Levick who saw nothing wrong with his behaviour:

I have never seen or heard anything amiss with Mr Carpenter no more than I have seen him and other gentlemen at times who have been staying at his house walking out on the road with their arms around each other waist.<sup>99</sup>

In fact, the investigation was not a success. It seems that the police involved were almost as uncomfortable as the men that they interviewed in having to address sexual matters. One can assume that it was a relief to all involved when Captain Holland had to write that:

We have been unable to obtain any incriminating evidence of recent date agat [sic] Merrill. who appears to be (as far as can be ascertained) the greatest offender. whilst agat Carpenter there is nothing but strong suspicion.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

Needless to say no-one was prosecuted and Merrill and Carpenter remained an integral part of their local community. Tamagne has suggested that this failure to prosecute Carpenter on 'morality' charges was part of a conspiracy to 'pin him with a more serious crime - national treason perhaps'.<sup>101</sup> This seems entirely far-fetched. If the authorities had wanted, they could have made a case with the material that they had. That they didn't seems due in part to a wish to avoid a Wildean scandal but more to the fact that it is doubtful that they could have secured any witnesses to testify or even make a statement.

Carpenter had clearly become used to living in an environment where his sexuality was not an issue. This was illustrated by his surprise at the capital's reaction to the Wilde trials and the resulting press backlash. The newspaper coverage of the trials in the north, examined in Chapter Two, was, moreover, markedly different to that in the capital. In Merrill and Hukin we have two examples that are rare in their detail of how northern, working-class men experienced their sexuality before the First World War. Their lack of guilt and fear suggests that the culture in which they lived did not set out to persecute men like them. It possibly did not even recognise men like them as they did not recognise themselves as a distinct sexual type. They were not isolated men with isolated experiences. In fact they were part of a large group of working-men from across the north who knew each other and sometimes slept together. Although it is clear that they were not part of a homosexual subculture in the style of that in London, they were part of a masculine, homosocial culture that

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<sup>101</sup> Tamagne, *History of Homosexuality in Europe*, p.87. Part of the investigation touched on Carpenter's socialism and his links to known anarchists. He was also never prosecuted for his political leanings.



often found ways to incorporate sex and love between men alongside the worlds of work, politics and friendship.

### Who was being prosecuted for homosexual offences?

In recent studies, it has been identified that the majority of men who became involved in the legal system were working-class.<sup>102</sup> The research carried out for this thesis only serves to emphasise this idea and prove that in this area, the north reflected what was happening in the capital. There are numerous potential reasons for this: that working-class men did not have access to private spaces to conduct their sexual affairs and were therefore forced into risky public sex, that they did not have access to good lawyers or the contacts that could keep such situations out of the courts, or that working-class men were more likely to prostitute themselves and thus make themselves more vulnerable to the police. One could even argue that because the ideas of the sexologists and their prescriptive views on sexual identity had not reached the vast majority of the working-classes by this point, working men who had sex with other men did not understand that they were transgressing both the law and the boundaries of moral behaviour. Because of this, it is possible that they were less cautious about their choices of partner and location.

Out of all the men tried in the sample years in this period, only three could potentially be classed as middle-class: a teacher, a lay reader and a skating rink

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<sup>102</sup> Harry G. Cocks, *Nameless Offences: Homosexual Desire in the 19th Century* (London, 2003); Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (London and Chicago, 2005).

proprietor.<sup>103</sup> What they all had in common was that they held positions of authority over children and the teacher and the lay reader in some ways represented the state. This was not uncommon in metropolitan prosecution trends; that people who seemed to have breached their privileged position of trust and moral authority must be seen to have been tried and, if appropriate, punished. These were also the most likely cases to be picked up by the press. The rest of the prosecutions show a varied range of working-class professions being represented: a carter, labourers, miners, soldiers, sailors, fishermen, shop assistants, grocers, steelworkers, a butler, a hawker, men in the cloth trade, a hairdresser, barmen, waiters, a photographer and even a showman.<sup>104</sup> They cover the entire spectrum of work, from the professions traditionally associated with homosexuality such as waiters, hairdressers and sailors to the professions that were almost fetishised as emblems of masculinity, steelworkers, miners and soldiers.<sup>105</sup> As the majority of men in the sample had their occupations recorded it is possible to see that in most cases, working men slept with other working men. There was no clear evidence of casual or professional prostitution or an abundance of cross-class relationships of the like that has been found amongst the Metropolitan Police archives.

The story of the men who were prosecuted in this period is not a straightforward one. There is no evidence of a concerted effort by any police force in the north actively to prosecute homosexual men. The largest number of men prosecuted was in 1915 during the First World War. In some ways this was an anomaly as

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<sup>103</sup> HO 140/201, HO 140/245, HO 140/321, The National Archive.

<sup>104</sup> HO 140/161, HO 140/165, HO 140/201, HO 140/205, HO 140/241, HO 140/245, HO 140/281, HO 140/285, HO 140/ 321, HO 140/325, The National Archive.

<sup>105</sup> In fact, perhaps surprisingly, the majority of men that were arrested worked in the more traditionally masculine professions.

tens of thousands of soldiers passed through northern cities and accompanying them were larger numbers of both civilian and military police on the look out for bad behaviour. It is important to note that although more men were arrested, more were found not guilty by a judge and jury when they came to court. Out of the 102 men arrested and sent to court in the north, 26 (or one quarter) of them were habitual criminals who would most likely have been known to the police already, had committed child abuse or what would now be classed as attempted rape.<sup>106</sup> The majority of the rest of the men seem to have been victims of bad luck, bad timing or a bad choice of location for their sexual exploits. There were only two instances where the offence was specified to have taken place in private, one in Liverpool in 1895<sup>107</sup> and one in Lancaster in 1910<sup>108</sup>. Oddly enough, both of these incidents happened around new year (possibly involving drinking and celebrations) and in both cases all those involved were found guilty - with the Liverpoolian man pleading guilty to both procuring and committing an act of gross indecency. These cases could have been brought to court by a nosy neighbour, a disgruntled friend or ex-lover or even one of the men involved who changed his mind or wanted to settle a score. This however was not the norm, all the rest of the acts involved took place in public or on board ships that were stationed or returned to Hull or Liverpool (but again the latter was unusual).

### Where were men being prosecuted?

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<sup>106</sup> HO 140/161, HO 140/165, HO 140/201, HO 140/205, HO 140/241, HO 140/245, HO 140/281, HO 140/285, HO 140/321, HO 140/325, The National Archive.

<sup>107</sup> HO 140/161, The National Archive.

<sup>108</sup> HO 140/281, The National Archive.

Based on current analysis that recognises the importance of urbanisation and the city to the historiography of sexuality, one would assume that the majority of arrests for homosexual acts would have taken place not only in the big cities of the north such as Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and Sheffield but in the centres of these cities. As in London where the West End and more central spaces (geared towards a fledgling commercial culture) were the key sites of homosexual activity, it could be expected that the same would apply to northern cities: that men would meet where shops, theatres, pubs and urinals were most abundant in an attempt to create and participate in a homosexual sub-culture. Of course, had this happened, as in London, arrest rates would have been higher in these areas due to an increase in visibility making the job of the police and concerned public that much easier. This did not happen. As has been already mentioned, there was no equivalent commercial network for homosexual men to participate in any northern city at this time. Even now, there is only Manchester with a specific gay village, with cities like Leeds and Sheffield having gay bars scattered around but a higher number of gay friendly, mixed establishments.<sup>109</sup> Because of this, arrests seem to have taken place throughout the north in small towns and satellite towns of the big cities as much as in the cities themselves further confirming that the landscape of homosexual life in the north was very different from that described in the capital. Across the sample years there were only six arrests in Manchester, five in Leeds and four in Sheffield. These figures help to explain why the men in Edward Carpenter's circle evaded prosecution and were able to feel so relaxed about their sex lives.

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<sup>109</sup> Ian Taylor, Karen Evans and Penny Fraser, *Global Change, Local Feeling and Everyday Life in the North of England: A Tale of Two Cities; A Study in Manchester and Sheffield* (London, 1996), p.191.

The only exceptions to this seem to be in the two port cities of Liverpool and Hull where city centre arrests far outweighed those of other places. In particular, Liverpool had a very high arrest record. The highest number of arrests in any town or city was eight, in Liverpool it was eighteen. One would also have been unlucky to have been tried at the Liverpool assizes as it had the highest level of guilty verdicts (eighty percent) and proportionally the lowest level of not guilty (twenty percent).<sup>110</sup> This seems to reflect Liverpool's status as a thriving port city that attracted a high amount of transient residents and men looking for work. Levels of policing tended to be higher in ports to account for the sailors constantly passing through and the disproportionately high numbers of single men (from England and overseas) engaged in casual work. Dockside areas were also notorious for their immoral entertainments, prostitution and heavy drinking. It is possible that the police were more aware and actively on the look out for sexual transgressions amongst other crimes that enraged public decency and were thus more likely to pursue homosexual men. Following on from this, when the men finally reached court they could have faced a jury more aware of and hardened against deviant sexualities such as prostitution and homosexuality who were thus more likely to come to a guilty verdict than their counterparts across the mainland north.

If Liverpool assize was the worst place to be tried for homosexual offences in the north, Manchester and Lancaster were not too far behind. In Manchester, sixty percent of men were found guilty and in Lancaster fifty-seven percent were found guilty.<sup>111</sup> The Northern assize circuit judges and the people that formed

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<sup>110</sup> HO 140/161, HO 140/165, HO 140/201, HO 140/205, HO 140/241, HO 140/245, HO 140/281, HO 140/285, HO 140/321, HO 140/325, The National Archive.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

the juries were clearly more inclined to punish men for their sexual transgressions or the police forces working in the area were more adept at collecting evidence and extracting guilty pleas. There is evidence to suggest that the Lancashire and Merseyside police forces were more professional and better manned than those in Yorkshire and when scholars and autobiographers have spoken of a northern respect for privacy and the individual, they were usually referring to Yorkshire.<sup>112</sup> This could have been due to the fact that cities in Yorkshire were more traditionally working-class. For example, Sheffield was known as 'the most proletarian city in England' and the working-class population dominated the landscape of the city.<sup>113</sup> Communities in these cities tended to be rooted in traditional industries with little movement of the population as opposed to the more fluid populations in the north-west. It is apparent that cultural differences across the north had a tangible impact on the lives of its people, particularly the lives of people who transgressed the boundaries of popular morality. In the two North-Eastern assizes of York and Leeds, the figures seem to reflect these differences. In Leeds fifty-one percent of men were found guilty and in York, a strikingly low percentage of twenty-five were found guilty.<sup>114</sup> There were clearly real, regional differences in how men were arrested and how they were tried once they entered the court system.

It is difficult to gather personal details from official legal records, especially in this period where no court transcripts or depositions still exist. However, it is

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<sup>112</sup> Clive Emsley, *The English Police: A Political and Social History* (London, 1996, first published 1991), pp.265-267.

<sup>113</sup> Taylor et al, *Global Change, Local Feeling and Everyday Life in the North of England*, p.87. The middle-class residents of the city were a small minority and lived on the outskirts while working-class housing dominated the city centre.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

possible to consider the circumstances in which men were arrested and to study what this meant in relation to the homosexual life of the north. It has already been stated that the majority of men arrested were caught in public spaces and of the men who were engaged in consensual acts with adults, most were arrested on their own or in pairs. The records do not state where within a town or city men were caught so it is reasonable to assume that they were caught in the usual public spaces that we have come to associate with homosexual sex in this period: the urinal or public toilet, the park or the back alley. In the case of Grindley and Morton, two young miners who were prosecuted for committing gross indecency with each other at Handsworth in Sheffield in the June of 1895, it is easy to imagine them going for a drink after work (Morton had already been bailed once for drunkenness) and falling into bed, or the local park together at the end of it. It could have been a one time act to relieve sexual tension or perhaps they were lovers who became careless and paid the price with six months hard labour.<sup>115</sup> A case such as that of George Hirst, a twenty-six year old Innkeeper from Huddersfield shows that there were pubs in all sorts of towns and cities across the north where homosexual men gathered and probably did much more than drink.<sup>116</sup> He was prosecuted for committing gross indecency with five different men from 1 January 1894 to 1 June 1895 and it is likely that his position as an innkeeper provided the space and opportunity for his successful love life. Labourers were most often arrested for homosexual acts and this could be explained by the fact that they were likely to be at the

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<sup>115</sup> HO 140/165, The National Archive.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

bottom end of the working-classes as far as earnings were concerned and that they were likely to live in lodgings and be more vulnerable to arrest.<sup>117</sup>

It is clear that there seem to be no set rules that were adhered to when prosecuting men for homosexual offences. Apart from George Hirst and his inn, there are no examples of larger scale arrests in this period. This points to the fact that police forces were not pursuing homosexual meeting places and that they were not demanding the names and addresses of other homosexual men from those who were caught. Those who became involved in the legal system were caught alone or in pairs or were implicated in accusations of child abuse and most seem like isolated incidents. There appeared to be no desire on the part of the police or magistrates to further pursue any men outside the confines of individual cases and there were certainly no attempts to clamp down on any particular venues or meeting places. Men in the north seemed to come before a judge and jury due to misfortune, stupidity or indisputable criminality (in the cases of child abuse and attempted rape) and this is quite a different story to the commonly repeated discourse of persecution and repression that has held dominance in the history of British homosexuality.

## Conclusion

During this period, northern working-class men were able to have sex with each other with very little interference by the authorities or members of their own communities. Curious members of the public or the police could find such men if they looked for them and were willing to prosecute if they caught them in the act

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<sup>117</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, p.126.



but many of the men that came before the courts seem to have done so due to bad luck rather than targeted policing. Due to the masculine working-class culture of the time and understandings of northern masculinity there seems to have been little anxiety about same-sex desire amongst local communities, local police or the men who did the desiring. It was simply not important as an issue. Working-class people often led difficult lives even in times of prosperity. Many industrial jobs were physically taxing and dangerous and material issues such as housing, food and clothing were never far from the surface. This left little time or inclination to worry about how pleasure was sought. The police were more invested in pursuing other forms of crime such as theft, prostitution, gambling, vagrancy and drunkenness. The only exception to this were the port cities of Liverpool and Hull. Although in these areas it is possible that same-sex desire was more linked with prostitution and the transgressive life of the docks and as such did present a challenge to social order. Such crimes had the potential to disrupt local society. It took an unusual event with the power to challenge normal social conditions such as the First World War to facilitate an increase in prosecutions. Yet even when this occurred, local juries were less willing to convict than in peace time and the effects were temporary.

Physical and emotional affection seem to have been commonplace in how working men interacted with each other and it is possible that these men (and their communities) regarded sex between men as something ordinary - another form of human contact. Working men's identities and sense of selfhood were not dependant on their sexuality, they were tied to their work and workplace community, their sense of regionality and to the groups of mates that shared these key areas. For the men in Carpenter's Sheffield, class and socialist

politics held a similar sort of power. Same-sex desire was not disruptive to the community or to notions of masculinity as long as these areas remained at the forefront of how men understood themselves. It would not be until the 1950s, when sexuality became one of a number of challengers to work as the primary indicator of a man's identity, that these notions began to change. There were no moral panics in the north to rival those of the capital. The Wilde trials and white slavery panics remained entirely metropolitan affairs. Paradoxically, although much working-class sexuality was expressed on the streets, it remained a more low-key affair. People were invested in privacy and the individual's right to do as he pleased as long as it was consensual. This is demonstrated by the reactions of Sheffield's working men to George Merrill's advances and the fact that none of them testified against him. Carpenter could easily have become another Wilde, but he did not, thanks to the protection of the local community.

## **Chapter Four: 'The wife does not take any active interest in the matters that mostly appeal to me': Personal experiences of masculinity and same-sex desire in the north, 1919 - 1938**

In order to analyse the experience of working-class men who desired other men in the north during the inter-war period it is necessary to understand the culture in which they lived. Chapters Two and Three have underlined the masculine nature of working-class culture and the way in which men and women, on the whole, socialised separately. They also put forward the argument that working men took their sense of self from their work. This chapter will develop that argument by drawing on the work of Arnold Freeman in Sheffield which demonstrates that this was still the case into the inter-war years.<sup>1</sup> A careful reading of that work also provides evidence of how men experienced their marriages and their relationships with other men and the importance of good character (and the surprising ways in which men earned and kept their good character) which is key to understanding how men viewed masculinity and same-sex desire. The chapter will then move on to address the impact of the depression on how men experienced their relationships with other men and conclude with analysis of the Altrincham trial in 1936, one of the largest homosexual trials of the twentieth-century.

### Working-class culture in the north

By the beginning of the inter-war period, little had changed from the earlier period in how many working-class northerners experienced their lives. The

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<sup>1</sup> St Philips Education and Research Society, *The Equipment Of The Workers: An Enquiry By The St Philip's Settlement Education And Research Society Into The Adequacy Of The Adult Manual Workers For The Discharge Of Their Responsibilities As Heads Of Household, Producers And Citizens* (London, 1919).

inter-war period was distinctive due to the economic situation that led to the depression. However, in the immediate aftermath of war, it was not immediately clear that such economic changes were approaching. For many in the north, the First World War had been a terrible interruption of everyday life, but in its aftermath, a semblance of normality returned very quickly. Of course, the impact of the war in terms of lives lost and the men who returned from the front with mental and physical injuries was profound - particularly as the north had provided the majority of Pal's Battalions for the ill fated Somme campaign of 1916. Yet even this kind of trauma was not enough to disrupt the broad rhythms of working-class culture that remained so firmly entrenched. In the post-war period, men returned to their pre-war ways of life and were able to take comfort in the tradition and familiarity of it. Of the 1.3 million women who took industrial employment during the war, barely any remained in their positions by 1921 and this ensured that masculine workplace culture in traditional industry remained intact.<sup>2</sup> Chapters One, Two and Three have discussed the various moral panics that proliferated throughout the war years and the way that prosecutions for homosexual offences in the north increased during the war. However, these effects of wartime conditions were temporary and, socially and sexually, things quickly returned to something close to pre-war normality as peace time settled in.<sup>3</sup>

However, normal is perhaps not what would be expected. Popular celebrations in cities like Sheffield often had lots of queer potential. One of the highlights of

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<sup>2</sup> Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures, England 1918-1951* (Oxford and New York, 2000, first published 1998), p.111.

<sup>3</sup> For example see: Joanna Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London, 1994), p.31. Before the war, levels of illegitimacy amongst predominantly working-class women were falling. During the war they saw an increase, however, immediately after the war levels declined once again.

the year in Sheffield was Rag Week at the university. This began in 1920 as a way to raise money for various charities. The event's mascot was the Rag Fairy and was always played by a man - usually, the hairier the better. A student in the early 1930s recalled that 'a six foot medical student called R.B. Davies used to prance up and down .... dressed up as a short skirted fairy with a star ended wand.'<sup>4</sup>



Figure 4.1: The Sheffield Rag Fairy.<sup>5</sup>

It was not just the fairy who played with gender roles and masculinity. There was always a procession through the city that involved floats and music which thousands of people turned out to watch. A float and its riders from 1926 playfully exploited the tolerance of many in the city with its name 'Ye Olde Nancie Boy(t)' and their costumes that included sailor suits and drag. The fact that it was photographed demonstrates that the gesture was taken in good fun

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<sup>4</sup> Helen Mathers, *Steel City Scholars: The Centenary History of the University of Sheffield* (London, 2005), p.94.

<sup>5</sup> This picture is a still from a British Pathé newsreel describing how Sheffield Rag week raised £10,000 for charity in 1960. The film is called *Rag Raises £10,000 1960* and can be viewed at <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/rag-raises-10-000/query/Sheffield>. Although the picture is from a later period, the inter-war fairies would have looked much the same.

and enjoyed by the public. Up until the post-Second World War years, the public of Sheffield were 'both generous to the cause [of the charities supported by Rag week] and tolerant' of such displays.<sup>6</sup>

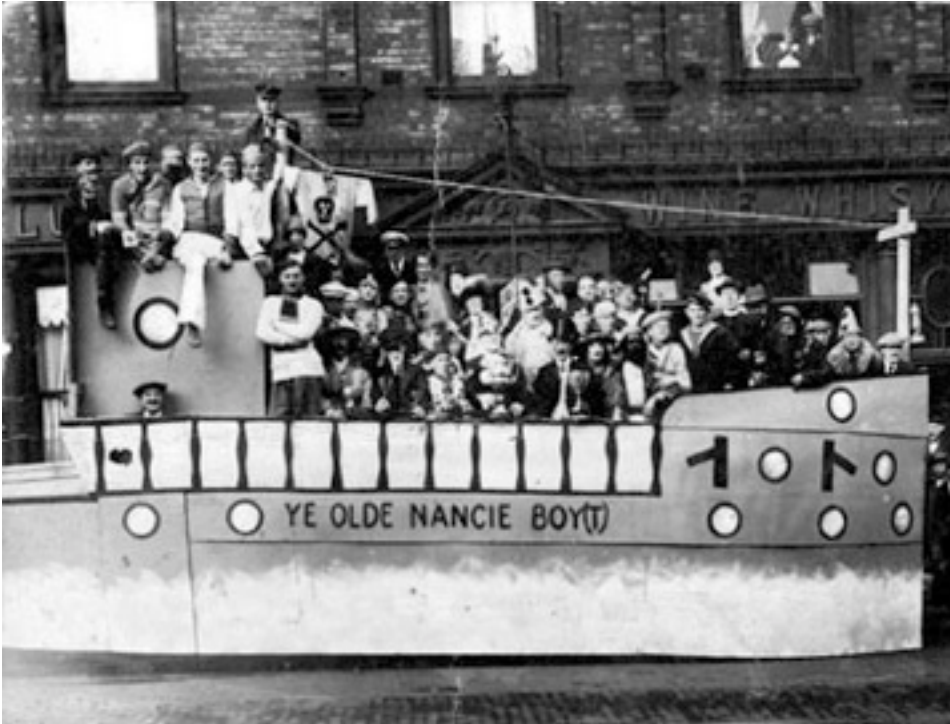


Figure 4.2: Rag Week parade, 1926.<sup>7</sup>

Chapter Three underlined the fact that celebrations often involved elements of fancy dress and cross-dressing and this was still the case (not just involving the Rag Fairy). In 1922, Sheffield cinemas raised money for local hospitals with a carnival and fancy dress football match. The highlight of the carnival was a dance done by a 'Harem girl' who was actually a man. Again, this was an event attended by thousands in the city and the newsreel footage shows how much it was enjoyed. Such displays of transgressive gender and masculinity were a part of everyday life that do not seem to have been linked in the minds of the

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<sup>6</sup> Mathers, *Steel City Scholars*, p.144.

<sup>7</sup> Image used with permission from Sheffield Local Studies Library [www.picturesheffield.com](http://www.picturesheffield.com).

northern public with negative interpretations of sexuality. Alongside the popularity of the bawdy music hall drag artists (who were the favoured performers for many working-class northerners until the end of the Second World War) these events indicate a familiarity with different interpretations of masculinity and sexuality.<sup>8</sup>



Figure 4.3: A 'Harem girl' dancing to an organ grinder.<sup>9</sup>

### *The Equipment of the Workers*

In the autumn of 1916, a group of volunteers overseen by Arnold Freeman began interviewing working people in Sheffield about all aspects of their lives. By the time that the loftily titled *The Equipment Of The Workers: An Enquiry By The St Philip's Settlement Education And Research Society Into The Adequacy*

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<sup>8</sup> Bryan D Hillerby, *The Lost Theatres of Sheffield* (Barnsley, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> A still from a British Pathé newsreel documenting the carnival and football match that raised money for Sheffield hospitals in 1922. The film is called *Well Done Sheffield Cinemas* and can be viewed at <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/well-done-sheffield-cinemas/query/Sheffield>.

*Of The Adult Manual Workers For The Discharge Of Their Responsibilities As Heads Of Household, Producers And Citizens* was published in 1919, 408 men and 408 women had been interviewed.<sup>10</sup> These 816 people were chosen to represent the manual workers of the city - in effect they were chosen for their ordinariness.<sup>11</sup> Freeman aimed to get a picture of how the northern working classes lived their lives, spent their free time and most importantly for this study *felt* about their role in life and the people they shared it with. It was this emphasis on how working people felt about their spouses, sweethearts, children, friends and key issues of the day that made this social survey stand out amongst earlier ones such as those conducted by Booth and Rowntree that focussed on economic situation and poverty. It was unsurprising that Freeman took this attitude, he was a friend of Edward Carpenter's and had led a similar life - giving up a privileged background and promising career at Oxford to follow his socialist principles north. It should be noted, however, that Freeman's driving force lacked the decidedly erotic focus of Carpenter's.

The reasons for undertaking the survey were detailed under the banner term of 'The Great Education'. What Freeman and his well meaning colleagues meant by this was linked to the contemporary assumption that the Great War had so fundamentally changed society that something had to be done both to prevent a worker's revolution like that in Russia and to ensure that working men and women had access to the education and standard of living that they, now more than ever, deserved. The two cornerstones of this theory were 'Education' and 'Poverty'. To the Settlement, education meant:

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<sup>10</sup> *The Equipment Of The Workers*, p.40.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p.33.



not merely the preparatory instruction given during childhood in the class-room, but also the influence upon adolescents and adults of newspapers, magazines and books, kinemas, music halls and theatres, public-houses and clubs, study circles, adult schools, university tutorial classes, etc., as well as the effects of participation in friendly society, trade-union and co-operative store and in local and national politics.<sup>12</sup>

Whilst poverty was seen as:

not merely the sort of thing that can be measured and tabulated, but the whole complex of limitations which collectively enslave the worker; not merely the smallness of his wage and the wretchedness of his dwelling, but the compulsion to spend every hour of vigour in work offering a minimum of opportunity for self-expression, combined with the lack of humanizing outlets for energy in his leisure time.<sup>13</sup>

It was acknowledged that working people before the war had begun to 'feel (Education) that their environment constituted a prison (Poverty)' but that the war had made them further question the position of those that were higher up the social scale.<sup>14</sup> In effect there had been 'a spiritual stirring within them for a life bigger than was bounded by twelve hours in a factory followed by supper and sleep in a slum'.<sup>15</sup> Part of the power of *The Equipment of the Workers* lies with the insistence that manual workers were individuals with hopes, dreams and emotional lives - an obvious fact that was not necessarily common currency amongst intellectuals and even philanthropists at the time.

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p.3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p.4.

Although it is important to note the empathy that those involved in the Settlement had with the workers that they interviewed, they were still heavily influenced by contemporary social science which ensured that Carpenter's comradely, rose-tinted view of those below him on the social scale was not replicated in the survey. Although differences from earlier surveys have been highlighted, there were also similarities. The main was that Freeman chose to classify what he referred to as his 'victims'. Around one quarter of Sheffield's workers were classed as 'Well-equipped', around three-quarters were 'Inadequately-equipped' and 'somewhere about one-fifteenth were 'Mal-equipped'.<sup>16</sup> It was in the descriptions of these categories that the scientific and almost eugenic prejudices of the middle and upper classes were revealed. Rather patronisingly, those deemed to be 'Well-equipped' were described as being 'awakened to the seriousness and splendour of existence', they were also likely to be political, read a lot and enjoy art.<sup>17</sup> 'Inadequately-equipped' workers were described as '*asleep*', 'they muddle through life' and were 'spiritually inert'.<sup>18</sup> It was suggested, nevertheless, that a few of them were 'sufficiently awake to see something of what the Well-equipped see with clear vision'. Those unlucky enough to be 'Mal-equipped' were mere 'beasts of burden rather than free human beings' and their very existence was 'a positive evil for the community'.<sup>19</sup> Later in the chapter, it will be examined what characteristics placed people in these categories and what character traits were valued both by those interviewed and those doing the interviewing - thus allowing us to see through these rather arbitrary classifications .

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

The questions the interviewers asked demonstrated how Freeman wanted to try to get to the heart of every facet of his interviewees' lives. There were ten headings on the questionnaire with multiple sub-headings: educational ideas, leisure, musical tastes, aesthetic feelings, social and religious activities, reading, home, political ideas, root desires and other data.<sup>20</sup> Included in the social and religious activities section, interviewers were invited to comment on their own opinions of what the interviewees' relationship was with their family, 'any points that would serve to indicate X's goodness or badness' and finally their 'personal opinion of X'.<sup>21</sup> This methodology highlighted the mixture of objectivity and subjectivity that coloured these early attempts into the social sciences but leaves a potentially richer source for historians. Thirty-three men and women were credited for collecting the information and helping to write it up but in reality due to war-time constrictions, one skilled male investigator interviewed more than three quarters of the men and one skilled female investigator interviewed more than three quarters of the women.<sup>22</sup> It was up to the interviewer to decide which category their interviewee fell into. What is more surprising is that many of the volunteers were working-class themselves and counted an engine-tenter, railwayman, shop assistants, a fitter and many school-teachers amongst their ranks.<sup>23</sup> This strategy was in place to ensure that interviewees felt as comfortable as possible to open up about their private lives - something that working-class men in particular were seen as loathe to do.

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p.42.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>22</sup> John Roberts, 'The Sheffield Educational Settlement (1918-1955)', PhD thesis (University of Sheffield, 1961).

<sup>23</sup> *The Equipment of the Workers*, p.xii.

## The 'Well-equipped' worker

The details recorded about the men and women in this category fell into two areas, extensive studies and intensive studies. The former recorded basic descriptions of the individuals involved and the latter went into real depth based on the headings on the questionnaires. When looking at the sample of thirty men summarised in the extensive studies, it is easy to get a picture of respectable, auto-didactic workers in the vein of those presented by David Vincent and later Jonathan Rose.<sup>24</sup> These men were presented as political, hard-working and there were as many atheists as those involved in the non-conformist churches. All were socialists and/or members of a trades-union. Many of them were particularly keen on reading anything from historical and political works to Dickens and the local press (with the *Sheffield Independent* being the favoured paper). The men put a great emphasis on the importance of education, both for themselves and where applicable their children, and this coincided with a general fondness for visiting art galleries and museums in their spare time. Of those who were married, it was noted that some of the men were happy to help their wives around the house and they seemed to have great pride in the home that they provided. Any sort of outdoor activity was enjoyed and this was probably fostered by living in such a dirty, industrial city. Some of the men were very fond of their gardens and spent much free time there and many cited walking in the moors either alone or with friends as their preferred

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<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Class* (New Haven, Connecticut and London, 2001); David Vincent, *Bread Knowledge and Freedom* (London and New York, 1981).

activity.<sup>25</sup> Outdoor space (and in many instances the companionship of mates) provided an escape from the confines of the factories and poor housing where these men were forced to spend their lives.

It is the remaining eight intensive studies that give a real insight into the private lives of working men in the city. The majority of the men described appear liberal and progressive. For example, seven out of the eight men supported female suffrage.<sup>26</sup> Underhill, a twenty-two year old skilled engineer was 'glad' women had the vote and Dalson, a twenty-seven year old engine-tenter stated that 'all adults over 21 years of age - irrespective of sex, social standing and whether married or single' should have the vote.<sup>27</sup> This sort of attitude confirmed the belief of the importance of the individual to northern working people that has been documented in earlier chapters. For these men, it was unthinkable that the women they lived and worked alongside should not be granted the same political rights as them. Hoppitt, an eighteen year-old private in an infantry regiment, eloquently summed this up by saying 'people who are doing their share in keeping the country should have a voice in arranging the affairs of the nation'.<sup>28</sup> The belief of these men in a very English brand of socialism (the kind pioneered by Carpenter and the Fabians in Sheffield in the nineteenth century) manifested itself in an almost utopian ideal of equality and comradeship. Six of the eight men had actually met Carpenter or were familiar with his work and views. There seems to have been a sense of fair-minded

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<sup>25</sup> *The Equipment of the Workers*, pp.67-74.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, pp.125-174. Alan Sinfield has argued that 'male hostility towards women often goes with hostility towards homosexuality' therefore one could assume that the opposite could also be true. Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Post-War Britain* (Oxford, 2007), p.92.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 32, 136.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p.127.

liberality at work in which these men of the educated working-classes believed that citizenship should not be determined by class or gender.

The eight men discussed in greater detail represented the full spectrum of manhood and masculinity; from those who were effeminate and uninterested in girls to those who were happily married and 'manly' in the classic Victorian sense of the word. What is interesting about this diversity is both that these men were chosen to represent a normal picture of northern, working-class manhood and that their worth or good character was not measured by their alignment to a traditionally masculine role. The pastimes that elevated these men into the 'Well-equipped' category sound like a list of 'Uranian' attributes that Edward Carpenter himself made in *The Intermediate Sex*: playing and listening to music, visiting the opera, painting, visiting art galleries and museums, writing poetry and sketching on the moors. Hoppit was described as having 'a gentle and affectionate nature and much attached to his home and family': his Mother described him 'as being like a girl about the house'.<sup>29</sup> He 'had not yet been attracted by female society' (and one suspects that he never was) yet was respectful to women.<sup>30</sup> In his leisure time, Hoppit read (he was familiar with Carpenter and knew where he lived), went to art galleries and walked (and sketched) on the moors either alone or with one of his few close friends. It would seem likely that all these traditionally feminine attributes combined with a weak and small appearance would have made Hoppit a target for isolation and bullying yet the interviewer was quick to point out that he was well liked by his fellow workers and flourished in the difficult surroundings of an army camp

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p.125.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p.126.

when he was called up. The key to this laid in the comment that 'his character has developed a good deal during the last year and he is showing a power of initiative and originality'.<sup>31</sup> The most important qualities in ensuring that a man was accepted into this masculine society were good character, initiative and originality and these overrode other qualities that transgressed a traditionally masculine identity.

For the two other unmarried men in this group, their social lives revolved around the same sorts of activities as Hoppit. Oscar was a thirty-three year-old grinder in the steel industry and like Hoppit, was likely to have been homosexual. No real names were used in the survey, interviewers made up pseudonyms for the interviewees. It is tempting to think that this man was christened Oscar because the interviewer recognised his preference for other men. He lived with his father and brothers and did 'not a little to make it artistic', in fact his bedroom was 'an indication that Oscar has a sense of beauty'.<sup>32</sup> Although he was weak and often very ill, he did well at a demanding, industrial job - in fact the interviewer was keen to note that despite his incapacity and distaste for his work, he was an 'exceptionally good workman' who was liked by his fellows.<sup>33</sup> In his free time Oscar went to the opera a few times a week, rambled on the moors with his sketchbook, visited friends, museums and galleries and went to see bands play in the local parks. He was keen to point out that Carpenter was a 'local writer and socialist with advanced views' and put forward his own advanced view by 'condemning anything that would rob him of living life to the full'.<sup>34</sup> His life

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.150.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.151.

seemed to hold more similarities to that of a youthful Carpenter than to what is usually expected of a northern, working man.<sup>35</sup> Underhill seemed to be a more traditionally masculine proposition, physically strong and another good worker. He was described as 'regular, punctual, industrious, efficient and capable of taking responsibility' and it was stated that 'he would make a good husband and father'.<sup>36</sup> Yet his leisure time told a slightly different story once again; he spent it visiting friends, singing, at choir practice, at art galleries, the theatre and music hall. He went on seaside holidays with his mates and was again, familiar with Carpenter.<sup>37</sup>

Of the five married men, all stated that they were very fond of their wives and children and most expressed great pride in the achievements and potential of their offspring. However, when the men gave more details of their family lives it became clear that these feelings were not as clear cut as they seemed.

Herringbury, a twenty-eight year-old munitions worker with a wife and two children, started his interview by saying that he was very fond of his wife but later revealed that he resented her infringing on the masculine space of the pub to pay club dividends and was 'thankful to get a home of his own for the sake of comfort if for nothing else'.<sup>38</sup> Youngson, a thirty-five year old fitter with a wife and children again started his interview by stating that he was very fond of his wife and children but went on to say that he only occasionally spoke to his wife about 'things and ideas' because 'the wife does not take any active interest in

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<sup>35</sup> In his autobiography *My Days and Dreams*, Carpenter speaks of his youthful self wandering the moors with notebooks, dreaming of his latest crush and being artistic in both the literal and Carpenter's own meaning of the word.

<sup>36</sup> *The Equipment of the Workers*, p.132.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p.133.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p.148.



the matters that mostly appeal to me'.<sup>39</sup> Conversations about politics, interests and dreams were reserved for his mates. Finlayson was a sixty year-old with a wife and children who was described as having a 'great regard for his wife and family' and had a 'beneficial influence on his mates'.<sup>40</sup> Later in his own words, he described a fundamental disagreement between himself and his wife in all matters of home and life and blamed having to live in an area he disliked on the fact that his wife would not move.<sup>41</sup> All three of these men were represented as good husbands and fathers and described themselves as such and yet their emotional needs were not necessarily fulfilled by their wives. They split their leisure time between their families and their mates, their important conversations often taking place with the latter. For Herringbury, his marriage was a way to secure a comfortable home that had been lacking in his childhood, for Youngson and Finlayson perhaps something similar had occurred. They did not seem to be intellectually or emotionally compatible with their wives for all they were fond of them.

Of the two happily married men, Quain, a forty-five year-old with a wife and six children, was described as an 'ideal father and an ideal husband'. He helped his wife at home but retained his position amongst his mates and because of this he was described as 'a real good chap' who was 'loyal to his mates on all occasions'.<sup>42</sup> His position as a valued and competent worker secured his position in masculine society even though he potentially transgressed this by helping his wife at home and participating in artistic activities in his spare time.

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p.156.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p.167.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p.161.

Dalson, a twenty-seven year old engine tender with a wife and child was perhaps the most interesting case. He stated that his home was the 'finest place in the world' and he enjoyed spending time with his family as well as his mates (having been on walking holidays with a friend whilst being married). Unusually, he admitted 'to having fraternized with University people and the Idle Rich' and when that was combined with his admiration of Edward Carpenter it is easy to imagine that he may have been a part of Carpenter's circle for a while. He had seen Carpenter lecture, was influenced by him in his views on religion and had read both *Towards Democracy* and *The Intermediate Sex*. This was very progressive and Dalson was clearly comfortable with Carpenter's views as demonstrated by his continued admiration of him. Such evidence suggests that even in happy marriages, there was a place for male friendship and an acceptance of different forms of love and sexuality.

The lives of the women in the 'Well-equipped' group told a similar story. Three of them knew Carpenter and saw him as 'an ideal socialist'.<sup>43</sup> The fact that so many men and women knew of Carpenter confirmed his local influence on ordinary people (as discussed in Chapter Three)- and not just those that he slept with. Those women who were single, spent their leisure time in much the same way as the men - only with their female friends as companions. All of them saw their value in society and interestingly of those who were married or widowed, only one, Mrs Quarle, was happy with her husband (although she felt that they had nothing in common). Mrs Emberson had been married to 'a villain' and was glad he had been killed in the war so that she could have

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p.180.

freedom.<sup>44</sup> Mrs Stappell at seventy-two had been widowed three times and was happier on her own than she had been in any of her marriages. These case studies alongside those of the men reinforce claims that many working-class people were either unhappy or unfulfilled in their marriages in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>45</sup> To marry for love and to be intellectually and emotionally compatible with your spouse seemed to have been the exception rather than the rule. Many of the people interviewed in the study used marriage to better their social position, leave an unhappy family life and create a comfortable and respectable home. Opportunities to meet people of the opposite sex were rife on the street, at the pictures, music hall, theatres, parks and dance halls. In fact, Mrs Stappell lamented the ‘manners and customs of some of the young women and girls, the walking and swaggering along the streets in masculine dress, the bad language and free intercourse with lads and men’.<sup>46</sup> However, the working-class culture of the city dictated that same-sex friendship should provide the comfort and compatibility that was lacking in many marriages.

#### The ‘Inadequately-equipped’ worker

The main difference between those who were ‘well’ and inadequately equipped was the aforementioned artistic bent and a ‘love of beauty’. The men described in this category appear to have been a little more practical than their better educated counterparts. Their favourite pastime was still walking in the surrounding countryside, either alone or with friends but artistic pursuits were

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p.196.

<sup>45</sup> Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain*, p.27.

<sup>46</sup> *The Equipment of the Workers*, p.224.

exchanged for the pub, playing sport, the pictures, the music hall and theatre and the baths.<sup>47</sup> The majority of them were still in favour of women having the vote and while many of the married men and women expressed a fondness for their spouse and children there was little evidence of this. This was summed up nicely in the case of Roell, a thirty-five year-old with a wife and children who spent no nights at home and had a 'running feud with his wife', yet believed that women should have the vote as they were 'certainly as good as most men'.<sup>48</sup> Most marriages described seemed to be about creating a comfortable home and focussed on the children with little evidence of compatibility or emotional fulfillment. This was again sought from mates in many instances during nights spent at the pub or baths and weekends in the countryside. Good character in these men was still linked to their performance at work, their respect for women and their attitude towards their mates. Umples, a forty-two year-old with a wife and children, was ostracised from his workmates for being 'too-willing to do his wife's bidding': he listened to his wife about 'things and ideas' and was regarded by fellow workers as 'balmy [sic] and selfish'<sup>49</sup>. Unlike Quain, Umples was not a particularly good worker and he valued his wife's opinion above that of his mates - this led to his alienation from the group. The men in this category, although supportive of female suffrage, often saw themselves as superior within marriage. Umples also talked about women in a 'sensual and repulsive way' and this also helped to make him unpopular at work.<sup>50</sup> The women interviewed in this category had very poor levels of education, seemed to have little interest in improving this and therefore seemed to have been in a very unequal position

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, pp.228-254.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p.236.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p.249.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*.

within their marriages. Perhaps this explains the practice of seeking of equals for friendship from the same sex.

### The 'Mal-equipped' worker

The men in this category lived up to the vision of working-class masculinity so often referred to as being the norm.<sup>51</sup> They were on the whole hard-drinking (often drunks), sex obsessed, disrespectful of women and violent towards each other and their wives and children. But these characteristics marked them out as a small minority amongst the workers of the city: behaviour like this was not the norm. Spring, who was twenty-one, spent his leisure time at the pictures, on rambles and going to see bands in the parks but what marked him out as being a 'moral imbecile' was the fact that he did many of these activities with girls and had 'purchased and furtively read low, immoral books' that he had bought in 'dirty' book shops in the slums.<sup>52</sup> All of the other men described were married and abusive to their wives and children. Some had been imprisoned for violence and neglect. Unstone, a twenty-eight year old with a wife and children, had committed the two cardinal sins of kicking his daughter in the head (and thereby hospitalising her) and of deserting his wife to live with the wife of a soldier who was serving in France. He wore showy clothes, had a showy house and took the greatest pleasure from 'waylaying men in the dark..... sexual vice, drinking and gambling'.<sup>53</sup> In fact, he displayed many of the traits thought to be indicators

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<sup>51</sup> Andrew Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working-class culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939* (Buckingham and Philadelphia, 1992), pp.48-54; Stephen Humphries, *Hooligans or Rebels? An Oral History of Working-Class Childhood and Youth 1889-1939* (Oxford, 1984, first published 1981), pp.1-27

<sup>52</sup> *The Equipment of the Workers*, p.301.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, p.307.

of working-class virility yet he was unpopular and mistrusted by his community. Finchel was another man disliked by his community for his sexual exploits. Although he was a better man than many surveyed in the respect that he was not physically violent towards his wife and was 'devoted in a crisis', he spent his nights at the pub and pictures and in the beds of different women.<sup>54</sup> This behaviour singled him out for anger rather than applause from his work mates. If these men had any 'mates', they were similar in nature and often living on the edge of the law. Many of these men did not work in the traditional sense of the term and got money from illegal means, gambling or their families. The more respectable men of the other two categories seemed to despise them for their sexual habits, disrespect of women and lack of respect for work.

The survey of women in this category displayed that although frowned upon by the community, a minority of women happily and shamelessly engaged in sex before marriage. Although it has been argued that the real offence was not premarital sex but being caught out by pregnancy.<sup>55</sup> Miss Bater, a nineteen year old servant, seems to have been a casual prostitute. She was engaged to a soldier but her father objected to her 'galloping about dark lanes in company with wild companions'.<sup>56</sup> She went on to describe a life geared towards having fun. Her preferred way to spend her leisure time was

being in [the] streets with a female friend of like tastes and behaving badly - attracting the attention of men (especially soldiers), making

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, p.309.

<sup>55</sup> Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures*, p.31

<sup>56</sup> *The Equipment of the Workers*, p.318.

casual acquaintance with men, going to cinemas, etc., getting presents of cheap jewellery, etc..... Sensual, sexual pleasures are chief appeal.<sup>57</sup>

Miss Bater seems to have been similar to Spring, they were young people who had chosen to break the taboos of pre-marital sex and did so unapologetically despite community disapproval. Miss Morne was another servant whose prostitution was less casual. She had worked in various factories across the city but preferred the 'gay life and excitement, music-halls, lounges of smart hotels, expensive food and drink.'<sup>58</sup> She liked sex and she liked to dress fashionably or, in the damning words of the interviewer, 'crude and showy'.<sup>59</sup> Mrs Jodder was a different case in that she was married yet habitually and openly cheated on her husband. This was seen as bad enough by her community but she was also dirty, 'her hair was a living moving mass of vermin, her flesh indescribably filthy', drunken and criminally neglectful of her two young children.<sup>60</sup> The extreme nature of her story was probably not one that was repeated often but the reaction of those around her confirm what behaviour was seen as beyond the pale amongst the working-classes of the city.

The interviews in *The Equipment of the Workers* give us a snapshot of working-class life during and after the First World War and many of the common findings contradict the dominant narrative of a working-class masculinity being situated in drunkenness, violence and sex. In fact, the men that were viewed as 'real' men both by the interviewers and their peers demonstrated respect for women,

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p.319.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, p.323.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, p.328. In a recent article, Hera Cook has made explicit working-class associations between 'poverty, loose sexual morals and dirtiness', Hera Cook, 'Emotion, Bodies, Sexuality, and Sex Education in Edwardian England', *The Historical Journal*, 55:2 (2012), pp.475-495.

continence in marriage (heterosexually speaking at least) and a love of beauty and artistic pursuits. Traditionally feminine pursuits described as indicators of Uranianism by Carpenter were valued as indicators of a true and respectable masculinity. Men visited the pub for comradeship as well as a drink and appreciated the countryside around the city. Perhaps most importantly of all, they were hard working and loyal to their work mates. All these things came together to form the unassailable fortress of good character. Good character was what a respectable, working-class man could aspire to and when he had achieved it, not even allegations of or convictions for homosexual offences could damage it - as shall be seen in the court reports of cases analysed throughout the rest of the thesis. Men were shunned by their peers primarily for indulging in casual sex, mistreating their families, being drunk and perhaps, most importantly, disrespecting the primacy of work. Unfortunately, men in the 'Mal-equipped' category were often the most visible due to their transgressive public behaviour and numerous appearances at the courts and in the papers. What the study also demonstrates is the importance of *place* in how men formulated their philosophy of life. The majority of men interviewed, even those in the 'Well-equipped' and educated category were inward looking. They valued Sheffield and its culture and were admittedly more affected by their surroundings than the wider world. In fact, they were generally more concerned with how (and if) things affected them and their families and seemed to care little for what others did as long as it was not affecting them or hurting the vulnerable. This explains the insistence on respect for women that all except the 'Mal-equipped' displayed and their general distaste for violence.

How did the north cope with the depression?



*The Equipment of the Workers* describes life in a working-class city at the height of its prosperity. Sheffield was a steel city enjoying the boom in the industry that the First World War had created. However, this did not last and the conditions in the north during the economic depression of the 1920s and 1930s have been documented well enough to have slipped into national myth and memory.<sup>61</sup> Although times were undoubtedly hard, life in the north during these years was not necessarily as bleak or as debased as these accounts have led us to believe. Not all areas experienced unemployment in the same way. Despite the fact that unemployment was high in cities such as Sheffield, Leeds and Manchester, it did not come close to the levels reached in towns such as Jarrow, which were totally reliant on one form of industry. For cities such as these, the depression was not a driver of significant social change, at least in the realm of sexuality. It did not last long enough to break down traditional forms of working-class culture and as McKibbin argues, working people ‘never ceased to think of themselves as primarily working class: they were not “unemployed” but working men and women out of work’.<sup>62</sup> How men coped with unemployment ‘was largely determined by the working culture in which they were raised; not by the consequences of unemployment itself’ and in areas where working culture was strong, such as those discussed by this thesis, unemployment (although terrible for individuals) did not permanently interrupt the rhythms of traditional working-class life.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> See: George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London, 1989, first published 1937); J. B. Priestley, *English Journey* (London, 1984, first published 1934); Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Weekend : A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1939* (New York, 1963, first published 1941); Walter Greenwood, *Love on the Dole* (London, 1993, first published 1933).

<sup>62</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p.161.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

As discussed further in Chapter Five, the prosecutions for homosexual offences during the depression years were higher on the Northern than the North-Eastern assize circuit. This could point to the economic dislocation that caused men to migrate to bigger and more cosmopolitan cities such as Liverpool and Manchester in search of work. However, such migration was temporary, with the majority of men returning home due to 'loneliness or nostalgia' or more prosaically, the inability to find work.<sup>64</sup> A new, transient male population was not the only concern for northern police forces. In Sheffield, where unemployment was a particular shock to the normally stable steel industry, the new economic conditions led to a rise in crimes relating to theft and drunkenness and it was this that the police chose to focus on.<sup>65</sup> Homosexual crime was not even acknowledged as a cause for concern.

The depression and mass unemployment only served to confirm and even elevate the status of the working man in working-class communities. This is highlighted in the classic novel of the depression, *Love on the Dole*. The young protagonist of the novel, Harry, holds up Larry Meath as the prime example of what a man should be:

Nearer the gates Harry glimpsed Larry Meath reading a newspaper and leaning against the wall. Larry Meath! Harry's heart leapt and his eyes glowed with eagerness. He'd understand; he was that kind. His quality of studiousness and reserve elevated him to a plane beyond that of ordinary folk; he seemed out of place in his lodgings in North Street. He wasn't for drinking, gambling, swearing or brawling. Though if you went to the library to look at the illustrated papers or to watch the

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> See Chapter Five for a full discussion of inter-war northern policing and for further details on Sheffield in particular.

old geysers playing dominos, you sometimes saw Larry at one of the tables absorbed in some book or other that looked as dry as the desert. And argue! Hear him, when during election times, you and the rest of the boys went to the committee rooms to see whether there were any bills to distribute or any lamps to hold; hear him then! he could talk fifty to the dozen. Yes, he'd a reputation for cleverness: his face attracted you, too; lean, a gentle expression and a soft kindness, a frank steadfastness in his eyes that invited confidence. People were always going to number 21 with their troubles....<sup>66</sup>

The description is almost romantic in tone and gives a fictional representation of the attitudes towards men similar to Larry in *The Equipment of the Workers*.

Larry is not a 'man's man' in the classic sense but has more in common with the men in the 'Well equipped' category of the survey; he is educated, respectful, a good worker and trustworthy. This demonstrates that standards of desirable masculinity had not changed significantly with the drastically altered economic circumstances.

Perhaps surprisingly, the economic depression prompted civic regeneration not seen since the industrial cities flourished in the mid-Victorian period. Charlotte Wildman has argued that Liverpool and Manchester used the opportunity of the depression in their established industries to attempt to reinvent themselves both materially and culturally.<sup>67</sup> Building on this argument, smaller regeneration projects also took place in Yorkshire including housing projects and the building of the Civic Hall in Leeds. In Sheffield, the City Hall was built and the famous town planner Patrick Abercrombie made plans to create a new civic square in part of the city's less salubrious theatre district. However, his plans were not completed until the 1990s apart from the grand new city library that was opened

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<sup>66</sup> Greenwood, *Love on the Dole*, p.23.

<sup>67</sup> Charlotte Wildman, 'The "Spectacle" of Interwar Manchester and Liverpool: Urban Fantasies, Consumer Cultures and Gendered Identities' PhD thesis (University of Manchester, 2007).

in 1934. For northern cities that had lost the power of the industry which created them, it was vital to modernise and show the rest of the country that there was more to the region than dirty slums and Wigan Pier.

Wildman suggests that Liverpool and Manchester wanted to rebuild their civic buildings in the modernist style and turn their city centres into consumerist spectacles where women were as welcome as men had always been. The development of shopping areas and the marketing of department stores ensured that city centres regained their respectability and were no longer the predominantly masculine realm of factories, music halls and pubs.<sup>68</sup> There were two unintentional and short-term side effects of this high-minded plan of improvement; gendered leisure pursuits were reinforced amongst the working classes and homosexual men brought before the law were disadvantaged. Mass-Observation studies in the late 1930s found that in the north, women were more likely to shop for their men's clothes rather than men doing it themselves as in the south. New consumer-driven centres were certainly bringing women into the city to spend money but on the whole they were doing it without their men who still preferred to spend their leisure time 'in the public house'.<sup>69</sup> Shopping as a leisure pursuit was at this time a feminine activity and added another way for men and women separately to spend their time. As had been common for many years in working-class communities, 'men and women's different leisure pursuits created homosocial networks'.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p.146.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

In talking about making a city more respectable, it would be easy to make an assumption that more focus would have been placed on ridding the city centre of its most undesirable elements, namely drunks, prostitutes and homosexuals. A similar situation occurred in London during the 1937 and 1953 coronations.<sup>71</sup> Prosecutions for public order and sexual offences increased and particular sites of disorderly conduct that would have been forced into the public eye were clamped down on.<sup>72</sup> Looking at the prosecution statistics outlined in Chapter Four, this was not the case in the north. In fact the Northern assize court circuit prosecuted fewer men during the mid to late 1930s than at any other time during the inter-war years. The changes in Manchester and Liverpool did not lead to a concerted policing strategy to target homosexual men and drive them out of the city but it did lead to their trials being moved to ensure that embarrassing information did not appear in the press linked to these areas. Large and potentially disruptive trials from Lancashire were sent to the Chester assizes. This has been interpreted in the past as an attempt to ensure that the men involved would be appropriately punished as Chester was renowned as a more conservative and disapproving city than Manchester.<sup>73</sup> It can however be argued that doing so was a way to temporarily deflect any air of scandal from a city that had put significant effort into reinventing itself as a consumerist, respectable fantasy.<sup>74</sup> Regardless of motive, it had a negative impact on the

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<sup>71</sup> Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: The Making of the Permissive Society* (New Haven and London, 2010), pp.41-48.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> The artist Jason Bowman and the activist Alan Horsfall both chose to use this interpretation: Jason Bowman, personal communication (22 November 2010); Alan Horsfall, 'The Way We Were: The Altrincham Case' <http://www.gaymonitor.co.uk/waywewere.htm> accessed 11/02/2012.

<sup>74</sup> Wildman, 'The "Spectacle" of Interwar Manchester and Liverpool', p.26. Wildman refers to the idea of urban fantasy and consumer fantasy throughout her thesis but first explains the concept here.

working-class men brought to trial as many had to spend money saved for their defence on the transportation costs from towns and cities in Lancashire to Chester, which then as now was not the easiest or cheapest place to reach. The details of the largest trial to suffer this fate are discussed below.

### The Altrincham trial

During 1936, one of the biggest trials for homosexual offences in English history took place. It did not take place in London and perhaps because of this fact, it is not well known to historians of sexuality. When this case has been discussed before it has been in the context of an article by the late gay rights activist and founder of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality Alan Horsfall and as the subject of an art installation at Manchester's Whitworth gallery by the artist Jason Bowman and a local gay men's group, Out in the City. This was called 'Untitled (on a day unknown...)' and ran from 16 January 2010 to 28 February 2010. The life stories of some of the men who belong to Out in the City will be discussed in Chapter Seven. An example of a contemporary Metropolitan case has been analysed by Matt Houlbrook. In this instance a raid on a private ballroom in Holland Park in 1932 took place, where sixty people (many of whom were working-class) were arrested. The Altrincham case differs from this one in that while many of the Holland Park men were defiant in their homosexual identity, all but one of the Altrincham men did not acknowledge an identity.<sup>75</sup>

The offences being tried took place in and around the affluent Cheshire town of Altrincham and in various towns throughout Lancashire yet the case was tried in

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<sup>75</sup>, "LadyAustin's Camp Boys": Constituting the Queer Subject in 1930s London, *Gender and History*, 14:1 (2002), pp.31-61.

Chester - in an entirely different assize court circuit to where many of the acts took place. There is much detail surrounding the case that serves to highlight how poorly homosexual men have been treated by the authorities in the past and it is obvious (on the surface) to anybody studying the case why it has been used as an example to support a politically minded discourse of the repression and persecution of homosexual men. However, there are many things about the trial that do not fit into this reading. The incident that led to the trial taking place was not a result of police persecution and many of the men were given character references by policemen in court. Furthermore, allegations of homosexuality were often not enough to destroy a man's standing with his employer, family and community. Men were only heavily punished when the way that they enacted their sexuality had the potential to challenge masculine norms. This chapter will go on to discuss these alternative readings and the impact that this new understanding of these events has on our understanding of the experience of men who desired other men in this period.

The charges behind the case originated when a fifteen year-old boy became ill and was hospitalised. The boy himself made no complaints about any of the accused but his employer 'dragged the truth out of him'<sup>76</sup>. It is unclear how this 'truth' was related to the boy's illness or several months' absence from work but he confirmed that he had met a twenty-nine year-old man named Gregory in May 1935 and 'subsequently became seriously ill in hospital'.<sup>77</sup> One can only speculate whether Gregory contributed to the boy's illness emotionally or physically or whether the two were entirely unrelated but the press took the

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<sup>76</sup> *The Altrincham and Hale Guardian*, 7 August 1936, p.6.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

opportunity to link the two issues together in the public mind. From this point on, a scenario common in homosexual prosecution cases unfolded. The prosecution moved from one suspect to another with man after man incriminating himself and others until twenty nine men were eventually tried. What followed was on the surface typical of many of the large, metropolitan 'show' trials dating back to Wilde. There were mentions of love letters, lipstick, the obligatory powder puff, gifts of flowers and slippers, hotel registers and indecent photographs.<sup>78</sup> Some of the men were painted as corruptors and pathological homosexuals whilst others were painted as innocent, manly victims. Such a simple reading of the case fails to take into account the many varied and often confused interpretations of events as understood by those involved in the case and by the public at the time.

There is no evidence left from the case proceedings to examine as the letters and photographs were destroyed at some point over the following years but there is still a considerable amount to be learned from the indictment files and newspaper reports that remain. The men were called a 'gang' by the judge and he claimed that 'they no doubt knew pretty well that when Gregory was arrested that a lot of the other names would come out.'<sup>79</sup> In a literal sense, this seems to have been a sweeping statement based on a minimum of truth. Some of the men clearly knew each other as there was evidence of the relationships and sexual acts that they had engaged in together but not all these men knew each other intimately or even as friends. It does however seem that they were part of a wider group of men who could be connected through the places that they

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<sup>78</sup> *The Altrincham and Hale Guardian, The Manchester Guardian*, Horsfall, 'The Way We Were'.

<sup>79</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 5 November 1936, p.4.



socialised and, even if indirectly, through the people that they socialised with. They met each other in pubs and cafes in Manchester but none of the homosexual acts that formed the crux of the prosecution actually took place in Manchester or in the city centre's public spaces. They took place in various small towns in Cheshire and Lancashire such as Altrincham, Hale, Stretford and Colne. The nature of the prosecution uncovered a series of relationships that took place in men's homes and hotels rather than in back alleys and urinals.

The men involved in the case were almost exclusively working-class. There were rumours that all the men who could be implicated in the case and could afford it had fled the country when they heard of the police investigation.<sup>80</sup>

Those left to face the music were waiters, a barman, salesmen, shop assistants, clerks, a van boy, a servant, a draughtsman and perhaps the only representative of a higher social class - a chiropodist.<sup>81</sup> This cross-section of men is different both from the majority of men in previous chapters and to those involved in the large South Yorkshire cases discussed in Chapter Six. They were not generally manual workers or workers with a skilled industrial trade. Not only does this emphasise the regional differences in the north, it also reflects the fact that the social make up of the Manchester working-classes was different and less rooted in traditional industry by this stage. The men met in Manchester's burgeoning commercial scene rather than at work as in the routine cases discussed thus far. As mentioned, Manchester city centre had become an area devoted to leisure rather than heavy industry and the occupations of the men in the case reflect this. The fact that these men seem to

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<sup>80</sup> Horsfall, 'The Way We Were'.

<sup>81</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 5 November 1936, p.4.

have patronised a commercial scene can also be linked to evidence in the trial that suggests the beginnings of an identifiable subculture.<sup>82</sup> It seems that in the north-west, the old traditions and patterns of working-class life that were alive and well in Yorkshire had begun to break down.

Their ages ranged from the youngest at seventeen (at the time of the trial) to the oldest at fifty nine.<sup>83</sup> However, the majority of defendants were in their twenties and early thirties. Even though the majority of men involved were consenting adults, the case was used by the prosecutors and the press as an example of the classic trope of predatory old homosexuals corrupting youth. In such a large and embarrassing hearing there had to be a way of making sense of what had happened and to attribute blame to those who were 'really' homosexual and therefore criminal. The individual verdicts for the twenty-nine men varied wildly - one man was released without charge, five were found not guilty and acquitted, five were imprisoned from three to seven years, six were imprisoned with hard labour for two to six months and twelve were bound over for five years (five of these men were given sentences of ten to fourteen days' hard labour which in practice amounted to immediate release at the end of the trial).<sup>84</sup> The sentences appear to be almost random and they seem even more bizarre when one reads the indictment files and finds that some of the men

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<sup>82</sup> Evidence of wearing drag and using camp names echoes similar situations in the capital. For example see Houlbrook, "Lady Austin's Camp Boys".

<sup>83</sup> The men who were prosecuted and their ages: Thomas Anderson (23), William Beevers (21), Alfred Capper (34), Frank Cooper (19), Sidney Cross (43), Jack Dinsley (20), Albert Goldstraw (31), Gregory George Gregory (29), Simon Johnson (59), William Langford (19), Leslie Maddocks (34), Ernest Marsden (21), Arthur Marshman (22), Thomas McDermott (34), Ernest Newall (37), Percy Nicholson (50), James Peake (20), David Richardson (28), Richard Roberts (24), Michael Rothschild (21), Norman Sparrow (17), Harold Wainwright (31), Sidney Waite-Dook (26), Joseph Wheeler (31). *The Altrincham and Hale Guardian*, 7 August 1936, p.6.

<sup>84</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 6 December 1936, p.12, ASSI 64/152 Chester Assize indictment file, The National Archive.

were accused of buggery with each other but only one man was imprisoned. If both men consented to the act and they were both found guilty, why on many occasions was only one of the men imprisoned?

There was a distinct line drawn in the reporting of the case between those men who were depicted as homosexual, repeat offenders, corruptors or perverts and those who were young, foolish, drunk or curious. Unsurprisingly, it was the former who received prison sentences and the latter who escaped with being bound over (although as was the norm at the time, all had their names, addresses, ages and occupations printed in the press). Most of the men started the trial with pleas of not guilty but as it progressed and more evidence was presented to the court, many changed their pleas to guilty. Goldstraw, Gregory, Peake, Roberts, Nicholson and Cross were painted as the villains of the piece, the ringleaders and the real homosexuals. Gregory was the man whose bedroom the police had searched and found 'a powder puff, grease paint and a book entitled *Twilight Men*'.<sup>85</sup> Although the powder puff and paint could have been explained by Gregory's reported involvement with amateur dramatics, the scene had been set. This description of a man's somewhat effeminate and unusual bedroom echoed the descriptions of Oscar Wilde and Alfred Taylor's decadent and painted chambers as discussed in Chapter Two.

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<sup>85</sup> *The Altrincham and Hale Guardian*, 7 August 1936, p.6. *Twilight Men* was an American book written by Andre Tellier and published in 1931. It sold over 100,000 copies in that year alone. The novel told the story of a homosexual French poet who lost his lover at a young age, tried to drown his sorrow in parties, gay sex and morphine, killed his father and eventually committed suicide. Brett Beemyn, *Creating a Place For Ourselves: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Community Histories* (New York and London, 1997) pp.99-100; Susan Stryker, *Queer Pulp: Perverted Passions from the Golden Age of the Paperback* (Hong Kong and San Francisco, 2001) p.100.

Of the six, all except Cross (who will be discussed later) were given harsh prison sentences. Gregory pleaded guilty to all six offences brought against him and the judge described him as 'the worst of the cases that have been before me at this assize'.<sup>86</sup> All the men he had slept with, except one, had been younger than him and he was painted firmly as the seducer. Two of the men were imprisoned, Roberts for four years (he was also classed as a seducer) and Wainwright for six months with hard labour (he was the one man who was older than Gregory) but the rest were bound over. Goldstraw's story was similar - all those whom he slept with who were younger than him (with the exception of Peake, another seducer) were bound over whilst he received the highest sentence of the trial - seven years in prison. When speaking of Capper, the judge observed that 'he thought it was an isolated case and that he had got into the hands of a thorough scoundrel'; of Maddocks, another partner, he said 'I think you were led astray by Albert Goldstraw and that you are not a young man addicted in any way to this filthy habit'.<sup>87</sup> Peake was brought up on six charges and told 'Yours is indeed a pitiable case, but I regret I cannot accept a suggestion that you did not realise the gravity of the offences'.<sup>88</sup> After being given three years in prison, he 'was led from the dock crying'.<sup>89</sup>

As mentioned above, Roberts was imprisoned for four years as the judge's words followed him out of the dock: 'Although I regret having to send a man of only 24 years of age to a long term of imprisonment, it is my duty as a

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<sup>86</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 6 November 1936, p.12.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

punishment to you and a deterrent to others'.<sup>90</sup> He had been accused of having sex with Robert Smith, a much older man at forty three. Smith's counsel used the common and questionable defence that Roberts had taken advantage of a drunk and insensible Smith. When Smith was shown the statement that Roberts had made he replied:

I have no definite recollection, but I remember a man staying at my flat - at least I remembered something of it when the effect of drink had worn off. I had been drinking heavily and was hardly conscious of what happened.<sup>91</sup>

The court was quick to believe this version of events and Smith was found not guilty. Whether they were eager to minimise the number of convictions or whether Robert's name had already been damaged beyond repair, it is hard to tell but it is clear that explanations involving drink were easy to tolerate and accept. Nicholson was the second oldest of the bunch at fifty and he had already been convicted for indecency three times. This in effect sealed his fate to five years in prison.<sup>92</sup>

What was unusual about these men (except for Nicholson) were their ages. They had been cast in the role of lecherous seducers with the power to pervert normal young men. But they were not latter day Oscar Wildes, they were young working-class men who did not fit the public ideal of what young working-class men should be. Goldstraw was thirty one, Gregory twenty nine, Roberts twenty four and Peake twenty, they were not middle aged men prowling the streets

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 November 1936, p.4.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

enticing young boys with gifts but they were equally not young men who had made one-off mistakes whilst drunk. These men appear to have been active and exclusive homosexuals in practice if not in identity. They exclusively pursued sexual and romantic relationships with other men but it is not obvious whether this made them aware that they were part of a self identified, sexual group. The reason that one can assume that they were masculine, fairly confident men who did not openly identify as homosexual was that Cross was the opposite and this was highlighted with great clarity in the press.

Cross was forty three, described by the doctor in charge of the case as 'a highly neurotic type' and not as sexually active as the four men mentioned above.<sup>93</sup> He was only charged with two offences and although both of his partners were younger than him, he was not painted as the aggressor. At the beginning of the trial, twenty four of the accused men consented to a medical examination to attempt to prove who had been the receiving partner in the many buggery cases included in the proceedings. Out of these medical examinations, Cross was the only one who was singled out as someone who would benefit from medical treatment rather than imprisonment. It is entirely possible that Cross, as an older man, had been better placed financially to employ a better solicitor who advised him to identify as homosexual and ask for medical help as a way of avoiding prison. It is equally possible that he genuinely wanted 'help', felt guilt over his actions and that he had trouble dealing with his sexuality. This could explain why he was regarded as a 'neurotic type' and why his sexual encounters were limited when compared to the other men that were on trial. Medical evidence confirmed that Cross had been a 'receiving agent' but it also

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 6 November 1936, p.12.

confirmed the same of Gregory, Roberts and Peake - none of whom were referred for medical treatment.<sup>94</sup> It is difficult to believe that if any of the other men were obvious 'neurotic types' that their counsel would not have attempted the same defence.

As already stated, although most of the men involved lived in Lancashire and many of their offences took place in Lancashire, the case was tried at Chester assizes. This was a controversial ruling for two reasons: firstly, these working-class defendants found it very difficult to afford the transport costs to get to court, let alone the cost of a decent solicitor. The consensus amongst the legal profession at the time was that trying the case in Chester was 'an obvious convenience to the prosecution.... and it would be a gross injustice to the defence'.<sup>95</sup> All the solicitors instructed in the case except one were not in the Chester circuit and it was beyond the means of their clients to support their own defence'.<sup>96</sup> Jack Dinsley was singled out for sympathy as it was reported that his widowed mother had saved up for his defence but having to travel to Chester would use up that money.<sup>97</sup> Secondly, Chester assize juries were notoriously conservative and much more likely than a Manchester jury to convict for homosexual offences. As previously discussed, one was much less likely to be convicted in Manchester than in Liverpool or Chester.

So far, the discussion of this case could be seen to uphold a long entrenched narrative of homosexual persecution but in returning to how the case was

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<sup>94</sup> *The Altrincham and Hale Guardian*, 7 August 1936, p.6.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

brought to the courts, it can be shown that what happened in Cheshire and Lancashire in 1936 is not so simple to read. Of the seventy two charges prosecuted at the trial, the majority were committed between 1930 and 1936. A few went back to 1925. In effect, there was a strong and varied network of men who met in pubs and cafes across the north west throughout this period. They led active sex lives and formed relationships, and until Norman Sparrow fell ill in 1936, they did so without falling foul of the law. Their story highlights commercial venues in Manchester, but for the most part it highlights discreet yet presumably fulfilling experiences that included taking partners to hotels, private flats or family homes when parents were away. They led full lives with love affairs complete with letters, gifts and photographs. They sometimes wore make up, called each other by nicknames like 'Queen Mother' and indulged in much of the same camp performance of the working-class 'queans' described in *Queer London*.<sup>98</sup> The difference was that whilst Quentin Crisp and his friends were trolling the West End for trade covered in henna and make-up, his northern counterparts chose to enact their sexuality in more private settings - this performance took place in private rather than on the streets or in commercial gay bars. Whilst it is clear from this trial that by the inter-war period there were the beginnings of a distinct homosexual, commercial network in Manchester, it was either discreet or mixed enough to slip under the radar of the authorities or the authorities did not care until it was forcibly brought to their attention. Although the conduct of the police was entirely suspect during the course of the prosecutions, the reason that they became involved at all was purely accidental. It was the confession of a sick boy to his suspicious employer that brought down the twenty nine men who were eventually tried, not the

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<sup>98</sup> Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (London and Chicago, 2005), pp.141-149.



efforts of the police. There was no concerted effort to catch homosexual men before this confession, but once it had been made and reported there was no choice but to follow up on the accusations.

As already stated, the conduct of the police in gathering evidence to prosecute the case was dubious at best.<sup>99</sup> It is not unusual for historians to draw this conclusion when dealing with these sorts of trials but it has often been assumed that the contemporary public questioning of police methods did not begin in earnest until the Montagu, Pitt-Rivers and Wildeblood trial in 1953. The newspaper coverage of the Altrincham trial confirmed that this was not the case: it included a detailed critique of police methods when dealing with the suspects. All but two men voluntarily wrote statements implicating themselves and others, despite the fact that there was no material evidence against many of them. The obvious question is why - especially given that in the case of Jack Atkin, a bit of defiance resulted in an acquittal. Atkin was implicated by Richardson's statement and as in the case of many of the men, this was the only evidence against him. Instead of panicking or being swayed by police enticements, he stood firm and responded to the accusations with 'That's all right. Let him prove it'.<sup>100</sup> His counsel built on this defiance and 'quoted certain authorities' on the inadmissibility of the statement as evidence. The magistrates agreed and Atkin was made free to go.<sup>101</sup> Perhaps Atkin was convinced of his innocence, or was unusually self-confident, or had counsel that was better in dealing with

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<sup>99</sup> Newspaper and Hansard sources used in Chapter Four highlight the concerns that were directed at the inter-war police throughout the country. Policing methods were being questioned in all areas where it was clear entrapment and the coercion of 'voluntary' statements were used.

<sup>100</sup> *The Altrincham and Hale Guardian*, 7 August 1936, p.6.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

homosexual cases, but it is likely that much of the case would have collapsed if the quality of evidence had been challenged as successfully across the board.

The lawyers of the accused asked the same thing in court. One stated:

However much you admire the Cheshire police it is impossible for your worships to believe that one after another, these men against whom the police had no evidence immediately volunteered statements which convicted themselves.<sup>102</sup>

Following this statement, there was 'an outburst of applause from the prisoners'.<sup>103</sup> The solicitor addressed the crux of the matter in a later statement:

...you have to look at it from an unprejudiced point of view, and say whether you can really believe that man after man has convicted himself without any inducement being held out. Every one who has been cross-examined has made nearly the same statement - "I was told it would be better for me to make a statement". I am going to ask your worships to say that you are not satisfied that this statement was given voluntarily.<sup>104</sup>

It was made clear both to the court and the readers of the press that there was credible suspicion about the methods of the police and that in many ways, the prisoners had been entrapped into making statements with the implication that they would get more lenient treatment if they did. A possible explanation for this choice of police tactic was the fact that the local police were inexperienced in how to proceed with such a case. They would not have been used to gathering evidence on such a large scale and in such circumstances and it may have

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid, The Manchester Guardian, 7 August 1936, p.13.*

been that the only way they knew how to proceed was to get the defendants to confess.

The counsels for the defence did not just bring the validity of these statements into question, they questioned the way that the police had brought some of the men into custody and suggested that they were induced into talking without realising what it was they were letting themselves in for: 'Two officers went to Beever's house and induced him to come away without a warrant or anything at all, had a conversation with him before they left the house and a long conversation at the police station'.<sup>105</sup> The same solicitor went on to tell the court that these two officers could have been useful in the defence of Beever but that the Chief Constable had done everything in his power to stop them being called to give evidence. In response to this he stated 'I do not care a hang what the Chief Constable says, the prosecution should bring all the evidence in the case. I am going to suggest that it was on the strength of these conversations that the statement was made'.<sup>106</sup> The implication here was that the frightened and overwhelmed twenty-one year-old Beever was tricked and intimidated by the police and in knowing where his officers had gone wrong, the Chief Constable was seeking to cover it up. Of course, the defence counsel would have done their best for their clients and used any angle that they could to achieve this but it is significant to note that their impassioned and reasonable lines of defence were published for the public to read and to make up their own minds.

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

Perhaps the most astonishing thing that was said in the court during the course of the trial came from a detective who had been working on the case. Detective Harris was cross-examined by a member of the defence counsel and the exchange went as follows:

Did you ever know a more accommodating crowd of defendants?

[counsel]

No sir [Harris]

They have an extraordinary urge to write statements [counsel]

They are not criminals sir [Harris]<sup>107</sup>

One of the key detectives involved in the trial told the court and jury that he did not see the men on trial as criminals. Under the laws of the day, many of them undoubtedly *were* criminals and were sentenced as such but Harris's statement makes it clear that the common view of the police as actively persecuting homosexuals was not always the case. This was further evidence of the inexperience of the police in dealing with such a case - Harris was clearly not schooled in what to say in court and let his own views run away with him. This thesis has made the argument that in the majority of cases, northern police forces made a conscious decision *not* to actively pursue homosexual men, instead they focused on catching perpetrators of 'real' crime - such as burglary, theft, murder and gang violence. Harris's view that these men were not criminals reinforces this argument. The Cheshire and Lancashire police had been put in a position where they had to pursue homosexual men and paradoxically, the men's willingness to give the police what they wanted increased the size and scope of the case to something that it is almost certain none of the authorities wanted to deal with. At this time, prosecutions for homosexual acts were few and far between in the north and the coverage of

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

such cases was limited in the press. This could be another explanation for the willingness of the men involved to implicate themselves, they may not have understood the severity of what they were admitting to. If a detective did not see them as criminals, why would they have seen themselves in this way? If casual and not so casual sexual contact was as common between working-class men as this case suggests, then what was the real harm in admitting to it? It has already been documented that in the case of the twenty year-old Peake, the judge regretted that he could not accept the fact that he did not know the legal gravity of what he was doing when sentencing him.

Although the judge made examples of the 'ringleaders' of the case, there were moments of humanity and common sense. We can also draw conclusions about the publicly acceptable face of (homo)sexuality from the treatment of two men in particular, Sidney Cross and Albert Cheeseborough. It has already been documented that Cross was sent to receive medical treatment and was bound over for five years rather than being sent to prison. It was reported that his employer had already agreed that he would pay any expenses incurred by Cross being a patient at Cheadle Mental Hospital for twelve months as he wanted to 'do what he could for Cross'.<sup>108</sup> This has been interpreted by proponents of gay rights such as Horsfall as the state imposing medical treatment and a 'cure' on someone who was not mentally ill.<sup>109</sup> That could be the case but it is also an example of an employer liking and respecting an employee enough to do what they could to help him - regardless of his sexuality. One would not expect a northern business man and ex-magistrate of

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<sup>108</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 6 November 1936, p.12.

<sup>109</sup> Horsfall, 'The Way We Were'.

the 1930s to be so open-minded and yet he was willing to stand his name alongside Cross's in the court and press with the confidence that it would not affect his reputation and business.

Cheeseborough was a different case altogether. He was married and the incident that he was tried for took place in 1930, three years before his marriage, with the much older and already maligned Nicholson. He had changed his plea to guilty of gross indecency but his fate was very different to his partners as he was bound over for one month and not imprisoned.<sup>110</sup> The judge's comments are worth quoting in full:

I am quite satisfied apart from what has been said, that this is a case if ever there was a case of being more sinned against than sinning. You are twenty years younger than the man standing next to you in the dock and I am quite satisfied that what you said when you were arrested that you were disgusted and that Nicholson was a fiend is absolutely true. It was necessary and proper for the police to take their proceedings, but I feel quite sure that the police themselves if they had not had to carry out their duty would not have brought these proceedings against you. I have no thought of punishing you in any way. I am glad to hear that your wife to whom you are happily married, is standing by you and I hope this charge which must have been a nightmare to you will be forgotten by you and her. I accept your good character and I sincerely hope that your employer will take you back into his employment and that you will forget the terrible experience through which you have been.<sup>111</sup>

Again, this example has been used to suggest something negative, to demonstrate that if homosexual men were willing to conform to society's expectations and marry then they would have been treated much more leniently by the authorities. There may be truth in this argument but it does not take into account the fact that the majority of men involved in this case, including many of

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<sup>110</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 4 November 1936, p.20.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 6 November 1936, p.12.; 5 November 1936, p.4

those who exclusively had relationships with other men, were not homosexual in modern, politicised terms. What it does demonstrate is that Cheeseborough's wife was willing to stand by him even though he admitted his guilt and that the severity of homosexual experimentation was almost negligible when it was confined to youth and followed by marriage. He was not the kind of man who would normally have been pursued by the police and his past indiscretions only came out due to the prosecution of Nicholson. The court could deal leniently with people that were not seen as a threat to society. Cross was weak and neurotic, the stereotype of a homosexual man at this time and Cheeseborough had made a mistake and briefly experimented with his sexuality before he married. The men who received the most severe sentences preferred men but didn't fit the same stereotype as Cross and because of this could potentially challenge public understanding of what it meant to be homosexual.

Cheeseborough's good character was confirmed by the judge and police but this kind of discussion of character was not only reserved for men who married. Gregory's good character and love of amateur dramatics was confirmed by the police who even went on to tell the court that he had lost his father in the Great War and as an only child had lost the valuable guidance of a father when he needed it the most.<sup>112</sup> This may have pandered to the contemporary (and somewhat Freudian) image of the homosexual as a mother's boy with no strong male influence growing up but it also expressed a sympathy and understanding of personal circumstance that was not to be expected from the men who had been charged with the task of prosecution.<sup>113</sup> The police certainly did everything

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<sup>112</sup> *The Altrincham and Hale Guardian*, 7 August 1936, p.6.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

they could do their jobs but the court reports showed that they took no pleasure in it. Richardson was sentenced to six months' hard labour but his respectability, that of his family and his prowess as an athlete were also commented on.<sup>114</sup> In handing down the sentence, the judge commented '... the worst part of your case, it strikes me, is the horrible example you have been to your younger brothers and sisters'.<sup>115</sup> The implication here was that the judge handed down a harsher sentence than he would have done due to the fact that he believed that Richardson's younger siblings had to be deterred from following in his footsteps. As shown by many other prosecutions, if there was any hint that minors had been or could have been (even indirectly) corrupted then the law would have been used to its full extent. Jack Disley's mother was called to the witness box to confirm that Jack Warbuton had been a regular visitor to the house for tea and had stayed over when she was away over Easter. Not only did she save up for his defence, it seems that she was supportive of her son's relationship.

## Conclusion

The Altrincham case was a mixture of confused and contrasting approaches towards the issue of homosexuality. It was not a demonstration of leniency and tolerance but equally it was not an example of single-minded persecution and cruelty. A spectrum of people were treated in very different ways. It served to emphasise the northern regional differences between the cosmopolitan cities of the north-west and the more insular cities of Yorkshire and the north-east. In

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.



doing so, similarities to Metropolitan cases were highlighted as was the vast difference between the burgeoning commercial scene in Manchester and the well-established one in London. The immense detail in which the case was reported was surprisingly neutral and tended if anything to be sympathetic towards the defendants; the good character of many of them was emphasised as were the many mistakes and dubious practices of the police. Having sex with a man was not always enough to compromise a man's good character and this good character could save him from a prison sentence or minimise his punishment. Although the police seem to have used every trick in the book to get confessions from the men involved, they did not vilify them in court and even went as far as to dispute their criminality.

One of the key points to come from the trial was that it was usually not the sex act itself that was being punished but perhaps the intent behind it. For example, buggery was not always given the harshest punishment and sometimes only one partner in an act was punished. When having sex with another man was combined with the potential corruption of youth, transgressive gender behaviour (as in the case of Gregory and his powder puff) or previous homosexual convictions it proved a step too far in the eyes of the authorities who then chose to define them by their actions. The harshest sentencing and the majority of the blame were reserved for defendants who could not easily be categorised by contemporary psychology, medical science or cultural stereotypes; ironically the 'normality' of these men and the way that they discreetly fitted into society was what had protected them from the eyes of the law. These men challenged notions of masculinity and working-class respectability as many of them *were* respectable, had good, often masculine, jobs and their own homes. Their type

of homosexuality had been acceptable when kept discreet. The police would not have pursued them but when they were thrust into the spotlight they were dealt with harshly by the legal system. The case was an embarrassment to the region and the first time that a trial from the northern provinces had been reported in such depth in the press. Regardless of how individual police forces chose to deal with (or ignore) the issue within specific counties or cities, when the case thrust the issue of northern manhood and sexuality into the national consciousness, there had to be seen to be an appropriate response from the authorities. At a time when the north was seen as degraded by unemployment and poverty, there was a determination that its morality should not also come into question.

## **Chapter Five: 'They are not criminals sir': Public understandings of same-sex desire in the north, 1919 - 1938**

The inter-war years have been seen as a time of great social change. It has been argued that the growth of the consumer society, mass unemployment, the increased influence of psychological and psychoanalytical ways of thinking, suburbanisation and the expansion of the national media all had dramatic effects on British society in the interwar period.<sup>1</sup> The upheavals of the First World War, and the emotional and physical damage that they caused, have been seen as the catalyst for a crisis of masculinity and femininity.<sup>2</sup> This combined with the impact of the increased influence of psychological and psychoanalytical ways of thinking could be seen to have led people to re-evaluate how they understood themselves and their identities in the post-war world.<sup>3</sup> But what did all this mean to the northern working classes, many of whom remained ensconced in traditional industries and traditional ways of life? Did any of these changes affect how men who desired men in the north were viewed by their communities and the authorities? This chapter will analyse the prosecution statistics for the period, consider inter-war policing in the north, examine a northern trial for obscene libel, and assess the local press response to homosexuality and related offences in order to answer these questions.

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<sup>1</sup> Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford, 2004), p.2.

<sup>2</sup> Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press*, p.2, Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London, 1996), p.13; Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, pp.252-252.

## Prosecutions for homosexual offences

During the inter-war years the legal landscape for prosecuting men accused of committing homosexual offences remained the same as in the earlier period discussed in Chapter Two. The categories of crime remained the same, as did the potential punishments. What changed was the number of men who were brought to trial. In both London and the north, this figure had increased substantially from the earlier period and the reasons for this will be discussed later in the chapter.<sup>4</sup> Matt Houlbrook's *Queer London* is the benchmark study of homosexuality in the capital during this period. Houlbrook has collated data regarding what he terms 'Queer incidents resulting in proceedings at the Metropolitan Magistrates Court and City of London Justice Rooms' and this data covers the period 1917-1957.<sup>5</sup> 'Queer incidents' refer to arrests that could be confirmed as being related to a homosexual act and as with the research done for this thesis, ignores arrests for public order offences such as indecent exposure as the circumstances of the charge cannot be confirmed.<sup>6</sup> It also includes inter-generational sexual encounters (there was still no distinction in the law to make these a separate offence).<sup>7</sup> Houlbrook sees a Queer incident

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<sup>4</sup> The configuration of the North and North Eastern Assize courts remained the same in this period with the exception of an extra sitting at Northumberland being added to the North-Eastern Circuit. By 1935, all Home Office Calendars of Prisoners are sealed to public viewing and this meant that the information for prosecutions had to then be taken from, in the case of the North-Eastern Circuit the Crown Minute Books and in the case of the Northern Circuit where these have been lost or destroyed, Indictment files. Unfortunately, this means that from 1935 onwards the information about the accused's occupation and mental capacity that was recorded in the Home Office Files is lost. This information can then only be gathered from newspaper reports (should they exist) of individual trials.

<sup>5</sup> Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (London and Chicago, 2005), p.273. These figures were collated from the registers of the Metropolitan Magistrates Court and City of London Justice Rooms and at five year intervals.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p.274.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*.

as a 'single moment of police intervention' so one incident could include multiple men and multiple and varying offences.<sup>8</sup> This thesis has included each man involved in the same incident as a separate offender. The reason for this is that in some years the number of men tried in the north was so small that to count all the men involved in a related incident as one would leave that year with only one incident to analyse. The sample years for the north and London do not exactly match but they have been compared as closely as possible. Even with these discrepancies, it is still possible to make comparisons and draw conclusions about why the number of prosecutions in London differed so greatly from those in the north.

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* This has the potential for downplaying the actual number of men who became involved in the legal system in London.

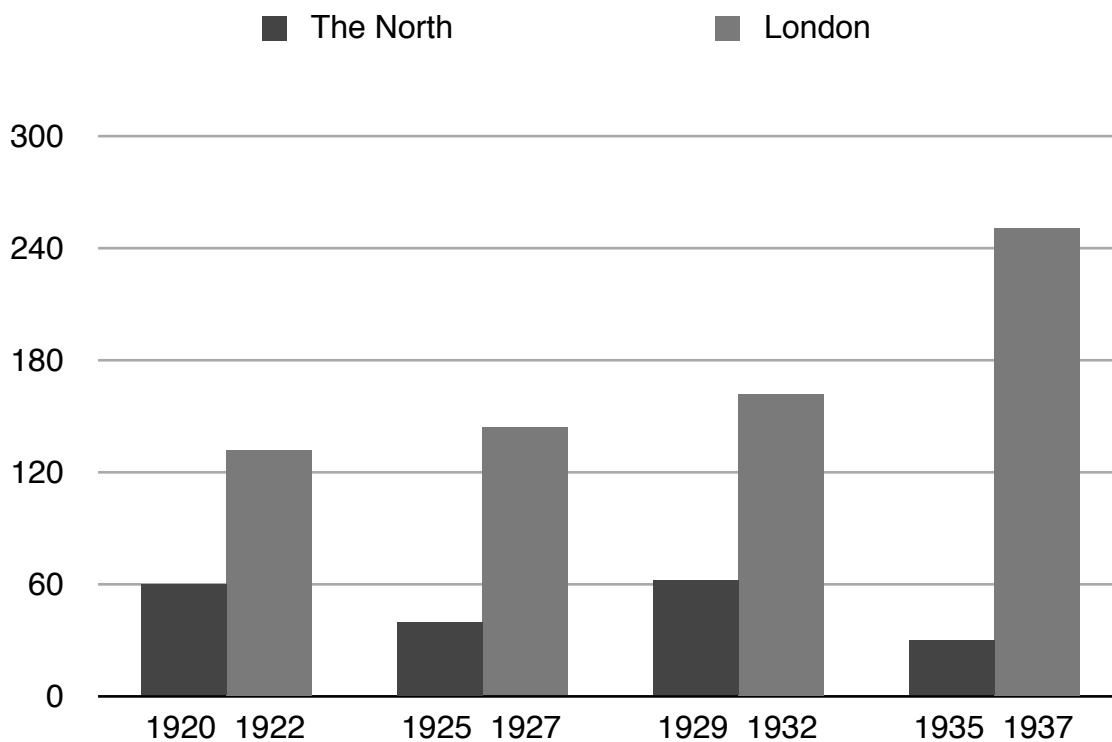


Figure 5.1: A comparison of men in London and the north who appeared in court for homosexual acts, 1919 - 1938.<sup>9</sup>

Like the period 1895-1918, the number of prosecutions in London was at least double those in the north if not triple. There is a huge disparity when comparing 1935 (30 prosecutions) in the north to 1937 (251 prosecutions) in London - there were eight times as many prosecutions in the capital. This in part could be explained by two factors; a change in the structure and priorities of the Metropolitan Police Force and the impact of the coronation of George VI in May 1937. The Met had changed tactics from treating homosexual offences as a part

<sup>9</sup> Home Office Calendar of Prisoners: HO 140/360, HO 140/363, HO 140/390, HO 140/393, HO 140/414, HO 140/417, North Eastern Circuit Crown Minute Book ASSI 41/36, Northern Circuit Indictment Files ASSI 51/191, ASSI 51/192, ASSI 51/193, ASSI 51/194, The National Archive. All incidents cited here can be confirmed as homosexual acts. The information in the documents is sufficient to be able to distinguish between for example; buggery and bestiality or indecent assault on a male or female. They also include inter-generational encounters and what we would now class as child abuse and any aggravated encounters that included violence. The year 1929 has been included instead of 1930 because all documents relating to that year were closed to viewing. I submitted Freedom of Information requests to view the documents but was refused. The Home Office Calendar of Prisoners for 1935 were with a separate government department and unavailable for viewing, they have since been closed to public viewing. I therefore took my information from the North Eastern Circuit Crown Minute Book and as this does not exist for the Northern circuit, the Northern Circuit indictment files. The London statistics are taken from Houlbrook, *Queer London*, pp.273-274. Northern figures represent individual men and the London figures represent queer incidents as previously explained.

of wider concerns with public order offences in the 1920s to separating them into their own class of crime, complete with plain-clothes officers to enforce this change in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>10</sup> It can be argued that there was a concerted effort to clean up the capital during the year of the new king's coronation.<sup>11</sup> It became a city of international scrutiny after the embarrassment of the abdication crisis and the eyes of the world were fixed on London to see what it and the nation as a whole would do next. There was also the more practical consideration that the coronation route would have taken in some of the less salubrious areas of London's red light and gay districts and the government did not want to be embarrassed by what unscheduled entertainments potential spectators at the coronation might see. Both of these reasons give some context for the dramatic increase in Metropolitan arrests in 1937 but it still fits in with the trend of prosecutions increasing year on year as shown by Houlbrook's research.

Taking the above into account, the differences in numbers of men prosecuted between the north and London are striking. During the inter-war period, the population of Greater London ranged between approximately seven and eight and a half million people.<sup>12</sup> The population of the north ranged between approximately twelve and thirteen million people.<sup>13</sup> As with the earlier period, one was much more likely to find oneself involved with the law living in London than living in the north. And again, as with the earlier period, there was no real

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<sup>10</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, pp.31-33.

<sup>11</sup> A similar situation occurred on the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. See Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: The Making of the Permissive Society* (New Haven and London, 2010), pp.41-48.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.londononline.co.uk/factfile/historical/> {accessed 23/04/2012}.

<sup>13</sup> B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1988), p.38.

pattern in northern prosecutions, they fluctuated in each sample year and there is no steady increase over time. This suggests that the way northern authorities chose to deal with (or not to deal with as the case may be) homosexual men was not linked closely to that in the capital and that periods of concerted efforts to police homosexuality in the capital did not necessarily transfer out to the provinces. Northern cities had not grown by much by the inter-war period. The biggest population growth had occurred at the end of the Victorian period when cities such as Sheffield, Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds had been in economic and industrial boom. Liverpool remained the biggest city with a population of 856,000 by 1931.<sup>14</sup> This indicates that although inklings of the gay life that could be had in the capital were beginning to make themselves known in the north, a distinct subculture had not yet arrived.

Inter-war London has been portrayed as a golden time of opportunity for men who desired other men.<sup>15</sup> These were the years of Quentin Crisp tripping around Piccadilly in make-up and velvet on his way to meet his friends in Lyon's Corner House.<sup>16</sup> Stephen Spender, John Lehmann and Tom Driberg slept their way through hordes of willing, working-class men that seemingly appeared like magic for their pleasure.<sup>17</sup> The names of countless cinemas, bars, cafes, bath houses, parks and urinals where men of all classes could meet friends and

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, pp.26-29.

<sup>15</sup> Florence Tamagne, *History of Homosexuality in Europe: Berlin, London, Paris 1919-1939, Vol. I & II* (New York, 2006), p.13.

<sup>16</sup> Quentin Crisp, *The Naked Civil Servant* (London, 1996, first published 1968).

<sup>17</sup> Tom Driberg, *Ruling Passions* (London, 1991, first published 1977); Lara Feigel and John Sutherland (eds), *Stephen Spender: New Selected Journals, 1939-1995* (London and Boston, 2012); John Lehmann, *In the Purely Pagan Sense* (London, 1985, first published 1976). Although there is probably an element of sexual fantasy in the writing of all three men, their accounts give a picture of the ease with which they found sex and socialised with other men during this period.



lovers can be easily evoked thanks to these autobiographies and the work of historians such as Houlbrook. Even with the visibility of homosexual opportunity that was apparent during the period, it was not until after the Second World War that the 'dramatic intensification' of police activity occurred.<sup>18</sup> This visibility was encapsulated by the publication of *For Your Convenience: A Learned Dialogue Instructive to All Londoners and London Visitors*. It was 'perhaps the first queer city guide'.<sup>19</sup> This loftily titled book was a guide to all the best urinals to visit if one wanted to pick up a man and it offered homosexual men an entree into the subculture, the like of which could not be found in the north. However, it also potentially offered less friendly interested parties such as the police an opportunity to find as many men as they wished to arrest. As it was published in 1937, one has to wonder if this had an impact on the increased number of men arrested that year.

### Policing in the north

It has already been established that throughout the 1930s, the London authorities developed new and specific strategies to target homosexual men. By the end of the period homosexual offences were no longer just one more amongst a longer list of public order offences. They were a distinct category of crime that was targeted by a distinct policing policy that had begun to include plain clothed officers and presumably the entrapment that has been associated with this method. Patrick Higgins has stated that from the 1920s to 1960, 'locally

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<sup>18</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, p.34.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p.51.

inspired campaigns against homosexuals' took place in provincial England.<sup>20</sup> These began in the 1920s and 1930s in counties in the south and west and spread throughout the 1940s until all counties were affected.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Higgins has argued that many provincial forces were 'vicious' in their treatment of homosexual men.<sup>22</sup> This thesis will challenge that notion as applied to the north. It has already been stated that there was no police campaign against homosexual men during the earlier period and this remained the case into the inter-war years and throughout much of the post war period.

Northern police forces were still woefully undermanned, under-equipped and old fashioned in comparison to the Met. Local authority budgets still did not have the funding to ensure that adequate policing was provided for the population. Throughout the 1920s Sheffield maintained a police force of around 556 men for a population of half a million, Leeds was a little better off with a force of 725 men for a population of 465,500.<sup>23</sup> This was clearly not a strong enough force to deal with more serious crimes such as burglary, theft, violence and murder, let alone the homosexual offences that were victimless.<sup>24</sup> During the 1920s, northern towns and cities experienced varying levels of unemployment and in the post-war steel slump, Sheffield was particularly badly hit. In 1923, the Chief of Police, John Hall-Dashwood, expressed his concerns about both the local

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<sup>20</sup> Patrick Higgins, *Heterosexual Dictatorship: Male Homosexuality in Postwar Britain* (London, 1996), p.167.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p.166.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>23</sup> J. P. Bean, *The Sheffield Gang Wars* (Sheffield, 1981), p.19.

<sup>24</sup> By using the word 'victimless' here, I am referring to homosexual acts committed between consenting adults and not cases of child abuse and rape.

police force and the potential impact of the economic situation in the local press.

He stated:

the public of Sheffield are paying rates for police protection which under the circumstances it cannot possibly get. In Sheffield, we have to admit that we are floating on very thin ice indeed and we have to also admit that, unless more generally helped by punishments to fit crimes, unpalatable as it may be, that Sheffield's police force is utterly inadequate numerically to cope with the wave of crime that must necessarily follow in the wake of the unemployment situation at the present time.<sup>25</sup>

Hall-Dashwood was reacting in part to the increasing prevalence of gang-related violence that was spreading around the north and had become particularly serious in Sheffield. It is astonishing that he chose to advertise in the press that his force was not capable of protecting the populace and it is clear that northern forces were still in the position of having to choose what types of crime actively to pursue.

Hall-Dashwood's interview was prompted by a report made to the Home Secretary by the Inspector of Constabulary that year. It stated that northern police forces were having greater difficulty each year in performing their basic duty of preventing crime and tackling the normal level of crime in their areas. Part of this was down to the small size of these forces when compared to the national yearly increase in crime rates. But a large part of it was down to local attitudes towards crime, the police and the agency of the individual. Earlier chapters of this thesis document the distinctive elements of a peculiarly northern identity that respected the privacy and the rights of the individual and mistrusted the police. The inspector's report and Hall-Dashwood's interview

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<sup>25</sup> *The Sheffield Telegraph*, 7 May 1923, p.4.

(and the newspaper's editorial response) confirmed that this was still the case during the inter-war period. The report stated that courts in the northern provinces were convicting less often and when they did, punishments were lighter than in the capital. Hall-Dashwood confirmed this view in *The Telegraph* when he stated:

It is the boast of the really bad man that he gets the best run for his money in Sheffield. He would rather be caught in Sheffield than in any other part of the country because, he says, you have to produce more evidence for the prosecution in a Sheffield court to get a conviction than in any other town in the country. Moreover, the convicted man in Sheffield is invariably pleasantly surprised by the light character of his sentence.<sup>26</sup>

This interview gave the impression of a man exasperated by the people that he was supposed to protect. It suggested a live and let live attitude in the local area that would only be shaken if a crime was considered serious enough to warrant suitable punishment. In response to the interview, *The Telegraph* ran its own views on the matter in the same edition. It stated that 'too often innocent men were found guilty.....and we are inclined to think that leaning to the side of mercy is not on the whole the worst of faults'.<sup>27</sup> It is unexpected to see the Chief of Police being so openly criticised in the local press and this echoed the questioning of authority the Sheffield newspapers demonstrated in their reporting of the Wilde trials thirty years earlier. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Hall-Dashwood did not last much longer in his position and was replaced in 1926 by Captain P.J. Stiltoe whose nickname was the "gang buster". He came to the city wanting to take on the challenge of an area with a bad reputation for 'gangs, violence and drunkenness' and made these areas his priority (which they

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

remained until the 1950s).<sup>28</sup> The traditional concerns linked with predominantly working-class areas - drink, violence and theft were the primary concern and there was little room left to police what people did with their sex lives.

By 1935, the situation had improved. In Sheffield the force had increased to 708 policemen and 6 policewomen for a population of 518,257.<sup>29</sup> Leeds had lost a few officers and was down to 694 for a population of 482,809 and Manchester had a much larger force of 1421 for a population of 766,311.<sup>30</sup> However, the extremely low number of men prosecuted at the Northern assizes that year show that increased police presence did not in this case translate to more men being targeted for homosexual offences. Indeed, the opposite was true. Fewer men were prosecuted than in the 1920s when police capacity had been critical. This would imply that it was not just simply lack of numbers that prevented northern forces targeting homosexual men, but an attitude of indifference, if not tolerance, towards the offence. By this time, changes were starting to creep into the northern forces. It was noted that in Sheffield, two police women had been recruited to the criminal investigations department and had started to work in plain clothes. Female officers had first been sworn in in 1915 to fill the deficit of men who had gone to war. However, some women were kept on to police gender specific crimes. It was thought that female officers were better equipped to deal with female offenders and victims. They were also seen as more able to work with children, therefore often investigated child abuse cases and became

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<sup>28</sup> Bean, *The Sheffield Gang Wars*, p.20.

<sup>29</sup> City of Sheffield Police and Auxiliary Services Annual report 1935 - 1940, Sheffield Local Studies Library, 352.25.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* Again, Leeds police force has been merged into West Yorkshire Police. In comparison, as of March 2012 West Yorkshire has 5219 police officers.

know for 'the policing of families'.<sup>31</sup> Their job was also to sniff out indecency but not necessarily of the homosexual kind. From 1934 onwards there had been a concerted effort to deal with brothels, prostitution, child abuse and indecent literature in the city. New recruits, both male and female were sent on two-week training courses to learn how to deal with all facets of indecency. The list of topics covered was as follows: 'Brothels and Indecency, Offences against the person, Bigamy, Offences against females', but there was no specific mention of 'Offences against males' even though this was a category of offence that was recorded in these official documents.<sup>32</sup>

In May 1926, *The Guardian* reported on the Met's success in employing female police officers to detect men involved in indecency with children and young people. Over a decade later, Sheffield's police force was able to try the same technique.<sup>33</sup> Hiring female officers was a specific strategy designed to make the victims of sexual assault and child abuse more likely to prosecute.<sup>34</sup> It was also believed that women officers were more effective in dealing with the problem of prostitution.<sup>35</sup> These women also became the moral police force of the city as they were charged with 'patrolling the streets, pleasure grounds and parks'.<sup>36</sup> This could have been done in reaction to the distaste that the northern working-class had shown to male officers sent to police what in effect was viewed as

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<sup>31</sup> Louise Jackson, *Women Police: Gender, Welfare and Surveillance in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester, 2006), pp.1-4.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 26 May 1926, p.11.

<sup>34</sup> Higgins, *Heterosexual Dictatorship*, pp.161-162. In focussing on child abuse and the importance of children as witnesses, women police officers were able to more successfully prosecute men for their abuse.

<sup>35</sup> Jackson, *Women Police*, pp.172-173.

<sup>36</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 26 May 1926, p.11.

private behaviour. It is almost certain that women would not have been sent out specifically to find men having sex with each other but this strategy can explain why men were caught in public spaces. If female officers were searching the streets and parks for heterosexual indecency and prostitution it was inevitable that they would find men doing the same things with each other.<sup>37</sup> The main worries of the local authorities until the war seem to have been increases in drunkenness (thought to be caused by higher levels of employment in the city), violence, prostitution, sexual assaults on females and abortion.<sup>38</sup> The proliferation of crimes against women or involving women explains why Sheffield chose to try out the plain clothes tactics on these crimes rather than on men whose crimes were usually victimless.

There was, however, one occasion in 1935 where it is clear that the Sheffield police force attempted to use the tactics of entrapment that were becoming more prevalent in the capital. The reason why this case was documented was that it became a topic of discussion in the House of Commons. On 27 March 1935, Cecil Pike, the MP for Attercliffe, a working-class district of Sheffield, asked the Home Secretary Sir John Gilmour a rather pointed question. He wanted to know whether his attention had been drawn to the case of Sheffield City Police vs Carnell and Bonnington, a case where two men had been accused of gross indecency and which the judge at Leeds assize had thrown out of court with criticism levelled at the 'methods adopted by the police to

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<sup>37</sup> Jackson, *Women Police*, p.172. During the First World War, women officers had been tasked with 'separating young working-class women and servicemen in the interests of order, public decency and sexual continence'. This carried on after the war with patrols reported to 'run in men and women alike for having sexual intercourse in public'.

<sup>38</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 26 May 1926, p.11.

secure evidence against suspected persons'.<sup>39</sup> He then went on to ask Gilmour to 'state what steps he proposes to take to prevent the police from inciting innocent persons to commit crime'.<sup>40</sup> Unsurprisingly, Pike was fobbed off by Gilmour who claimed that he had 'instituted enquiries into this case' and would communicate further when he had had a chance to look at the reports that he had asked for.<sup>41</sup> Gilmour was replaced by Sir John Simon in June of 1935 and mention of the incident disappeared with him. What is important here is that local MPs as well as local residents were willing to challenge the authority of the police and even when it related to such a potentially sensitive subject, the importance of protecting the rights of privacy and the individual remained foremost. It is unclear whether the complaint came from Pike himself, the men involved or others from his constituency but it is clear that the police were not able to act in the autonomous manner in which they often could in the capital without their tactics being challenged. Pike was more concerned with the men's unfair treatment by the police than the fact that they had presumably committed some sort of homosexual offence. This challenge to the authority of the police will be demonstrated further by the attitudes of juries to prosecutions where the only witnesses were police witnesses.

It is clear, then, that northern police forces operated differently from the Met both in terms of the resources available and in terms of methods and approaches that would be tolerated by local government and the public that they were protecting. Like the earlier period, choices had to be made about

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<sup>39</sup> H C Deb 27 March 1935 vol 299 cc 1905-6.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*



what types of crime to pursue and the low prosecution statistics make it clear that even by the inter-war years, no northern police force actively pursued homosexual men in the way that some of their Metropolitan counter-parts did. Policing a population of over twelve million people with a force in the low thousands made northern police forces retain the pragmatic view towards crime that had been held since the previous century. Violent crime and theft had to be a priority and where sexual crimes were concerned violence, abortion, prostitution and bigamy were prioritised as the biggest moral threats to northern society. In this period men caught up in the legal system for committing homosexual offences still seemed to be so by accident rather than being turned into a category of their own worthy of a dedicated aspect of the force as in London.

#### Differences between the North and North-Eastern Assizes

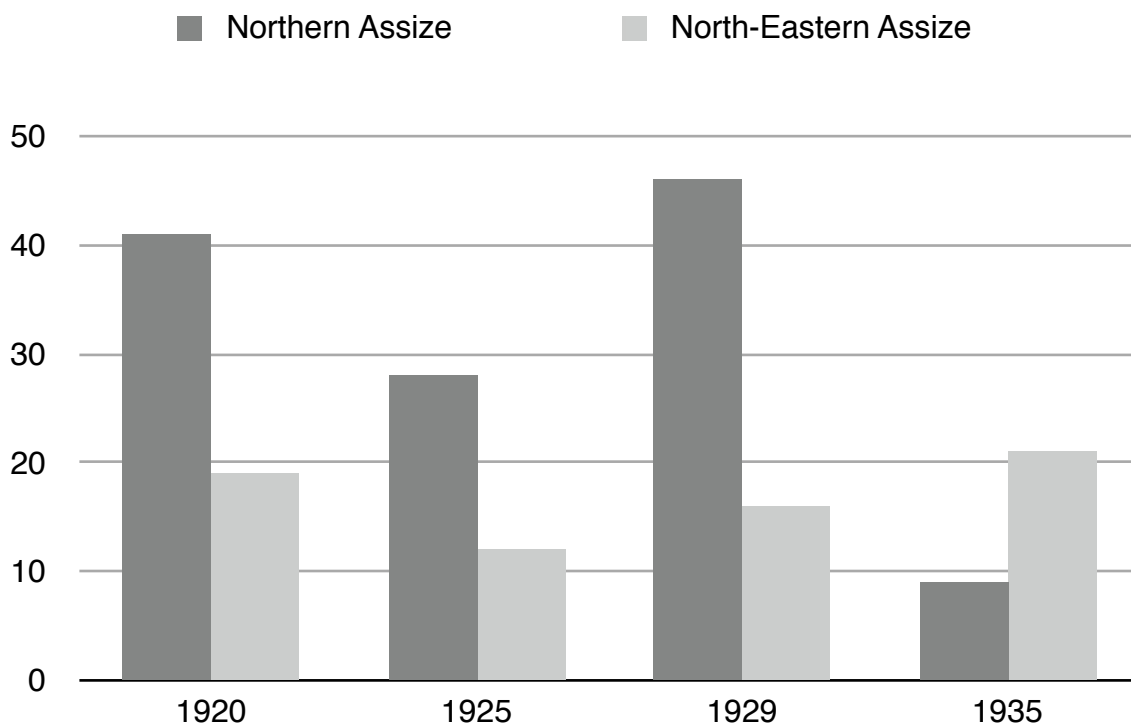


Figure 5.2: A comparison of prosecution figures for the Northern and North-Eastern Assize circuits.<sup>42</sup>

During the inter-war years it is clear that the regional differences explored in Chapters Two and Three remained and the impact of these on the number of men who were prosecuted for homosexual offences was still pronounced. In 1920 and 1925, more than twice the number of men were prosecuted on the Northern circuit and in 1929 this figure multiplied to almost triple. 1935 reversed this trend with almost double the number of men being prosecuted on the North-Eastern circuit. It can be argued that this links back to Wildman's thesis (discussed in Chapter Four) on the regeneration and re-packaging of the north-west and the subsequent shifting of embarrassing trials for homosexual offences (such the Altrincham case also discussed in Chapter Four) from the Northern to the Chester Assize Court Circuit. This argument is further corroborated by statistics used by Florence Tamagne.<sup>43</sup> Tamagne chose to

<sup>42</sup> See footnote for Figure 5.1 for full details.

<sup>43</sup> Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, p.309.

document the rise in prosecutions in Cheshire (ten in 1930, thirteen in 1933 jumping to 105 in 1937) and interpreted this as evidence of a newly repressive attitude and of a sustained and targeted attack on homosexual men in the area by the police.<sup>44</sup> In fact, this was evidence of local authorities sending men arrested in the north-west out of the area for prosecution to avoid scandal at a time when the image of the area was vital to the reconstruction of the north in the minds of the English public. Therefore, men whose prosecutions would have been spread across the region were concentrated on one assize. Although prosecution rates remained low, they had increased since the earlier period. However, they had not increased across each five-year sample. Like the earlier period, there is no real pattern in the numbers except it seems that one would have been more likely to be prosecuted on the Northern circuit than the North-Eastern. This could be explained by the fact that as discussed above, the north-west had a larger police presence than Yorkshire but can also be explained by the changing nature of the north-west's two biggest cities - Manchester and Liverpool as discussed in Chapter Four.

### Guilty or not guilty?

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

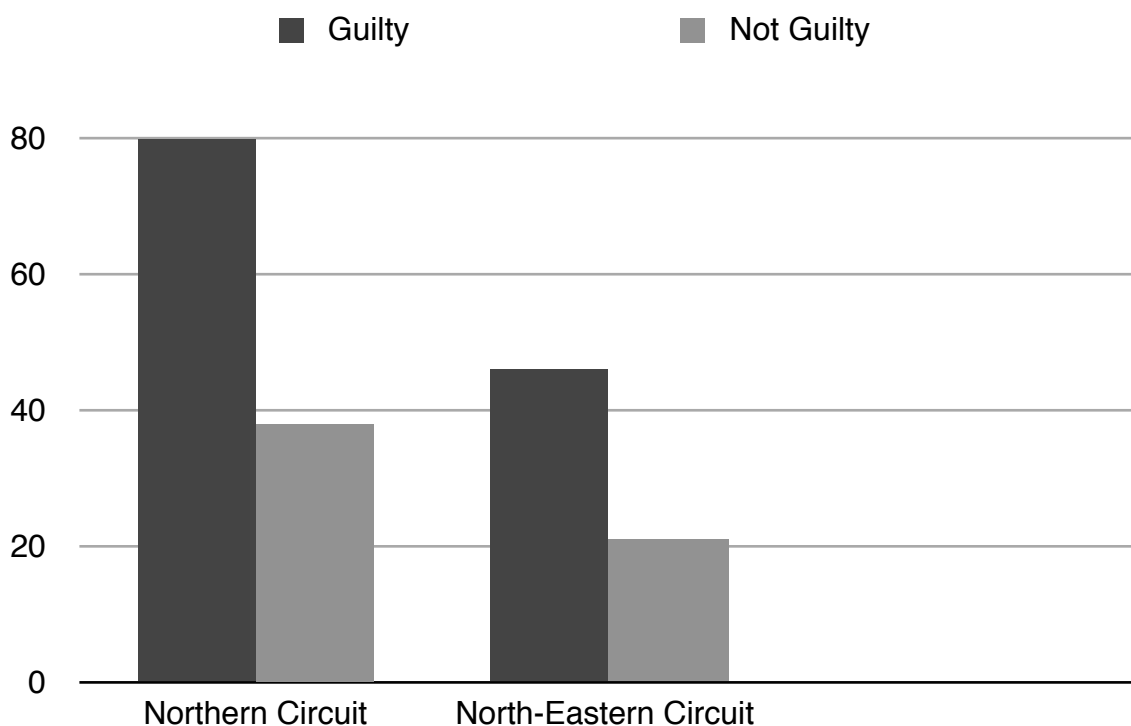


Figure 5.3: Guilty and not guilty verdicts in prosecutions for homosexual offences in the north, 1919 - 1938.<sup>45</sup>

Across the period, thirty two percent of men who were tried for homosexual offences in the Northern circuit were found not guilty. This figure is strikingly similar to the thirty one percent found not guilty in the earlier period. Where the biggest change occurs is in the North-Eastern circuit where the percentage of men found not guilty dropped from fifty four percent in the earlier period to thirty one percent in the inter-war years. This was not just a demonstration of changing attitudes in the area covered by the North-Eastern assizes circuit, it also reflected the increase in the number of men who pleaded guilty to their offences when in court. In itself, this could reflect a shift in the way that lawyers and the authorities viewed homosexuality - perhaps it was becoming a more defined identity and those in positions of power were starting to see it in the same way as their metropolitan counterparts.

<sup>45</sup> See footnote for Figure 5.1 for full details.

## Who was being prosecuted for homosexual offences?

During the inter-war period, the majority of men prosecuted for homosexual offences were still working-class. Even in 'show trials' such as the Altrincham case, the men involved were working-class. Rumours surrounding the case - that there were men from higher social classes involved but that they were tipped off and allowed to leave the country - echoed similar situations in the capital fifty years earlier.<sup>46</sup> Rumours such as these were also reflective of the 'them and us' attitude often prevalent in class-based society.<sup>47</sup> If true, these rumours suggested three things: that the authorities were more inclined to let men of a higher social class escape the law, that men of a higher social class had a similar understanding to the authorities of what having sex with other men meant in regards to the law and self-identity, and that men of a higher social class had access to better legal advice and the funds to act on it. The details of this case also suggest that many of the working-class men involved still had no concept of themselves as homosexual or as doing anything illegal. The ideas of the sexologists and the sort of homosexual identity that had been accepted by many middle-class men had still not filtered down in any meaningful way to the majority of northern working-class men. Another similarity to the earlier period studied is that working-class men still did not generally have access to much

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<sup>46</sup> A contemporary example of this was William Lygon, the 7th Earl Beauchamp. He was a prominent aristocrat and politician who is thought to have been the inspiration for Lord Marchmain in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*. Although married with children, Beauchamp was homosexual and had numerous indiscreet affairs with men, including his own footmen (the prettiest of whom were seen serving dinner with heavily bejewelled hands). He was 'outed' in 1931 by a vindictive brother in law and fled abroad where he lived for the rest of his life. Jane Mulvagh, *Madresfield The Real Brideshead: One House, One Family, One Thousand Years* (London, 2008), pp.277-310.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life* (London and New York 2009, first published 1957), pp.57-85. Hoggart describes how working people felt that it was one rule for them and another for the middle-classes. They felt that the authorities were always against them whilst they would try to help those of a higher social class.

private space. The fluctuating nature of the economy during the inter-war years and the nature of housing that was available and affordable meant that men were still more likely to have to meet in public places for sex. When more details are available about cases in the newspapers, it becomes clear that many of the men involved were either living with parents or married and these circumstances would clearly mean that it would have been difficult to use their homes for sex with other men.

Of the men who were prosecuted in the sample years the following could potentially be classed as middle-class: a chemist, a pianist, a manager, a superintendent of a boys' home, an insurance broker, a hotel proprietor, an actor, a law student and a schoolmaster and clerk in holy orders.<sup>48</sup> The actor, manager, hotel proprietor, chemist and schoolmaster were found not guilty.<sup>49</sup> The last is interesting as he was accused of committing gross indecency with three of his young pupils and this represented the kind of case that was the most common in newspaper reporting - the scandal of a predatory man abusing his educational and/or religious position of trust.<sup>50</sup> It was not a case that was taken lightly, in fact it straddled two assize court sessions which meant that it took months for the judge and jury to be able to come to a conclusion, which in the end was in the favour of the defendant. The superintendent of the boys' home (a man named Orr) was accused of buggery, indecent assault on a male person and gross indecency but it does not seem that this was related to his his

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<sup>48</sup> Home Office Calendar of Prisoners: HO 140/360, HO 140/363, HO 140/390, HO 140/393, HO 140/414, HO 140/417, North Eastern Circuit Crown Minute Book ASSI 41/36, Northern Circuit Indictment Files ASSI 51/191, ASSI 51/192, ASSI 51/193, ASSI 51/194, The National Archive.

<sup>49</sup> HO 140/414.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

charges at the home.<sup>51</sup> However, the reason for his harsh sentencing of twelve months' hard labour was probably connected with his position of power over young boys. He also had a long list of previous convictions for forgery, theft, false pretences and forgery - clearly not the sort of man who could have had his homosexual offences overlooked by the authorities.

The case of the law student was also not as simple as may first have been assumed. He was twenty-six, Indian and had been accused of committing gross indecency and indecently assaulting two boys aged fifteen and thirteen.<sup>52</sup> Unlike the schoolmaster charged with a similar offence, he was found guilty and sentenced to twelve months in prison. He received a lighter sentence than Orr and this could have been due to the fact that his foreignness was less off-putting to the judge than Orr's criminal background. In the earlier period, all the middle-class men who were prosecuted held positions of power over children; by the inter-war years these type of men were still represented but men with no connection to children were also being brought before the law.<sup>53</sup>

The working-class men who were prosecuted still represented a varied range of professions. There were labourers, hairdressers, steelworkers, miners, weavers, barmen, waiters, servants, clerks, a butcher, shop assistants, musicians, soldiers, sailors, painters, transport workers, apprentices and even a

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<sup>51</sup> HO 140/390. If a minor was involved in a case, the age of the boy was usually stated in the records even though this made no difference regarding charge or sentencing in the eyes of the law

<sup>52</sup> HO 140/414.

<sup>53</sup> Home Office: Calendar of Prisoners: HO 140/161, HO 140/165, HO 140/201, HO 140/205, HO 140/241, HO 140/ 245, HO 140/ 281, HO 140/ 285, HO 140/ 321, HO 140/325, HO 140/360, HO 140/363, HO 140/390, HO 140/393, HO 140/414, HO 140/417, North Eastern Circuit Crown Minute Book ASSI 41/36, Northern Circuit Indictment Files ASSI 51/191, ASSI 51/192, ASSI 51/193, ASSI 51/194, at The National Archive.

male nurse.<sup>54</sup> Again, there were some men from the professions traditionally associated with homosexuality such as those in the service industry and sailors, those who were in traditionally masculine jobs such as steelworkers, labourers and miners and everything in-between. The profession most frequently represented was that of labourer, in fact 27 per cent of men who were prosecuted were described as such.<sup>55</sup> This could encompass anything from someone with steady work at a building site to someone doing casual unskilled work at a factory or steelworks. These could also be men who travelled around looking for odd days worth of work wherever it could be found and it is possible that during the years of depression in the industrial north, these men were the most vulnerable to prosecution. They would have moved around and stayed in temporary lodgings, perhaps looking for distraction (and possibly comfort) in more reckless ways than their more settled counter-parts. This is the last period where records are available that record the men's occupations and it is still possible to confirm that the majority of working men were sleeping with other working men.<sup>56</sup> There is no evidence of the types of cross-class encounters pursued by Lehmann et al and thus no clear evidence of homosexual prostitution.<sup>57</sup> If a sailor was caught committing gross indecency with a labourer, it would have been unlikely that there was a financial transaction involved. This suggests a fundamental difference in how same-sex desire was understood and enacted in the north as opposed to the capital.

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<sup>54</sup> Home Office Calendar of Prisoners: HO 140/360, HO 140/363, HO 140/390, HO 140/393, HO 140/414, HO 140/417, North Eastern Circuit Crown Minute Book ASSI 41/36, Northern Circuit Indictment Files ASSI 51/191, ASSI 51/192, ASSI 51/193, ASSI 51/194, The National Archive.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 51 out of 192 prosecuted were labourers.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*



Once again, the story of the men prosecuted for homosexual offences during the inter-war years was not a clear one of repression and persecution. Of the one hundred and eighty five men that form the sample for the years 1919-1939, fifty of these were habitual criminals who would have been known to the local police, were accused of child abuse, attempted rape or were classed as mentally deficient or imbeciles.<sup>58</sup> The mental state of those classed as deficient was so bad that their criminal trials were stopped and the men were sent to institutions. Those with prior criminal records can be placed in two categories (although sometimes they overlap). There were those on the fringes of society with repeated convictions for drunkenness, begging, theft, assault, abuse of male and female children, vagrancy and indecent exposure, and there were those who had previous convictions for consensual homosexual offences.<sup>59</sup> The men who had previously been convicted for homosexual offences but were presumably otherwise respectable had often been given a very light sentence on their first (and sometimes second) offence - usually a fine.<sup>60</sup> It is likely that it was their habitual behaviour, and the failure of the legal system to prevent this behaviour, that ensured a prison sentence when caught again. The majority of men who came before the assizes courts in this period seem to have done so due to bad luck and conducting their affairs in public rather than a concerted effort by the authorities to entrap them.

#### Where were men being prosecuted?

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

Prosecutions still occurred all over the north and were not just confined to the big cities and their centres. Across the sample years there were only six arrests in Manchester city centre and nine in Leeds. More men were caught in Salford and Preston than their larger neighbour. Arrests in Sheffield city centre had increased to nineteen over the period but the records of the local police force show no attempt to pursue homosexuals, it is possible to put this increase down to a consequence of the policy employing female police officers to patrol the streets, parks and pleasure grounds in search of heterosexual vice. Newcastle had only two arrests, Bradford four and York and Hull only one. This is a clear indication that a visible, defined homosexual subculture was not present in northern cities by this time. There were bars, parks and urinals that were used by homosexuals (as will be discussed further later in the chapter) but either these were not known to the authorities or, as part of the policing strategies detailed above, they were largely ignored. Many of the arrests seemed to have involved one or two men in a small town or even village. Incidents like these occurred at thirty nine different locations across the north. The numbers of arrests in the bigger cities (and therefore potentially the presence of the illegality of sex between men in the public discourse) was small enough that it is entirely plausible that the men who used ignorance as a defence in court were telling the truth. The numbers in the outlying towns, villages and smaller cities were minuscule and this illustrates why the spread of a homosexual identity rooted in the law and defiance in the face of the law (as demonstrated by the working-class, East End queans) was so slow to take hold in the north.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> For discussion of working-class queans and their identity and defiance see: Houlbrook, *Queer London*, pp.141-149.

The one exception to this rule was again Liverpool. The highest number of arrests in any other northern city was nineteen. In Liverpool, the number was fifty nine.<sup>62</sup> This suggests that the differences that had always set Liverpool apart from its neighbours had become more pronounced since the end of the First World War. Out of all the cities in the north, Liverpool perhaps had the most in common with London. It was the largest and most cosmopolitan city due to its large docks that were the gateway to Ireland and America and were also the stopping point of large numbers of military and merchant vessels. Immigrants had made their home in Liverpool for centuries and it had the oldest African and Chinese communities in the country. These sorts of conditions meant that a transitory population similar to that in London (although on a much smaller scale) was attracted to the city. This could have been exacerbated during the depression years as thousands of unemployed young men were forced to search for jobs. A city that offered work at the docks, a chance for travel or an inroad to the navy would have been popular amongst men on the fringes of society and therefore more likely to be caught by the police. As already stated, areas with high concentrations of sailors and casual workers led to high levels of prostitution and drunkenness and Liverpool was no exception.<sup>63</sup> This in turn led to a local population and police force that were less likely to turn a blind eye to the sorts of transgressions that were likely to be a more visible, public nuisance than in other northern cities.

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<sup>62</sup> Home Office Calendar of Prisoners: HO 140/360, HO 140/363, HO 140/390, HO 140/393, HO 140/414, HO 140/417, North Eastern Circuit Crown Minute Book ASSI 41/36, Northern Circuit Indictment Files ASSI 51/191, ASSI 51/192, ASSI 51/193, ASSI 51/194, The National Archive.

<sup>63</sup> Paul Baker and Jo Stanley, *Hello Sailor! The Hidden History of Gay Life at Sea* (London, 2003), pp.149-150.

Although one would have been more likely to be arrested for homosexual offences in Liverpool than any other place in the north, it was no longer the worst place to be tried for those offences. Of those tried, seventy-one percent of men were found guilty; in Manchester it was the same figure and on the Northern circuit, Lancaster was the least inclined to find men guilty with a figure of fifty-two percent.<sup>64</sup> These figures remain similar to the earlier period with a fairly small drop in guilty findings in Liverpool and Lancaster and an increase in Manchester. The change at Lancaster might have occurred because a large number of cases from Liverpool were sent to be tried at Lancaster instead. Many of these involved sailors and the Lancastrians were perhaps unsure how to read a type of man that they were unused to dealing with. Where the biggest changes occurred were on the North-Eastern circuit. In the earlier period Leeds had found fifty-one percent of men guilty; this had become seventy-three percent.<sup>65</sup> In York, only twenty-five percent of men had been found guilty; this had become fifty-percent (although it remained the most lenient stop on the northern circuits).<sup>66</sup> Three new sessions had been added to the North-Eastern circuit during the inter-war period - Newcastle, Northumberland and Durham. Of these new additions, sixty-seven percent of men were found guilty at Durham, fifty-seven percent at Northumberland and one hundred percent at Newcastle.<sup>67</sup> Some of these changes are striking, but what do they mean in terms of how the authorities dealt with homosexuality?

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<sup>64</sup> Home Office Calendar of Prisoners: HO 140/360, HO 140/363, HO 140/390, HO 140/393, HO 140/414, HO 140/417, North Eastern Circuit Crown Minute Book ASSI 41/36, Northern Circuit Indictment Files ASSI 51/191, ASSI 51/192, ASSI 51/193, ASSI 51/194, The National Archive.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

The biggest difference between the two periods was that the number of men who pleaded guilty increased dramatically, particularly those tried in the North-Eastern circuit.<sup>68</sup> The majority of those that pleaded not guilty in this area were found not guilty, whereas, a significant number of men who pleaded not guilty on the Northern circuit were still found guilty by the judge and jury.<sup>69</sup> Many of the men tried on the North-Eastern circuit had been caught in pairs with the witness being a police officer. If the men remained strong enough to challenge the statement of the officer involved, they were nearly always found not guilty by a jury. During this period, it seems that the police forces covered by the North-Eastern circuit had begun to match their counterparts on the Northern circuit for their ability to extract guilty pleas from those under arrest although jurors on the North-Eastern circuit remained dubious of the place of the authorities to regulate people's sex lives.

There are further details to be gleaned from the records as to the circumstances of how men met and interacted with each other. John Knight, a forty-two year-old painter was arrested in Stockport for committing gross indecency.<sup>70</sup> He was imprisoned for five months with hard labour. What is unusual about Knight's case is his previous convictions. He had been fined for being abusive and for prostitution. This is the only direct reference to male prostitution in any of the sample records. It is also interesting that he was only fined for his previous offence although it probably did lead to the fairly severe punishment that he received for committing gross indecency in 1929. We get a picture of a more

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> HO 140/414.

developed commercial network being available to men in the north-west than Yorkshire due to the numbers of bar men, hoteliers and waiters that were arrested there. This suggests that these men owned or worked in establishments that were either friendly to or catered especially for a homosexual clientele. This did not necessarily put them at a disadvantage in the eyes of the jury. The case of John Burke, a thirty-two year-old seaman and the aptly named Peter Bold, an eighteen year-old barman, conjures up the image of the kind of friendly pub that Quentin Crisp would have gladly left the excitement of Piccadilly for.<sup>71</sup> They were both charged with attempted buggery and gross indecency. Both pleaded not guilty yet only Burke was found guilty and sentenced to six months in prison. Quite how Bold could have been not guilty of the acts that Burke was found guilty of committing with him is unclear. Another case involving a bar was that of Frank Davies, a thirty-seven year-old barman and Alfred Hughes, a fifty year-old clerk.<sup>72</sup> In this case both men had previous convictions for 'indecent conduct', three in the case of Davies and two in the case of Hughes and, perhaps because of this, both pleaded guilty and were given three months each in prison. Neither had been imprisoned before. They had both received fines but the number of convictions suggests some notoriety around the pub where Davies worked.

There are many occasions where two men in the same profession and of a similar age were arrested together and these types of incidents suggest relationships forming at work. This will be discussed more fully in Chapters Six and Seven yet it is indicative of the type of peculiarly northern masculinity that

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

allowed for such a fluidity of role amongst work mates. The example of the workers in the Sheffield survey discussed in Chapter Four makes clear that for some men, their emotional fulfillment relied on their pals. The examples detailed below illustrate that for some men, their sexual fulfillment did as well. This seemed more likely to be the case in the traditional, skilled professions. In 1920, two weavers, James Marsden and James Berryman from Burnley were prosecuted for committing gross indecency with each other.<sup>73</sup> They were found not guilty, even though Marsden had a previous conviction for the same thing. It is possible that their profession enhanced their respectability in the eyes of the jury and that this helped their case. In the same year Darrell Dobson and Ralph Cleck, both engineers in Manchester, were prosecuted for committing gross indecency with each other.<sup>74</sup> Because of their ages (Dobson was forty and Cleck was seventeen) it is likely that Cleck was an apprentice at the same works as Dobson, maybe even his apprentice. Both pleaded guilty; Dobson was given five months in prison and Cleck was bound over. This disparity in sentencing was inevitable due to the age difference between the two men and Dobson's perceived breaching of a position of trust.<sup>75</sup> A similar example came from Sheffield. Charles Thomas, a steelworker, and Charles Brooks, a grinder, were charged with committing gross indecency with each other in the city centre in the summer of 1920.<sup>76</sup> Perhaps they were friends from work or they knew each other as a part of the steel community. For whatever reason, they went out into a public space for sex and were caught. Thomas was given six months'

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<sup>73</sup> HO 140/360.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Further examples of this can be found in Chapters Four and Six in the analysis of the Altrincham, Rotherham and Barnsley trials.

<sup>76</sup> HO 140/363.

hard labour but the younger Brooks was found not guilty. There is perhaps some more of the prejudice regarding an older man 'corrupting' a younger man here that resulted in the disproportionate and odd sentencing. This could indicate the perception of the crime in moral terms - i.e. the problem was with the older man setting the younger man on the wrong path, rather than the crime itself.

Urinals and outdoor spaces still featured heavily in the landscape of homosexual life in the north during this period. There are specific references in the records to urinals, with Liverpool Lime Street Station seemingly a hot spot. Often, men made use of the abundant countryside outside the major northern cities to look for privacy and somewhere to meet. Bowley Gap, a pleasure spot outside Bingley in West Yorkshire, was one such place where a woolcomber named James Garrett was unpleasantly surprised and caught in the act in July 1920.<sup>77</sup> What is clear is that men remained inventive and willing to travel a little further afield in pursuit of privacy and pleasure. A difference from the earlier period was that there were a larger number of cases involving more than two men. The only really big 'address book trial' was that in Altrincham, although prosecutions of a different nature were starting to become apparent. A twenty-three year-old hoist attendant named Robert Hooper was charged with committing gross indecency with three different men, in Bradford on 10 April 1920.<sup>78</sup> He pleaded guilty and was given six months' hard labour. How did this come to trial? Perhaps the most sensible conclusion was that the men were at a party or a pub which was raided by the police. Another possibility is that Hooper

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<sup>77</sup> HO 140/363.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*



was caught with one man and incriminated himself regarding the others. None of the men that he slept with, although named in the records, faced trial. In the same year, Edward Parkin was charged for committing offences with five men at Ripon over April and May.<sup>79</sup> Because the offences occurred at different times and Parkin pleaded guilty, it would seem that he had incriminated himself after being caught out. He received two years' hard labour. In May 1925, Robert Rumford, a sixty year old pattern maker, was arrested in York for committing offences with three other men regularly since 1923.<sup>80</sup> He had previous convictions for gross indecency dating back to 1900 and pleaded guilty to this charge. This earned him a further two years in prison with hard labour. Rumford's situation seems to have been similar to Parkin's although the regularity of the offences and the time frame over which they were committed suggest that the initial complaint may have come from one of his partners - none of whom were arrested themselves.

#### The strange tale of *Boy* - an obscene libel trial

A strange interlude amongst all the indictments for homosexual offences can be found in the trial for obscene libel of a book called *Boy* in Manchester in 1935.<sup>81</sup> This was one of a run of high profile obscenity trials during the period but it has not previously been addressed in any depth. The company behind the publication of the book was called Boriswood Limited and the author was a man named James Hanley. Hanley was a working-class man who had spent many

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> ASSI 51/194.

years at sea. He was living in Liverpool when he wrote *Boy* and went on to write many more novels and later screenplays.<sup>82</sup> Amongst the indictments is a copy of the passages from the book that were classed as obscene and therefore the reason behind the trial taking place. Unsurprisingly, the titular Boy (Arthur Fearon) was the main character and most of the book was set at sea or amongst sailors. There were numerous heterosexual sex scenes in the book but it was also full of homoerotic references.

The first part of the book that the authorities took offence to included a surly boatswain smiling and declaring 'Can I use him. Well. Well. I can use a brownie anytime'.<sup>83</sup> It got worse from there. Fearon fended off an amorous male cook but the reader was told that he was used to this having had a life 'spent among the roughest of men at the docks and yards'. Here was the glaring assumption that desiring other men was commonplace amongst the toughest elements of working-class society.<sup>84</sup> He was paid to take part in a threesome with an Arab captain and a prostitute and told a story about a pretty young boy like him being raped and murdered by some Arabs when he dared to leave the protection of the ship. The final part of the book to offend the authorities rounded off the story as some sort of morality tale. Fearon had contracted syphilis from the woman that he slept with. This revelation was followed by some slightly melodramatic advice from the ship's steward who told him:

Shh. Say nothing. When it's dark take a header overboard and that's the end of it. I knew a man had it badly in Santos. They put him in hospital

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<sup>82</sup> Baker and Stanley, *Hello Sailor!*, p.3, 22.

<sup>83</sup> ASSI 51/194.

<sup>84</sup> Pat O'Mara, *Autobiography of a Liverpool Slummy* (London, 1994, first published 1934). O'Mara's autobiography traces his life in the Liverpool slums and then his life at sea. Much of the subject matter corroborates *Boy* and sex between men was familiar to him especially at sea.

there. No use. Couldn't do anything with him. Smothered him in his sleep.<sup>85</sup>

*Boy* is full of conflicting strands of morality and sensuality. Fearon is an object of desire to both men and women and at times he appears to be confused as to which sex he preferred. Men were presented as predatory and sex obsessed but women were presented as diseased. His punishment came from sleeping with a prostitute and not his dubious sexual conduct with other men. Just what sort of message were readers supposed to take away from this book?

Many people in fact wanted to read the book as it ran through numerous cheap, paperback editions throughout 1934 and 1935 and it was this cheap publication that led to the trial. The fact that it was brought out in a cheap edition indicates that it was produced for a working-class audience and it was presumably aimed at men. In the earlier period, there was evidence of bookshops in the industrial slums selling obscene material and this trial provides evidence that material to sell in these shops was produced locally as well as in the capital and abroad.<sup>86</sup> Although certainly not pornography, it was a risqué novel that tackled subjects that were beyond the pale in literature at the time. The publishers assumed that not only would working men understand all the references to same-sex desire in the book, but that they would want to read about them and would perhaps even be titillated by them (they were not exactly subtle). The inclusion of so much homoerotic content in a book seemingly aimed at the general public highlighted the familiarity that ordinary men had with same sex sexuality in the north at this

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<sup>85</sup> ASSI 51/194.

<sup>86</sup> St Philips Education and Research Society, *The Equipment Of The Workers: An Enquiry By The St Philip's Settlement Education And Research Society Into The Adequacy Of The Adult Manual Workers For The Discharge Of Their Responsibilities As Heads Of Household, Producers And Citizens* (London, 1919), p.302.

time. In the context of the book, it was as everyday as desiring a beautiful woman, sleeping with a prostitute or getting a dose of the clap - essentially a part of the sexual experience of many working-class men. Boriswood Limited pleaded guilty and were fined £250, a relatively large sum of money when compared to the average of £5 that men could be fined for committing homosexual offences.<sup>87</sup>

### *The Manchester Guardian*

Alongside the large amounts of coverage given to the Altrincham case in 1936, homosexuality and related issues retained a presence in the local press and in the *Manchester Guardian* throughout the period. Although ostensibly a local paper, the *Guardian* had a distinctly metropolitan bias in its news and outlook during the inter-war years. There was considerably more discussion of policy issues, the Metropolitan Police and Metropolitan cases regarding sexuality than the local press. This could also be explained by the class of readership that the *Guardian* courted. During August 1921, discussion was taking place in the House of Commons regarding a Criminal Law Amendment Bill. During these discussions, it was proposed that 'a new clause providing that any act of indecency between female persons shall be a misdemeanour punishable in the same manner as indecency between males under section 11 of the CLAA of 1885' and this proposal was printed by the *Guardian*.<sup>88</sup> This had clearly become a very different newspaper to that which chose to ignore the Wilde Trials twenty-

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<sup>87</sup> Home Office Calendar of Prisoners: HO 140/360, HO 140/363, HO 140/390, HO 140/393, HO 140/414, HO 140/417, North Eastern Circuit Crown Minute Book ASSI 41/36, Northern Circuit Indictment Files ASSI 51/191, ASSI 51/192, ASSI 51/193, ASSI 51/194, The National Archive.

<sup>88</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 6 August 1921, p.9.

six years before. Before this point, it had been unheard of both to mention female indecency in the press and to acknowledge that it even existed as a part of the public discourse.

Until 1928, there was no discussion of male homosexuality although there was much concern about the state of northern youth and its potential slide into indecency due to the 'growing temptation of the street', indecent postcards, the cinema and prostitution.<sup>89</sup> By 1928, homosexuality became an issue for discussion in the context of how best to deal with the problem and how dubious the use of plain clothes policemen could be when attempting to arrest men - both in that the policemen involved could become susceptible to the lures of other men and that they could easily become agents provocateurs.<sup>90</sup> The findings of the Street Offences Committee stated that 'importuning' needed to be redefined: 'A person is not importuned by a wink or a nod or a passing remark and such trivial overtures may be disregarded by law'.<sup>91</sup> The paper went further in 1929 when responding to a Metropolitan case that questioned the Met's tactics in policing Hyde Park. It reported that men were being arrested when they should not have been and that the police should not have been trying to 'enforce moral standards which have nothing whatever to do with the preservation of public order'.<sup>92</sup> There was no such discussion of the wider issues around homosexuality and its treatment by the law in the local press which instead focussed on court reporting. It is easy to see how readers of *The*

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 25 May 1927, p.13.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 11 December 1928, p.5.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 17 April 1929, p.6.

*Guardian* may have had a different view of homosexuality and its place in society and as an identity than those who read the local or popular press.

The *Guardian* remained careful as to which (if any) prosecutions for homosexual offences it chose to report on and it seems that only cases which included a transgression of society's values greater than the act itself were chosen. In February 1929, William Winstanley and Thomas Bunney (both from Manchester) were sentenced to time in prison for indecency with each other.<sup>93</sup> Winstanley had been an international footballer and rugby player and it was presumably impossible to ignore that a sportsman who had represented his country had been having sex with other men. Readers were also informed of a vicar who was under 'great mental strain' which meant that he couldn't resist sleeping with a drunken man, an ex-policeman who had been fired for committing indecency and couldn't help himself for a second time and a scoutmaster who had become a threat to his young charges by committing gross indecency with three men.<sup>94</sup> These cases have all become tropes in our understanding of how homosexuality was regulated and reported.

The reportage of such cases informed the reader of men who had 'abused' positions of power and respect and had acted against society's expectations of them. Therefore, it was deemed necessary to name and shame them in the press as cautionary tales where the same treatment was perhaps not necessary for ordinary men in the same position. This insistence on only reporting cases where more powerful men were involved consistently misrepresented the truth

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 20 February 1929, p.11.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 11 February 1929, p.11; 8 March 1929, p.13; 18 June 1929, p.22.

that working-class men were the majority victims of the law. On the rare occasions when ordinary men were mentioned, it was in the context of further tropes associated with homosexuality. An example of this occurred when seven men were arrested in Leeds and one tried to commit suicide (he failed and was brought up on a further charge of attempted suicide).<sup>95</sup> This seems to have been positioned as a further cautionary tale and all this moralising appears to be at odds with the paper's fairly liberal attitude towards the wider understanding of homosexuality as a social issue and how to deal with it discussed above. Often in the details of the cases discussed, there was some mention of mental health issues or a positioning of the man's sexuality as an illness. This was a clear choice to adopt the medical understanding of homosexuality as championed by the sexologists.

### The *Sheffield Independent*

The treatment of homosexual issues in the *Independent* was very different to that discussed above. As mentioned, there was no discussion of the policy issues regarding homosexuality but the paper found a way to continue in the liberal vein it started when reporting the Wilde Trials in 1895. When a curate was charged with gross indecency, readers were told that 'his vicar spoke of his high character and the general esteem in which he was held'.<sup>96</sup> The case was followed up two months later to confirm that both he and his partner had been found not guilty.<sup>97</sup> When a man was tried for indecency after being caught

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, 30 January 1931, p.9.

<sup>96</sup> *The Sheffield Independent*, 5 January 1921, p.6.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 19 March 1921, p.8.

wearing women's clothes, the paper chose to print the following from the court reporting:

I hear that you have another white evening dress on order. You are not getting married are you? It is no concern of the bench if you choose to squander your money on feminine attire and wear corsets.<sup>98</sup>

The man was found not guilty. As well as northern cases such as the ones above, The *Independent* passed comment on Metropolitan issues when they particularly seemed to challenge northern attitudes. This was not to suggest that the capital was a den of iniquity and that northerners were lucky to be away from it - it was to challenge some of the more repressive measures that were beginning to become commonplace. In 1921, the paper printed in some depth a story from the capital that detailed the dangers of the current legal system and the severity of the crime of blackmail, especially when in relation to homosexual men. It also chose to pass judgement on the seemingly unimportant decision by the Metropolitan authorities to ban men from wearing women's clothes at the Chelsea Arts Ball.<sup>99</sup> The *Independent* found this move to be ridiculous and a challenge to the right of the individual to do as they pleased - to demonstrate this it printed an archly knowing quote from one of the Ball's attendees "they will be telling me soon what partner to bring" he said "and how to dance".<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 25 August 1921, p.10. This case reflects the British press's fascination with cross-dressing during this period. The majority of cases that were reported on did not link the idea of cross-dressing to homosexuality. For further discussion see Alison Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman! Women's gender-crossing in modern British popular culture* (London and New York, 2007), pp.63-89.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 1 January 1931, p.7. The Chelsea Arts Ball was a highlight of the homosexual social calendar in London. It had become known for drag and same-sex dancing and was a night of high camp in open view. Because of changing attitudes towards sexual identity in the capital, the authorities chose to make 1931 the year that they took a stand against the event.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*.



Where cases of gross indecency were reported, just the facts of the case made the paper.<sup>101</sup> In itself, the act of naming and shaming the men was a repressive measure but the fact that the paper did not pass judgement on the severity of the crime or the mental state of the men involved demonstrated that the local press did not choose to propagate the Metropolitan authorities' medicalised understanding of homosexual identity. The tropes that were prevalent throughout the period in the *Guardian* were not present in the *Independent*. During this period, the local press was not instrumental in helping to formulate a universally understood version of the homosexual man. Throughout 1931, The *Independent* pursued its goal of being read as a liberal and cultured paper by promoting a season of Oscar Wilde's plays in the city and by wondering why Wilde's *Salome* had ever been banned in a review of the play staged in the capital.<sup>102</sup> It also reported throughout the year on a campaign to save Edward Carpenter's house at Millthorpe and keep it as a monument to him and his achievements. In rehashing Carpenter's political and literary achievements, the paper did not hide his way of life. In fact, it celebrated it. Readers were told that:

It was in this cottage that Carpenter lived with George Merrill his faithful companion and general factorum [sic]. They did their own housework and cooking and lived the life of charming simplicity for which Carpenter had always yearned after his brilliant career at Cambridge.<sup>103</sup>

Carpenter's life and relationship was not portrayed as unusual or sinister but as the culmination of a long held dream. It is difficult to image that such an editorial piece would have appeared in the national press at the time.

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<sup>101</sup> These details included: names, ages, the offence and the verdict.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 21 July 1931; p.10, 6 October 1931, p.11.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 10 June 1931, p.4. This was the day's editorial.

## Conclusion

Although prosecutions for homosexual offences in the north increased during the inter-war years, they still remained far below those in the capital. The number of prosecutions in London were still at least twice those in the north regardless in disparities of population. During the period, prosecuting men who had sex with other men was still never a priority for northern police forces, although Metropolitan tactics of entrapment were (unsuccessfully) trialled. These police forces were still underfunded and understaffed and this led to the earlier policy of choosing which crimes actively to pursue being continued. In some northern cities, the introduction of women police officers inadvertently led to an increase in the number of men who were arrested for homosexual offences, but this was not a specific focus. The northern circuit still provided the most men for prosecution and men tried on that circuit were the most likely to be found guilty regardless of how they pleaded. This could be evidence of the beginnings of a commercial culture that could be found in Manchester and Liverpool which led to homosexuality being slightly more visible and defined in the area.

The vast majority of men who were prosecuted were still working-class and most of them were arrested in public spaces. Of these men, many seem to have met each other either at work or as part of the culture of a particular profession. These professions were on the whole located within the traditionally masculine industries. This lends credence to the fact that it was not unusual for working men to get sexual and emotional fulfillment from their work mates and that their

identity could remain firmly attached to their work rather than their sexuality while they did so. The fact that there was a focus on prostitution and heterosexual indecency in the north demonstrates that there was ample opportunity for men and women to have sex, even in cities such as Sheffield where social life was still often sex-segregated. Men did not have sex with other men because they had to if they wanted to have sex at all (as in institutionalised situations like the armed forces or prison), it was presumably a choice based on desire. Unlike Sidney Cross in the Altrincham case, none of the other men that were prosecuted were identified as 'neurotic' or sent for medical treatment which indicates that the provincial legal authorities had not yet begun to view homosexuality in the medicalised terms of sexologists and psychologists. It is clear that it was going to take a significant social change in order for northern authorities, ordinary people and the men themselves to change how they viewed men that desired other men. This change was to come in the late 1950s and is discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.



## **Chapter Six: 'I can't help it. Every time I see a cock I go funny': Personal experiences of masculinity and same-sex desire in the north, 1939 - 1957**

It is documented by historians of sexuality and memoirists alike that the years 1939 to 1957 encompassed periods of relative freedom and of persecution for men who desired other men. The war years have long been regarded as a time of looser morality, with the 'we could be dead tomorrow' attitude fostered by total war leading to an increased willingness, by men and women, to take up sexual opportunities when they were presented.<sup>1</sup> Roy Porter and Lesley Hall's research has confirmed that cases of venereal disease increased dramatically at the outset of the war which led to much concern for the authorities.<sup>2</sup> Liz Stanley has also argued that

By the end of the war, many people who worked in or headed voluntary and statutory organisations concerned with marriage, childbirth, and birth control within and outside marriage, were increasingly aware that the war had brought with it major changes to sexual attitudes and behaviour.<sup>3</sup>

However, recent scholarship has attempted to challenge this notion. Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher claim that they found no sign of increased sexual license in their interviews and that those interviewed did not particularly present the war as a time of sexual opportunity.<sup>4</sup> Alan Allport has highlighted the

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Allport, *Demobbed: Coming Home After the Second World War* (New Haven and London, 2010, first published 2009), pp.81-106; Katherine Holden, *The Shadow of Marriage Singleness in England, 1914-1960* (Manchester and New York, 2007), pp.93-93; Alkarim Jivani, *It's Not Unusual: A History of Lesbian and Gay Britain in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1997), p.55; Roy Porter and Lesley Hall, *The Facts of Life: The Creation of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, 1650-1950* (New Haven and London, 1995), p.241; Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England 1918-1963* (Cambridge, 2010), p.59; Liz Stanley, *Sex Surveyed, 1949-1994: From Mass-Observation's 'Little Kinsey' to the National Survey and the Hite Reports* (London, 1995), p.5.

<sup>2</sup> Porter and Hall, *The Facts of Life*, p.241.

<sup>3</sup> Stanley, *Sex Surveyed*, p.5.

<sup>4</sup> Szreter and Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution*, p.59.

difficulty in pinning down information on people's sexual behaviour especially when official documents do not always fit with notions of what had occurred.<sup>5</sup>

For men who wanted to have sex with other men, the war years have often been portrayed as a golden age.<sup>6</sup> This is perhaps best summed up by Quentin Crisp's famous V.E Day lament that 'the horrors of peace were many'.<sup>7</sup> Crisp had famously documented the sexual opportunity that the black-out, increased numbers of men in the army and away from home and willing G.I.s provided. Similar accounts have been provided by less famous men. Roy, a man interviewed for *Between the Acts*, told of his sexual success in London, Edinburgh and Sussex with Canadian soldiers, married men and plenty of men that were To Be Had (TBH).<sup>8</sup> Men that were TBH were not viewed as homosexual but were happy to sleep with other men. Jivani's chapter on 'War' offers numerous life stories that confirm the view that sexual opportunity for men and women who preferred their own sex was rife. Such opportunity could be found in the armed forces at home and abroad or in towns and cities that had been disrupted by the war.<sup>9</sup> In accounts of the wartime and post-war world, this narrative of sexual freedom exacerbated by the conditions of war (such as the blackout and the transience of millions of people conscripted to the war effort) is often contrasted with the strict moral policing of the post-war years.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Allport, *Demobbed*, pp.81-106.

<sup>6</sup> Holden, *The Shadow of Marriage*, pp.103-104.

<sup>7</sup> Quentin Crisp, *The Naked Civil Servant* (London, 1996, first published 1968), p.93.

<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey Weeks and Kevin Porter (eds), *Between the Acts: Lives of Homosexual Men 1885-1967* (London, 1998), pp.98-99.

<sup>9</sup> Jivani, *It's Not Unusual*, pp.55-86.

<sup>10</sup> Lynne Segal, *Straight Sex: The Politics of Pleasure* (London, 1994), p.4. Segal described the 'tense domesticity and anxious conformity of the fifties'.

The efforts of church and state to promote marriage and family life as the only respectable and acceptable way to live and to rebuild society after the defeat of the Nazis have been emphasised.<sup>11</sup> The laxity of war-time morals was denounced by church leaders and the Marriage Guidance Council stepped up its efforts (and its pamphlet production) in an attempt to address the unhappiness that was found both sexually and emotionally in many marriages at the time.<sup>12</sup> It has been argued that this refocussing on traditional family values and the heterosexual, child rearing family (in response to the moral panic brought about by the war) re-enforced the unacceptability of people who lived unconventional lifestyles.<sup>13</sup> Single parenthood, cohabitation outside marriage, young people who lived alone or with friends and homosexuals were treated with suspicion and approbation.<sup>14</sup>

The 1950s have often been portrayed as a grim, utilitarian time where people remained ignorant of sex and were presumably waiting for sexual intercourse to begin in 1963, although this understanding of the 1950s has recently been challenged by scholars such as Adrian Bingham, Frank Mort and Richard Hornsey.<sup>15</sup> For homosexual men, the 1950s have been portrayed as a time of

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<sup>11</sup> Claire Langhamer, 'The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40:2 (2005), pp.341-362, p.345; Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures, England 1918-1951* (Oxford and New York, 2000, first published 1998), pp.300-301. Langhamer argues that 'The view that "a happy home and family life is the bulwark of a nation" might indeed be taken as *the* blueprint for postwar reconstruction in Britain.'

<sup>12</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, pp.300-301.

<sup>13</sup> Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (London and Chicago, 2005), pp.236-237.

<sup>14</sup> Holden, *The Shadow of Marriage*, p.62, 104,125-127; Houlbrook, *Queer London*, pp.236-237.

<sup>15</sup> Adrian Bingham, 'The "K-Bomb": Social Surveys, the Popular Press, and British Sexual Culture in the 1940s and 1950s', *Journal of British Studies*, 50:1 (2011), pp. 156-179; Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: The Making of the Permissive Society* (Newhaven and London, 2010); Richard Hornsey, *Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London* (Minnesota, 2010).

persecution and police brutality. The historiography demonstrates that in the capital, police methods changed to regularly seek out and entrap homosexual men (although the famous witch-hunts of the 1950s are shown to be myth rather than fact).<sup>16</sup> This situation in the capital has been assumed to be the norm for the rest of the country rather than, as this thesis argues, the exception. Patrick Higgins has argued that by the 1950s 'it was a national practice' for policemen and local communities to persecute homosexuals.<sup>17</sup> This chapter will examine two major cases that took place in Yorkshire in the 1950s, the remaining criminal depositions from the region and a series of life stories of gay men living in the north throughout the 1940s and 1950s. This will shed light on how similar men's experiences were to those in the capital and whether, by this period, it really was normal practice in the north to persecute men who had sex with other men. Chapter Seven will further examine the level of prosecutions in the north throughout the period to see if the same increase in prosecutions occurred outside London in the 1950s.

### The Rotherham and Barnsley trials

On the 25th July 1954, the *News of the World* reported a story with the headline 'A Town Rife With Rumour'.<sup>18</sup> The town that it referred to was Rotherham, a steel and mining town in South Yorkshire; the rumour, that the male population of the town had been overrun by homosexuality. In fact, seventeen men were being prosecuted for forty-one 'offences concerning male persons' and, despite

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<sup>16</sup> See Chapter Seven for further discussion.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick Higgins, *Heterosexual Dictatorship: Male Homosexuality in Postwar Britain* (London, 1996), p.166.

<sup>18</sup> *News of the World*, 25 July 1954, p.4.



the unprecedented scope of the charges, the prosecuting solicitor was quick to try and impose some sort of normality on the proceedings.<sup>19</sup> He declared that 'In view of the number of rumours flying about the town I wish to state that these men are the sum total of the persons concerned'.<sup>20</sup> When his following statement is taken into account, it seems that he was rather optimistic in this reading of the situation. In court (and then reported in the national tabloids and local newspapers) Mr Renshaw stated that what was most revealing about this unusual and complicated case was 'the fact that the offences started in a casual manner in places such as public resorts'.<sup>21</sup> The *Rotherham Advertiser* expanded on this by printing more of his opening address. He went on 'You may think that in some cases the extreme casualness in which the offences were committed was a matter for grave disquiet'.<sup>22</sup> One of these 'public resorts' included the almost sacrosanct masculine space of the industrial work place. He went on to pin the blame for the whole case on a twenty-one year-old saw driver called Brian Hobson who 'admitted his infamy without any sense of shame or remorse' and managed to 'corrupt' the other men involved.<sup>23</sup> Hobson's considerable charms can only be imagined when it was revealed that he had sex with six men at the back of a bus on the way to a work outing in London for the 1951 Festival of Britain.<sup>24</sup> Intriguingly, no one else on the bus complained about this to the police when it was presumably obvious what was going on. The case only came to the notice of the police after a complaint was made

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Rotherham Advertiser*, 24 July 1954, p.4.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *News of the World*, 25 July 1954, p.4; *Rotherham Advertiser*, 24 July 1954, p.4.

against Hobson regarding a different offence and it spiralled after Hobson proved to be willing to name every man that he had slept with (including those on the bus). The case throws up many questions that this chapter will attempt to address. It is clear that years of sexual activity between a large and diverse group of men cannot be explained away by Hobson's apparently magnetic sex appeal. The lack of complaint from the other men privy to such sexual activity suggests a level of familiarity with this type of behaviour. Therefore, the main question to explore is whether this kind of casual sexual experimentation was really a one-off or whether it could have been one route of ordinary experience for northern working men at the time.

This question begins to be answered by the prosecution of another apparently similar yet completely unrelated case at the same winter Assize session. This time, fourteen men were charged with what was in this case called 'impropriety'.<sup>25</sup> The case centered around the South Yorkshire mining town of Barnsley, a few miles from Rotherham. Despite the closeness of the two towns, there is no indication that any of the men in the two trials knew each other or shared a common sub-culture linked to their sexuality (in fact, not all the men involved in each trial knew each other). In this case, many of the relationships and sexual acts were casual and took place in public spaces and again in the work place. Like the Rotherham case, the blame for the whole situation was placed on one man, a twenty-four year old glass worker called Peter Goodliffe. And like Hobson in the Rotherham case, he seems to have had almost irresistible appeal - with one man, Wood even going so far as to join the army to

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<sup>25</sup> *News of the World*, 12 December 1954, p.5.

escape his charms.<sup>26</sup> In passing sentence, the judge declared that, 'It is clear beyond doubt that to a considerable extent you have been the focus of this truly disgusting business which has been going on'.<sup>27</sup> The majority of other men charged were portrayed as the seduced to Goodliffe's seducer. A further similarity occurred when a prosecuting solicitor stated 'I hope no one will think that the town of Barnsley has any worse record than any other town'.<sup>28</sup> Like Renshaw's assurance that all the men involved in homosexual acts in Rotherham had been caught, these words were meant to comfort the people of Barnsley after having the town's illicit sexual practices thrust into the limelight. The inadvertent message here, though, was that if Barnsley was no different to any other town, then presumably working men were sleeping with other working men on a regular basis across the country. In effect, he normalised what was classed as abnormal behaviour.

Before looking more closely at the detail of the two cases, it is important to understand how men in the north lived within their working-class communities during the early 1950s. A traditional, working-class way of life was still prevalent in the north in the immediate post-war period.<sup>29</sup> New levels of affluence did not

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<sup>26</sup> *The Barnsley Chronicle*, 14 August, p.6.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 18 December 1954, p.10.

<sup>28</sup> *News of the World*, 12 December 1954, p.5.

<sup>29</sup> For discussion on the social and cultural life of northern working-class communities in the post-war period see: Joanna Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London, 1994); Szreter and Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution*; Helen M Jewell, *The North-South Divide: The Origins of Northern Consciousness in England* (Manchester, 1994); Frank Musgrove, *The North of England: A History From Roman Times to the Present* (Oxford, 1990); Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (Newhaven, Connecticut and London, 2001); Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the National Imagination* (Manchester, 2004); Ian Taylor, Karen Evans and Penny Fraser, *Global Change, Local Feeling and Everyday Life in the North of England: A Tale of Two Cities; A Study in Manchester and Sheffield* (London, 1996); Ferdynand Zweig, *The British Worker* (London, 1952).

generally significantly change these communities until the late 1950s.<sup>30</sup> Men and women tended to socialise separately as they had done for the previous hundred years and many work places such as steel works and mines were all-male environments. The pub was perhaps the most popular place for socialising and women were often still unwelcome in this space - the majority of mixed-sex socialisation took place in dance halls and cinemas. Like earlier periods, there was a proliferation of working mens' clubs, sports clubs, swimming baths and musical societies where men met and spent their time in an entirely homosocial atmosphere. Even by the post-war period, the poor quality of much working-class housing and the dirty nature of many jobs meant that men were forced into public spaces such as swimming pools and baths to get clean. The camaraderie and comfort with masculine society as described in previous chapters was still present. Even today, older men in South Yorkshire call each other 'love' as a casual greeting or endearment - a practice that is found strange by people from out of the area. A tradition of casual affection between men remained ingrained in working-class society and was not seen as indicative of homosexuality.

Masculine society persisted as an escape from the cloying and crowded atmosphere of the slums, boarding houses and cramped terraces where many men lived in often overcrowded conditions. Single men tended to live with their (often large) families or, if they had moved to a different town for work, in boarding houses that offered little in the way of home comforts. Married men, if

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<sup>30</sup> For discussion on the impact of affluence on northern working-class communities see: Bourke, *Working Class Cultures*; Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London, 1957); Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*; Ferdynand Zweig, *The Worker in an Affluent Society: Family Life and Industry* (London, 1962). Northern towns and cities were often behind their midlands and southern counterparts in experiencing the material and social change of affluence.

lucky, would have had a home with just their wife and children, but if they were starting out or had fallen onto hard times they would likely have been living with parents or in-laws. A survey from 1950 suggested that three-fifths of people earning £12 or less per week had never experienced love, either before or after marriage.<sup>31</sup> Of people earning more than £12 per week, half had never experienced love.<sup>32</sup> Kate Fisher and Simon Szreter's recent study *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution* tells similar stories of working people being trapped in unhappy marriages.<sup>33</sup> In the period before affluence had a real impact on working-class life, people were still not always able to marry for love.<sup>34</sup> Sometimes there were financial benefits (including lessening the burden on the family economy) and sometimes marriage was seen as the way to gain independence and a way out of the parental home.<sup>35</sup> Male friendship and masculine society were often treated as an escape from unhappy marriages, poor living conditions or the congested character of the parental home. Because of this, it was not seen as unusual that strong bonds of affection should form between men and that sometimes men's emotional lives were centered around their male friends rather than their wives. At this time, this was not something that challenged a man's masculinity, it was part of how individuals' enacted it.

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<sup>31</sup> Bourke, *Working Class Cultures*, p.27. The survey in question was part of Geoffrey Gorer, *Exploring English Character* (London, 1955).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Szreter and Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution*, pp.196-225.

<sup>34</sup> Claire Langhamer, 'Love, Selfhood and Authenticity in Post-War Britain, *Cultural and Social History*, 9:2 (2012), pp.277-298. Although people wanted and even expected love from their marriages, the material constraints of working-class life often prevented this meaning that sometimes, a more pragmatic approach to marriage had to be taken.

<sup>35</sup> Bourke, *Working Class Cultures*, pp.51-80; Szreter and Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution*, pp.196-225.

Some of the broad themes mentioned here are reflected within the detail of the two cases. In both instances, the men involved were entirely working class and many worked in traditionally masculine industries such as mining, steel, engineering, building and labouring. Through studying the cases it becomes clear that there was a network of public areas such as urinals and open spaces such as parks and scrub land that the men used to have sex in both towns, but that there was no commercial network like that in London or even in Manchester as illuminated by the Altrincham trial. Men could use the 'scene' in the capital to help them form a distinctly homosexual self-identity. By the 1950s, this established selection of venues offered homosexual men a blueprint for constructing their identity. They highlighted behaviours, clothes and even language that could be used by men to identify themselves as homosexual.<sup>36</sup> However in South Yorkshire, the social and sexual lives of both groups of men revolved around work, work trips, pubs and the cinema.

There is evidence that work mates moved fluidly between friendship and sex, sometimes on work premises.<sup>37</sup> This could happen once, or regularly over a period of years and it did not seem to matter whether a man got married or not as to whether they would continue experimenting. In their defence, some of the men said that they had married and put their homosexual phase behind them,

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<sup>36</sup> For discussion of the capital's gay scene in the 1950s see: Paul Baker, *Polari - The Lost Language of Gay Men* (London, 2002); Shaun Cole, *Don We Now Our Gay Apparel: Gay Men's Dress in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2000); Matt Cook, 'Queer Conflicts: Love, Sex and War, 1914-1967' in Matt Cook, Robert Mills, Randolph Trumbach, H.G. Cocks, *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Men Since the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2007); Hugh David, *On Queer Street: A Social History of British Homosexuality 1895-1995* (London, 1997); Hall Carpenter Archives Gay Men's Oral History Group, *Walking After Midnight: Gay Men's Life Stories* (London, 1989); Houlbrook, *Queer London*; Matt Houlbrook and Chris Waters, 'The Heart in Exile: Detachment and Desire in 1950s London', *History Workshop Journal*, 62 (2006); Jivani, *It's Not Unusual*; Mark W. Turner, *Backward Glances: Cruising the Queer Streets of New York and London* (London, 2003); Weeks and Porter (eds), *Between the Acts*.

<sup>37</sup> *Barnsley Chronicle*, 14 August, 1954, p.6; 18 December 1954, p.10; *News of the World*, 25 July 1954, p.4; *Rotherham Advertiser*, 24 July 1954, p.4, 20 November 1954, p.13.

some said that they had married and were unable or unwilling to give up their sexual relationships with men, and some were confirmed bachelors.<sup>38</sup> In looking at this kind of information, scholars in the past have been more concerned with attempting to categorise men and deciding which men could even be studied in a history of homosexuality. For example, Jeffrey Weeks spent much of his earlier career writing on homosexual identity and who could be classed as homosexual. Scholars such as Houlbrook, Brady and Cocks have broken down these barriers by highlighting the damage that this narrow view does to a well rounded and realistic history of both sexuality and human experience.<sup>39</sup> What this type of information actually highlights is that working class masculinity and sexuality could be surprisingly fluid and could include relationships with other men without affecting their primary identity as a working man.

Further evidence to support this idea of fluidity is provided both by the men involved in the cases and the authorities prosecuting and defending them. When reading the court reports in the press, it becomes clear that there was an assumption amongst everyone involved that *all* men were potentially 'corruptible'. Sex between men was not just the preserve of homosexuals even if it was the self-proclaimed (and shameless) homosexuals who were blamed for the scale of events. In the Rotherham case, Hobson was a 'self-confessed pervert' and had been charged and put on probation for gross indecency the year before.<sup>40</sup> A man named Smith said in his statement, 'I know this is a terrible

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<sup>38</sup> *Barnsley Chronicle*, 18 December 1954, p.10; *Rotherham Advertiser*, 20 November 1954, p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> Sean Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861-1913* (London, 2009); H.G. Cocks, *Nameless Offences: Homosexual Desire in the 19th Century* (London, 2003); Houlbrook, *Queer London*.

<sup>40</sup> *Rotherham Advertiser*, 24 July 1954, p.4.

thing but I was born this way'.<sup>41</sup> In the Barnsley case, Goodliffe had admitted to having relationships with men since he was sixteen and 'his only fear and his only distaste had been the fear of being found out'.<sup>42</sup> It appears that the rest of the men involved seem to have indulged casually and many were married.

There were a few occasions of married men being charged for sleeping with other married men on a regular basis (these interactions took place at the work place - a space entirely divorced from home and family life) and the only mentions of monetary exchange come from the men who would be classified as straight or 'trade' paying homosexuals like Hobson and Goodliffe for sex. These men were seen as sexually desirable to other men not as freaks or objects of ridicule. This seems to be the opposite model of commercial sex described in *Queer London* where homosexual men payed 'trade' in gifts or money for sexual favours. One of Goodliffe's partners, a man called Haxby, told police that one of the reasons that he began having sex with other men 'might have been that my wife's attitude to sex was rather cold'.<sup>43</sup> This was an astonishing admission to make to the police and Haxby seems to have found it entirely logical that his wife's lack of interest in sex should lead to him seeking release with men and not other women.

Two further recurring explanations found in both cases revolved around alcohol and the army. The excuse of being drunk is one that was common in trials for homosexual offences. If it was combined with a 'normal', masculine identity then it usually resulted in more lenient treatment. The implication here is that it was

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Barnsley Chronicle*, 14 August, 1954, p.6.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*



not uncommon that young men under the influence of alcohol were likely to do something sexually dubious and in the right circumstances this could be overlooked (as shall be seen when sentencing is discussed). It is more unusual that experience in the army should be used so frequently as justification. Because of the ages of the men involved in the cases (between eighteen and fifty-two) the majority would have seen service in the armed forces - either during the war or as National Service. This experience seems to have been pivotal to some of the men's sexual selves, particularly those who were prisoners of war or served overseas. A man named Beverly stated 'It used to be a common thing in Burma. I didn't think it was very serious'.<sup>44</sup> Moffatt, who was shot down over Denmark and spent the rest of his war in a German POW camp, told the police that 'that kind of practice was rife throughout the camp'.<sup>45</sup> Cade started having sex with other men while he was posted to Syria with the Royal Engineers and told police officers that 'Since I left the army I've tried to conquer this habit, but on some occasions it has happened between myself and other men in Barnsley'.<sup>46</sup> A fourth man, Casewell told the police that 'I wish I had never started. This is hard to give up. It just grew on me but I will stop it now. It only started since I came out of the army'.<sup>47</sup> These could all have been genuine explanations for why these men felt that they wanted to have sex with other men, alternatively they could have all been opportunities to remind the police and the court of their respectability and manliness. Service in the armed forces and prowess at work were indications of a man's worth and this was not always overshadowed by his unusual sexual practices.

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Rotherham Advertiser*, 24 July 1954, p.4.

<sup>46</sup> *The Barnsley Chronicle*, 14t August, p.6.

<sup>47</sup> *Rotherham Advertiser*, 20 November 1954, p.13.

Much information can also be gained about how the men involved viewed their sexual activities through examining both cases. It must be remembered that what the men said in court (and then what was reported in the press) was being said for a purpose and an audience but that does not mean that it is not useful when trying to get at real feelings and experiences. It has already been noted that Hobson and Goodliffe were viewed as shameless in their preferences and it was this lack of shame that led to the Barnsley trial occurring in the first place. Goodliffe had been out drinking on the 4 July 1954 and had bumped into an acquaintance named John Wilson in the bus station on his way home.<sup>48</sup> They were obviously in no hurry for the evening to end as they ended up having sex behind the Market Inn. Wilson then suggested going for a 'walk' in some woods behind the local sanatorium but after having sex again he threatened Goodliffe with a penknife and attempted to rob him. During the robbery, Wilson punched kicked and stabbed Goodliffe, cut his face with the knife and took his watch, money and, bizarrely, his trousers. Goodliffe managed to fight him off and escape to a nearby house where the residents helped him.<sup>49</sup> He went to hospital for his injuries but also went straight to the police. He was unsurprisingly indignant after this post-coital attack and left out no details in telling the authorities *everything* that had happened to him. The police must have been astonished at a man marching into the station and casually admitting to a crime and this is clear evidence that Goodliffe either didn't know that he had committed a crime or found it so insignificant that the police would not care. A similar indignation was displayed by Hobson when he complained to police

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<sup>48</sup> *The Barnsley Chronicle*, 31 July 1954, p.6.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

that he had not received any money from a man who agreed to pay him for sex.<sup>50</sup>

From this moment, it became clear that Goodliffe would end up being charged for committing homosexual offences (as would the numerous partners that he was willing to implicate) but the police put this to one side and quickly pursued and charged Wilson with two counts of gross indecency and two of wounding and robbery with violence. The latter was classed as being 'among the gravest crimes in the whole calendar of crime'.<sup>51</sup> Goodliffe was told that he did not have to answer some of the questions put to him in court to avoid incriminating himself but he did not take this opportunity to remain silent and explained that although the sex acts that took place were consensual, what followed was certainly not. If the jury were shocked by this, they were told that 'whatever might be felt about his character he was entitled to be protected from the kind of violence and attack and robbery which he alleged had been committed on him by Wilson'.<sup>52</sup> They must have agreed as Wilson was convicted and given a lengthy prison sentence. This was a fairly unusual result. Goodliffe was extremely open in court about what had happened with Wilson and in this case the law protected him. There were many instances of men being found not guilty or being given short sentences for assaulting, robbing or even murdering homosexual men with a defence based around the fact that because of his sexuality, the victim had it coming. An example of this is a case that was tried at Leeds Assizes for an offence committed in 1950, again in Rotherham. John

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<sup>50</sup> *The Sheffield Star*, 21 July 1954, p.3.

<sup>51</sup> *The Barnsley Chronicle*, 31 July 1954, p.6.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

Cooney a 25 year old miner was charged with murder for killing Kenneth Crowe, a 37 year old schoolmaster. Crowe was married with children but went out dressed in his wife's clothes when his family was away. Cooney picked up Crowe after a night in the pub and discovered he was a man when he went to kiss and cuddle him. His reaction was to punch Crowe and knock him to the floor and in his rage, he kept on beating him until he was unconscious. Cooney maintained that Crowe had looked and sounded 'just like a woman' and that he had been totally taken in. The beating was intended to teach him a lesson so he would not try and trick a man again. The next day, when he learned that Crowe was dead, he turned himself in to the police. His defence was based around the argument that Crowe's provocation was enough to make the charge manslaughter at the most, the court disagreed and he was tried for murder. An all male jury found him not guilty of murder but guilty of manslaughter and he was imprisoned for five years.<sup>53</sup> This was not the case here.

Goodliffe's comfort with his preferences was also shown by his lengthy and detailed statement to the police. It is not clear why he chose to do this: whether he was offered a plea bargain, whether he didn't understand that implicating these men would lead to their arrests, or whether he was just proud of his conquests. He told in graphic detail what he had done with twelve men and a number of others whose names he could not remember. This was 'the most shocking document that many of the policemen had seen and most of it could not be read out in court.'<sup>54</sup> In fact, it was stated that the statements of Goodliffe

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<sup>53</sup> *The News of the World*, 26 November 1950, p.7.

<sup>54</sup> *The Barnsley Chronicle*, 14 August, p.6.

and the other men involved were 'couched in offensively filthy terms'.<sup>55</sup> It is easy to see an element of defiance in the way that the men described their sex lives. One wonders what made all the men's statements so offensive that they could not be read in court when compared with the hundreds of other trials where this was not the case? Was it an obvious enjoyment of what had happened? All of the twelve men that Goodliffe named were interviewed by the police. A man named Jones made a voluntary statement mentioning 'acts of indecency' with numerous men and sounded utterly surprised that 'It sounds dirty when you're speaking about it afterward.'<sup>56</sup> The implication here was that taking part in the acts was ordinary behaviour and it was only in talking about it that they became 'dirty'. When Walker (who was a married man and wanted to remain as such) was questioned about the alleged indecency that had taken place with Goodliffe, he did not deny it but told police 'That was just a bit of acting the fool'.<sup>57</sup> Here again was the attitude that sex between men was unimportant, that it was normal and nothing to worry about. It is telling that the men were happy to be so candid (albeit in different ways) when speaking to the police about potentially serious charges.

The official line of disgust pursued by the judges and prosecution in both cases was not necessarily reflected by the police and those who knew the men on trial. Renshaw the prosecuting solicitor told the court that Hobson had 'behaved throughout like a depraved animal' but one of the inspectors involved in the case confirmed Hobson's character by stating that he 'came from a very good

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p.10.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, p.6.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*.

home'.<sup>58</sup> He was described as a good worker and time keeper and could be seen in the town distributing religious leaflets'.<sup>59</sup> Both Renshaw and the inspector should have been invested in Hobson's punishment but it is as if they were speaking about two different men. This was repeated throughout both cases, with only one man being described as a bad worker. All the others were described by the police as variations of good workers, reliable men and men from good, respectable working-class homes. These descriptions reflect the ideas of what gave a man good character as discussed in Chapter Four. In some cases, employers provided a character reference and in some family members did the same. This was not the reaction that one would expect from a police and public that were supposed to be horrified by homosexual behaviour and it could reflect that like in the Altrincham trial, South Yorkshire's police force were inexperienced at prosecuting trials such as these. It also suggests that just as most of the men involved did not link their sexual preferences to their masculine identity, neither did the police or the wider public. A sexual indiscretion was not enough to drastically alter a man's perceived respectability or his privileged position as a reliable worker.

Another element of a man's life that could survive his sexual indiscretions was marriage.<sup>60</sup> It has already been discussed in Chapter Two that there could be an acceptance of same-sex relationships within late-Victorian working-class marriages in the north and this attitude seems to have been sometimes present in the 1950s. In a slightly different context - that of working-class men in the

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<sup>58</sup> *Rotherham Advertiser*, 24 July 1954, p.4.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 20 November 1954, p.13.

<sup>60</sup> This was also echoed in the Altrincham trial as discussed in Chapter Four.

Merchant Navy - Paul Baker and Jo Stanley have researched how wives dealt with their husbands having homosexual encounters while at sea.<sup>61</sup> They found that:

some wives could tolerate this kind of unfaithfulness. It didn't really "count". For some wives, a gay male rival for the attentions of their husbands was much less of a threat than a female competitor. All the stories we have heard report that wives *were* prepared to be indulgent or forgiving.<sup>62</sup>

When looking at women's circumstances within working-class marriages during the 1940s and the early 1950s, it seems plausible that due to high rates of unhappiness, sexual indifference or the desire to avoid pregnancy, women would turn a blind eye to their husbands seeking sexual satisfaction elsewhere.<sup>63</sup> If this was taken with a man there could be no chance of pregnancy and little chance of being deserted. Perhaps sex with other men did little to challenge acceptable notions of fidelity within marriage. In the Rotherham case, even the inimitable Hobson had a fiancée. What was perhaps more startling was that the open-minded Mavis still loved him and was willing to wait for him while he was in prison should he still want her.<sup>64</sup> Cook was 'happily married' and his wife was willing to go to court and testify should it have been necessary.<sup>65</sup> Moffatt had been previously imprisoned for gross indecency and

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<sup>61</sup> Paul Baker and Jo Stanley, *Hello Sailor! The Hidden History of Gay Life at Sea* (London, 2003), pp. 90-115.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, p.96.

<sup>63</sup> For discussion of the high levels of unhappiness in working-class marriages see: Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain*; Kate Fisher, *Birth Control, Sex, and Marriage in Britain 1918-1960* (Oxford, 2008), Szreter and Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution*. These three studies also describe the prevalence of women who were happily married but who shied away from sex due to ignorance, fear, a sexually unskilled husband and the fear of pregnancy.

<sup>64</sup> *The Rotherham Advertiser*, 20 November 1954, p.13.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*.

his girlfriend at the time had married him when he came out of prison.<sup>66</sup> She stood by him again during this trial for the same offence. In fact, for all those that were stated as married or involved with a woman (many of whom were found guilty), those women were presented as standing by their partner. This suggests a familiarity with same-sex relations amongst working-class communities that placed them within the boundaries of ordinary life.

Unsurprisingly, Hobson and Goodliffe received the longest prison sentences: both were given five years.<sup>67</sup> Hobson was denounced as the 'focus and centre of this kind of thing and spread corruption far and wide'.<sup>68</sup> Goodliffe was called a 'great danger for others who may be tempted to go astray' and sentenced severely for 'the protection of others'.<sup>69</sup> They had proclaimed themselves as different, had accepted homosexual identities and as such the anxiety that any man could fall victim to their charms was foremost. However, it must be taken into consideration that Hobson had been convicted of committing gross indecency eighteen months previously at Leeds Assizes and had been put on probation for two years with these offences falling within that two-year period.<sup>70</sup> The sentencing of the other twenty-nine men involved in the two cases varied - seven were imprisoned, fourteen were fined, six were conditionally discharged and two were found not guilty.<sup>71</sup> All pleaded guilty except the two found not

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> ASSI 44/330, The National Archives. This record refers to a box of indictment files pertaining to the autumn 1954 session of the North Eastern Assize Circuit held at Leeds. This is all that remains of the legal documents relating to the two cases. All evidence, depositions, statements etc. have been lost or destroyed.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Barnsley Chronicle*, 18 December 1954, p.6.

<sup>70</sup> *The Rotherham Advertiser*, 24 July 1954, p.4.

<sup>71</sup> ASSI 44/330.



guilty (in itself this is interesting as the outcome of the trials may have been very different if more men had challenged the statements given by other men or refused to give their own statement).<sup>72</sup> In explaining their leniency towards the twenty men who had admitted to having sex with other men but were just fined or discharged, the judges spoke of good character, forgiving wives and satisfied bosses. In the case of the six men who had been involved with Hobson at the back of the infamous coach in 1951, all were conditionally discharged. They were young men who had had a drink and done something regrettable but perhaps understandable. They were told, 'You all realise this is a criminal offence and it is right that you should be brought here to see what is involved. But you are young men and you can go away and forget about this.'<sup>73</sup>

These two cases present a snapshot of the sexual life of working men in two northern, industrial towns in the uncertain years between the end of the Second World War and the beginning of an affluent working-class society. In their famous studies of working-class life and the erosion of working-class culture from the late 1950s onwards, Richard Hoggart and Ferdynand Zweig documented how the masculine culture described in this chapter developed into something more familiar to us today.<sup>74</sup> Higher wages, better housing and the onset of a consumer society that could be participated in by the masses helped to push the focus of men's lives away from the pub, mates and work and towards the home, family and children. The homosocial, working-class culture that allowed the type of fluid attitude towards sex and friendship highlighted by

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *News of the World*, 21 November 1951, p.10.

<sup>74</sup> Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*; Zweig, *The Worker in an Affluent Society*.

the two cases described did not survive these societal changes and it certainly is not present today. What the study of this episode confirms is that the history of sexuality needs to be reframed and sexual categories need to be re-examined. In the north of England the ties between sexual preference, identity, class and masculinity were complex and sometimes contradictory but these examples make clear that same-sex desire must be studied as grounded in the social context.

### Depositions

Before the post-war period, the only depositions that have survived were generally for murder cases. It is not until the late 1940s that some depositions relating to homosexual offences survived. Many of those that remain are still closed to viewing but enough are available for viewing to allow further insight into the kind of men that were arrested and the circumstances surrounding those arrests.<sup>75</sup>

### George Pescod<sup>76</sup>

The case of George Pescod is a typical one but it is the only example amongst the remaining depositions of an anonymous encounter . On a Monday afternoon in June 1954, Pescod called into the toilets in Newcastle railway station. As he lived in Jarrow, he could have left work early and called in on his

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<sup>75</sup> I have submitted three separate Freedom of Information Act requests to have these documents opened but have been turned down on both occasions. Until the men involved and their immediate families have died, access will not be granted. The references for the requests are as follows: F0024987 29 April 2010, F0028114 & F0028115 19 April 2011 and F0031561 13 June 2012.

<sup>76</sup> ASSI 45/206 North-Eastern Circuit Depositions, The National Archives.

way or he could have called in on his lunch break from his work as an architect. He went into the first compartment and was probably delighted to find a man named Copeland in the adjoining cubicle. Copeland put his penis through a hole in the wall and Pescod masturbated him. Unfortunately, it was at this point that John Waugh, a lavatory assistant who had been cleaning the floor, saw what was happening through a space between the door and door frame in the compartments. Waugh did not stop the men straight away, but when a policeman (Thomas Martin) came into the toilet a couple of minutes later, he informed him. Martin looked for himself then, asked Waugh to look again to really confirm what was happening, kicked on the door, demanded they come out and took them into the lavatory office. He cautioned them both but let Copeland go while ensuring that Pescod was arrested. This seems to be an example of a typical encounter of anonymous sex but there are two interesting points to take from this case. Pescod, the middle-class architect was prosecuted while Copeland, the working man was set free with a caution. Although his plea was not guilty, when Martin told Pescod that he would be prosecuted he replied 'Just a silly prank; I have two 18 years old sons'.<sup>77</sup> He was clearly living something of a double life of the sort familiar to many middle-class homosexuals. The second point to note is the care which Martin seemed to take in ensuring that what he thought that he'd seen was actually occurring - this does not fit with the image of the policeman being happy to arrest a man on nothing more than a suspicion. However, care must be taken as we only have Martin's account and it is likely that he would have wanted to emphasise the care he took.

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

Richard Hartley<sup>78</sup>

Hartley's case was perhaps a more unusual one. He called at a police station in central Liverpool in September 1950 to report that he had been assaulted at work. Out of no-where during the course of the interview with a policeman (Jack Howard), Hartley confessed to committing homosexual acts. In his statement, Howard sounded as surprised as the reader may be at the turn of events. Hartley stated 'Yes, I have done something I am ashamed of. I gave a man £2 the other week for indecency'.<sup>79</sup> After being cautioned by Howard, he uttered the immortal line 'I can't help it. Every time I see a cock I go funny.'<sup>80</sup> This strange mixture of shame and ownership of his sexuality was repeated in Hartley's full statement. It began with another admission of shame, he stated 'I am sorry I have done something wrong and I want to tell you about it and get it off my chest.' However, what followed did not seem to be the words of a man plagued by guilt. He told how he had met a man whom he had not seen before on a Friday night three weeks previously. They chatted then went for a drink, this was followed by a trip to a nearby urinal. What could be described as foreplay followed and must have proved satisfactory as they then went back to the building where Hartley was a watchman where he performed oral sex on his partner. Again, this must have proved satisfactory as they met again on a following Friday night, went back to Hartley's place but this time had sex. He seemed unashamed of this when he told Howard 'It was a new sensation and I enjoyed feeling his cock inside me' however this was followed by a repetition of

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<sup>78</sup> ASSI 52/682 Northern Circuit Depositions, The National Archives.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

his earlier sentiment 'I am sorry for what I've done but I cannot help myself.

Almost every time I see a cock I'm lost'.<sup>81</sup>

Hartley seemed both to enjoy and feel ashamed of his preferences and perhaps this contradiction came from the fact that he had been paying for sex for the past two years. Hartley was sixty-one, single and living in lodgings. He had had a respectable past that included a decent education, partnership in business with his father and service in the Army for the duration of the Great War. He had lived with his mother until she died in 1945 and had various jobs such as handyman and night watchman since. In 1938, he had been sentenced to twelve months in prison with hard labour for two cases of gross indecency. It is safe to assume that Hartley was homosexual as we would understand it today, that he understood this himself and that he had been active for many years. As one of his jobs, he had been an attendant in a mental hospital and it is possible that while there he picked up some ideas about his own sexuality. It is also possible that in his advancing years, Hartley had had to resort to paying for what he once indulged in for free and that this did not sit well with him:

I generally pay cash for what they do to me. The most men I have had up in Moorfield is three..... I generally paid the fellow half a crown but I paid the man that has got into me £2 because he had had trouble with his wife. I have been doing this for about 2 years and generally I paid 2/6d. I have never had any boys.<sup>82</sup>

It seems that his guilt and shame were more firmly attached to the idea of paying for sex than the actual act itself.

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

This case subverts the trope of the middle-class man paying trade for sex. Richard Hartley was trade and yet he was paying other working-class men a fairly substantial amount for sex. The transactions between them were clearly not anonymous or unfeeling as he mentioned lots of talking in his statement and he knew about the man's marital troubles. He specifically stated that he had only been paying men for two years and one presumes that before then, his encounters did not involve cash. In confessing to committing not only gross indecency but buggery to Howard, Hartley sealed his own fate - with a previous conviction he would certainly have been facing a prison term (in fact he was given three and a half years in prison at that year's Liverpool assizes).<sup>83</sup> Throughout his confession, he did not name any of his partners and he was convicted of committing these acts with a 'man unknown'. We will never know why Hartley felt the need to confess to Howard, but his apparent confusion and the contradiction of his feeling shame but his apparent delight in the sexual acts that he committed nicely illustrates the conflicting attitudes towards sex with other men that were beginning to creep into 1950s, northern society.<sup>84</sup>

#### Albert Courteney and Roy Smith <sup>85</sup>

Albert and Roy's story is another of carelessness and almost accidental police involvement. It proves interesting in the fact that one of the witnesses involved was a policewoman who had been employed by Manchester police force to do the type of job described in Chapter Four. In looking for signs of heterosexual

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<sup>83</sup> ASSI 51/248 Northern Circuit Depositions, Liverpool Assizes, The National Archives.

<sup>84</sup> See analysis of the Rotherham and Barnsley trials earlier in the Chapter.

<sup>85</sup> ASSI 52/829 Northern Circuit Depositions Autumn 1950, Manchester Assizes, The National Archives.

indecent and prostitution, she had stumbled upon the two men in a compromising position. At 12.50 am on the 23 April 1955 P.C. Topham had been walking her beat in Didsbury. She saw a car parked on a grass verge with no lights on and nobody inside. Whilst checking the car, she heard noises coming from a nearby field and went through a gap in the hedge for a closer look. She saw what she thought was a couple having sex and went to investigate. On shining her torch on the couple she quite literally caught Courteney and Smith with their trousers down and there was no mistaking what they had been doing. She cautioned them both to which Smith replied rather hopefully 'Can't we do something about it?' - the answer to this was clearly a negative one as Topham then escorted them both to Didsbury police station.<sup>86</sup> Perhaps the most surprising thing about this situation was that the two men actually waited around to be cautioned and then followed Topham to the police station. Presumably they could have easily run away or overpowered her to escape.

Courteney and Smith paid a high price for this docile acceptance of the law. They confessed to committing buggery (this was confirmed further by Topham's statement and a police surgeon's report) and were both given eighteen months in prison.<sup>87</sup> They were both young men: Smith was a twenty-two year-old car salesman and Courteney was a twenty-six year-old army private who lived in lodgings which goes some way to explaining their reckless behaviour in search of someone to have sex with (and somewhere to do it). But perhaps that is where the similarities between them ended as their statements bear out. Wilfred Barker was a police sergeant who was manning the station when the

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> ASSI 51/262 Northern Circuit Indictment Files Summer 1955, The National Archives.

two men were brought in, because of this he became involved in the case. In his witness statement he wrote that Smith said, 'Oh why did I do such a stupid thing?' and repeated similar things throughout his time at the station.<sup>88</sup> It is not clear whether he meant the act itself or doing it somewhere where they were caught so easily. He also painted Courteney as the instigator and gave the impression of someone who was ashamed of what he had done and was thoroughly shocked at 'finding himself in police custody'.<sup>89</sup> This is unsurprising when it was revealed in a later document that Smith had been of good character, was a good worker and had not been in trouble before. If he was respectably working-class, Courteney was further on the margins. He had had a previous spell in the army with very good conduct but had been convicted twice for stealing and sacked for poor attendance in his time between enlistments. There is no record of Courteney being ashamed or unsure of himself when confronted by the police.<sup>90</sup>

Smith's statement makes unconvincing reading. As he was driving home from work he saw a man who attracted his attention and seemed to want a lift. He pulled up and was asked if he could give the man (Courteney) a lift to Didsbury. Smith wrote, 'Although this was out of my way I agreed'.<sup>91</sup> After 'little conversation' and an arrival at Didsbury, Courteney asked Smith to turn down a lane and asked him if he was 'a puff'.<sup>92</sup> One would have thought that had Smith

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<sup>88</sup> ASSI 52/829 Northern Circuit Depositions Autumn 1950, Manchester Assizes, The National Archives.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*



not been interested, alarm bells would have rung here but instead he replied 'Of course I am not' but then proceeded to let Smith masturbate him. What is notable here is the use of the word 'puff'. Both men clearly knew the meaning of the term. It is widely debated in the historiography as to what (if any) words working-class men used to describe men who had sex with other men: homosexual, gay, queer. Between these two men, this terminology was discarded and instead what seems to be a peculiarly northern term was used (one which was still used regularly - but without malice - during my childhood in the north). What followed was more of the same:

He suggested that we should go into the adjoining field and I expressed my wish not to do so. Upon further insistence, I consented and we both got out of the car. We went into the field and the man sat down on the grass but I refused to with the evading excuse that it was wet. I said I will go for my coat with the intention of starting my car and going and leaving him, but he followed me to the car and I was unable to do so. I got my coat and we both returned to the field. I spread the coat on the grass where I was told to lay down on it. I did so and he got down beside me. Before we lay down he pulled my trousers down also his own. We both had an inrecton [sic] and he tried to insert his person in my anus.....<sup>93</sup>

He probably undermined his own case when he admitted to having an 'inrection' and this was confirmed by Courteney's statement.

Courteney's statement was much shorter and more matter of fact. He stated that Smith was the one to offer him a lift and that it was him that suggested 'a run out into the country. He said he knew a place and I agreed to go.'<sup>94</sup> When they arrived at the lane in question, he said that Smith got out and went into the field and on looking for him, he found him 'lying on the grass... with his trousers

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

pulled down to his knees'.<sup>95</sup> When Courteney approached, Smith allegedly said 'come on' to encourage him closer but then told him to wait while he got his mac as the grass was wet.<sup>96</sup> Both men went to the car and came back with the coat. What followed was a less coy version of what Smith had described:

We went back into the field and he spread his mac on the grass and dropped his trousers saying "Well carry on". I had had some drink early on in the evening and before I realized what I was doing I dropped my trousers and he turned his back towards me and knelt down. I had got behind him and had just inserted my penis in his rectum when....<sup>97</sup>

Clearly both men had tried to shift the blame to paint themselves in a better light. Both claimed that the other had instigated the encounter and while Smith claimed that he had tried to fend off Courteney at every turn, Courteney claimed that Smith quite literally presented himself for sex (and who was he to say no when he had been drinking?). In both statements no names were used- it is quite possible that they did not know each other's names. They were literal strangers and strangers because they had no link to each other through a sense of kinship or identity - their shared preference did not make them inclined to protect each other. It seems clear that both men were experienced in this kind of pick-up despite Smith's assurance that 'This is the first time that anything of this nature has happened to me and every action which has occurred was on his instigation'.<sup>98</sup> Perhaps the police personnel taking the statements helped Smith with what to say in an attempt to salvage his apparent respectability.

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

## James Moorhouse and Roy Peatman<sup>99</sup>

Roy and James's case is an example of two workmates who developed a relationship that is all the more melancholy as they seemed to have been emotionally as well as physically involved. Both of them worked at a cigarette manufacturer, the twenty-one year-old Peatman as a machine operator and the thirty-eight year-old Moorhouse as tobacco blender. Both were single and both had been in the army, Peatman for National Service and Moorhouse for the full duration of the war. Their case differs in many ways from the previous: they tried to evade arrest, they both gave the same statement, they used each other's names in their statements and they did not try to shift the blame of their encounter. The only similarity was that their carelessness led to their downfall. P.C. Peter Sidebotham confirmed that at 10.35pm on 17 August 1957, he had seen the two men go into a cul-de-sac. He followed them with a torch and saw Moorhouse performing oral sex on Peatman. As he cautioned them, they tried to run away but Sidebotham somehow restrained them until Inspector John Holmes saw the struggle that was occurring, went to investigate and helped get them both to Whitworth Street Police station where they both gave voluntary statements. It has to be acknowledged that it would have been extremely hard for one policeman to restrain two men, perhaps they were unwilling to abandon each other to punishment.

How did the two men end up in that cul-de-sac? Both men confirmed that they had known each other for a few months but had been 'knocking about together

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<sup>99</sup> ASSI 52/902 Northern Circuit Depositions Autumn 1957, Manchester Assizes, The National Archives.

for a few weeks'.<sup>100</sup> The day in question sounds like what would now be classed as a date. They had been shopping in Manchester, for tea at the Blackbird Cafe in Piccadilly, for a walk and then for drinks in three pubs.<sup>101</sup> Their last pub was the Mechanics and it was in a passage near to there on the way to the bus station that they decided to stop and have sex. Presumably they had no privacy at home to do so. Moorhouse confirmed what happened next:

I took my penis out and Roy played with it and then I knelt down and put Roy's penis in my mouth, we had only been a few minutes when the policeman came and caught us. I would like to say that I haven't interfered with Roy in any other way and I am sorry it has happened.<sup>102</sup>

Peatman's story was told in the same matter of fact way:

We came out of the Mechanics's Arms into a side street where Moorhouse began to play with my penis. I also played with his penis. Moorhouse then got down and put my penis in his mouth. We had not been long when the policeman saw us I am very sorry this has happened and feel very ashamed of myself.<sup>103</sup>

Unlike the previous case, both men accepted each other's statement and did not try to determine an instigator for the situation indicating a desire to minimise the damage that could be done to them both. Their close friendship was revealed by the way that they had been spending their day off but this was not linked by them to the act that they performed in the alley. Neither man claimed to be homosexual or offered any real excuses or reasons for what had happened - they both narrated the events of the evening as if the sex act was

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Here 'tea' refers to the word with it's northern meaning - the meal that would otherwise be known as dinner.

<sup>102</sup> ASSI 52/902.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

an inevitable and ordinary conclusion to their meeting (which it perhaps would have been if the two men were indeed having a relationship). The apologies at the end of their statements seem perfunctory and there is no real sense of shame that comes from their words.

### Personal experience

The historian of the 1950s has available a small but enlightening set of interviews with northern, working-class men reflecting on their sexuality and experiences.<sup>104</sup> These have been collected over the past two decades by historians and social activists and have often been used as a part of a narrative of escape and freedom that these men constructed when they moved from the provinces to London. When these interviews are studied more closely, it becomes apparent that they can tell us much more about northern attitudes towards homosexuality than has been previously acknowledged. The assumption has always been that men could only be themselves in the established and more accepting metropolitan subculture. In the context of many of these life stories, the north has been portrayed as a prison that could be escaped when men came of age and left to pursue their careers or dreams of friends and romance. For these men, this was perhaps the case. Evidence proves that there was a varied and potentially fulfilling life available to men who were attracted to other men in the north but for those who identified with a

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<sup>104</sup> Baker and Stanley, *Hello Sailor!*; Bob Cant & Susan Hemmings (eds), *Radical Records: Thirty Years of Lesbian and Gay History* (London, 1988); Hall Carpenter Archives, *Walking After Midnight*; Steve Humphries and Pamela Gordon, *A Man's World: From Boyhood to Manhood 1900-1960* (London, 1996); Steve Humphries and Pamela Gordon, *Forbidden Britain: Our Secret Past 1900-1960* (London, 1994); Steve Humphries and Pamela Gordon, *A Secret World of Sex* (London, 1998); Jivani, *It's Not Unusual*; National Lesbian and Gay Survey, *Proust, Cole Porter, Michelangelo, Marc Almond and me: Writings by Gay Men on Their Lives and Lifestyles* (London, 1993); *Tales From Out in the City: An Anthology of Memories* (Manchester, 2009); Weeks and Porter (eds), *Between the Acts*.

homosexual identity and wanted to be more open about it, London was certainly the most advantageous place to go. The culture of being a man who desired other men in the north was one of discretion and contrasted with the type of homosexuality represented by the 'Dilly boys' and 'Queans' of the West and East End.

### Fred Dyson

Fred's story provides further evidence alongside the Rotherham and Barnsley trials for the casual acceptance of homosexuality amongst the northern working-class communities centered around traditional industry. Fred was born into a working-class family in a Barnsley mining town in 1936. He started work down the local pit at aged fifteen in 1951 and remained there for the rest of his working life. He was a teddy boy in the fifties and a popular one at that. The boys used to prefer to dance be-bop with him as he was a better dancer than the girls (it seems that the traditions of men dancing with other men that had been common in Carpenter's time had remained strong well into the twentieth century).<sup>105</sup> During the early 1960s, Fred was convicted of cottaging and the story made the local paper with the potentially disastrous headline of 'Miner Admits to Being a Homosexual All His Life'.<sup>106</sup> The first time that Fred became aware of his newfound notoriety was when he saw the paper in his mine's canteen and the waitress told him about the story. Naturally, he believed that this would be the end of his job and the end of his friendships with his workmates. What actually happened seems almost astonishing when seen in

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<sup>105</sup> Jivani, *It's Not Unusual*, p.210.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, p.121.

the context of the traditional view of the social conservatism of many working-class men. He went to see his union secretary Arthur (a man who held immense respect and power in working-class communities at this time, particularly in the mining industry) to discuss what, if anything could be done to save his job and was surprised by his response. Arthur told him 'You've not done nowt wrong..... I've played with a bloke many a time. Not done Nowt wrong.... Come on now you're going in club with me'.<sup>107</sup> Here is an echo of the casual way in which men found themselves having sex with other men. Fred defined himself as homosexual but one presumes that Arthur did not, yet he was happy to admit to his sexual encounters without a trace of shame. If Fred was worried about his reception in the club then his worries were unfounded. When he entered the tap room with Arthur, all his mates from the pit were there, one of them went over with a pint and told him 'Fred, if thou can admit to being a poof all thou life, thou are a better man than us. Have a pint.'<sup>108</sup> Again, here a similar level of tolerance was displayed by these miners to the steelworkers who remained unfazed by Brian Hobson et al's activities on their trip to London.

Fred's final hurdle came in talking to his manager about what happened and finding out whether he had lost his job. His manager told him that he was 'employed for his expertise and not for what he did in his spare time'.<sup>109</sup> The primacy of work and being seen as a good worker had been reinforced.

Although Fred had been convicted and his name and workplace had been reported in the press, his manager still believed that what people did in their

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

personal life was their business and their prerogative. This kind of attitude explains why so many employers were willing to stand up in court (as demonstrated in the cases discussed throughout the study) to defend their employees and the quality of their work and character. Respectability and standing in the community were not irrevocably altered by involvement in this type of sexual scandal. Due to his appearance in the paper, Fred became a sort of local celebrity for a while. His mates ribbed him about his proclivities and he received plenty of rude comments at the baths however, he recalled it as being fairly good natured. This was the kind of banter that working men regularly engaged in but about his sexual preferences rather than another characteristic such as his looks or his success with women. This is reminiscent of the banter described when Houlbrook discusses the working-class East End in *Queer London*.<sup>110</sup> He gave an example of a typical exchange in the baths:

Fred, come up here see what we've got for you mate  
Why, what you got? .... Twelve inches, no it's not big enough. Owt over twelve I'm interested but under twelve, I'm not bothered.<sup>111</sup>

There was an almost flirtatious tone to this banter and Fred was certainly never attacked or really bothered by these men who seemed to be fascinated by him. In fact he lived a happy and popular life in the local area and became involved in amateur dramatics and many clubs and societies surrounding the mine. His arrest and conviction remained a small blip on a fulfilled life.

### Terry Sanderson

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<sup>110</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, p.81, 157.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*



Terry's story is slightly different to Fred's. Terry eventually moved to London and became very politically active (although he also tried to instill some activism in Rotherham). He told his story as a part of a collection named *Radical Records* and at the beginning it looks like a damning account of the town of his birth but on careful reading a more optimistic view of the north similar to Fred's becomes apparent. He began with the kind of traditional representation of the area:

I grew up in a small mining village on the outskirts of Rotherham during the fifties and sixties. It was all pits and steelworks in those days and there was a resultant machismo about the place. Men were men and women knew their places. Homosexuals were unheard of.<sup>112</sup>

However, his next lines almost contradict this view. He stated:

I was quite effeminate in my youth but no one mentioned this fact to me. I was just thought of as being 'spoiled' or 'like a daft lass' rather than being gay. I suppose it was considered such a terrible thing to say about anyone that it had become totally taboo concept - even for your worst enemy. I was well into my teens before I even knew there was a word to describe these secret feelings I had, let alone find out that they had been legislated against.<sup>113</sup>

Although Terry painted a picture of his working-class community as being a terrible place for him to grow up as a homosexual, it is clear that he was not targeted for his effeminacy. He reasoned that no one spoke about homosexuality because it was a taboo topic but perhaps the reason for this lay with the fact that during his childhood, homosexuals were in fact 'unheard of'. It is possible that homosexuality was not spoken of because there was not a clear, widespread understanding in the community of what it meant as an identity.

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<sup>112</sup> Cant and Hemmings (eds), *Radical Records*, p.85.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

Based on the above, it could be assumed that Terry had a lonely and sexually unfulfilled youth but the opposite proved to be true. His first two encounters took place at the local cinema (whilst sitting next to his best friend) and while he was being fitted for a suit for his first job (with his mother looking at pattern books 'three feet away').<sup>114</sup> Clearly homosexuality was not as unheard of as Terry had believed throughout his teenage angst. Opportunities did not slow down when he began work in a camera shop on Rotherham High Street. He was hired because the manager, Mr Farrer had taken a fancy to him and the two began an affair - for Terry this began 'the romance of the century'; for Mr Farrer it was less dramatic as he continued to entertain 'just about half the gay population of the town'.<sup>115</sup> As sad as this early heartbreak must have been for Terry, it helped him in the long run by opening his eyes to 'the big, wide, illegal world of the homosexual ..... the twilight world actually existed unseen, but in parallel, with everyone else's world'.<sup>116</sup> In fact the manager of the department store and the local butcher were both homosexuals and 'Mr Farrer seemed to know so many people, and the reason he knew them was because they were all gay. What a revelation!'.<sup>117</sup> This description paints a picture of an established but hidden world where there were countless opportunities for men to socialise and form relationships with other like-minded men. Terry revealed that it was too soon in his own development for him to really get involved in this world and this combined with the distinct difference between this hidden and discreet network

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, p.86.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, pp.86-87.

to the brash and obvious world of London meant that the political and precociously self-aware man could not find what he needed in the north.

A further contradiction highlighted by Terry's story lies in his description of The King William pub in Sheffield, at the time (in his estimation), the only explicitly 'gay facility' in the city.<sup>118</sup> He portrayed it as an entirely negative place, but what the description also shows is the difference that existed between classes and between the north and scene in London. He described arriving at the pub:

To get to this bar you had to pass through a billiard room full of jeering straight men. It amazed me to think that even though the gay bar had been situated up those dark stairs for many years, the straight men downstairs managed to keep up the impetus so that no queen should pass without an insult. Indeed, the only people willing to endure this ordeal on a regular basis were the screaming queens who has already decided that the best way to cope was to flaunt it.<sup>119</sup>

What is highlighted here is that an openly gay venue was able to share space with a working man's pub for many years without incident. If there had been any real objection to the venue from its other patrons, landlord or the local police then the upstairs room would likely have been raided and shut down. There is no doubt that some of the billiard-playing patrons of the pub would have been homophobic and aggressive in their jeers and that this could have made a night out very unpleasant but it is also worth thinking of this kind of behaviour in terms of that experienced by Fred from his workmates and the men in the baths. How much of it was typical work-place banter that the more sensitive and self-reflective Terry was less able to engage with and deflect? There are also similarities in this scenario to the East End pubs described in *Queer London*

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<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, p.87.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*.

where there was much banter (both good-natured and not so good-natured) between patrons of mixed venues such as the King William.<sup>120</sup> The key point is that in working-class communities in the capital and in the north, men representing all forms of sexuality co-existed and socialised together.<sup>121</sup> In the north however, it was unusual for homosexual men to socialise apart from the community.

If most men chose to meet outside of explicitly gay venues such as this one, this was reflected in the attitude of local men to Terry's attempts to politicise them into the 1960s and 1970s. He had some limited success in Sheffield which by this time was viewed locally as 'cosmopolitan' because of its size and strong student population.<sup>122</sup> This was not replicated in smaller towns such as Rotherham and Barnsley where men were keen to hang onto their anonymity and the casual acceptance that this engendered and were in no rush to proudly come out of the closet until well into the 1980s. By the early 1980s Terry had been working in a mental hospital for years and coming out to everyone who would listen. He expected to be bullied, sacked and even assaulted but he never was. In fact, he got 'nothing but support, encouragement and .... love' from his colleagues and when he moved away to London with his partner, they organised a party for him and bought the couple gifts for their new home.<sup>123</sup>

Terry summed up his feelings on the matter to end his story:

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<sup>120</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, p.81.

<sup>121</sup> Taylor et al, *Global Change, Local Feeling*, p.191. Right into the 1980s, the majority of gay friendly pubs in Sheffield were found in working-class areas and were 'run down and unmodernised' rather than glamorous or glitzy. A man interviewed by Taylor et al. stated 'If one thing strikes me about the gay pubs in my own city, Sheffield, it is the *ordinariness* of many of the clientele - they could be drinking and smoking almost anywhere'.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, p.88.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, p.93.

I wept buckets, but it wasn't until later that I realised what had happened. These people - ordinary working-class folk like me - had come together to celebrate a gay relationship and to wish it success and happiness. What I had been fighting for all these years - the right for gay people to live their lives openly with dignity and respect was actually happening, and in the most unlikely of places.<sup>124</sup>

Clearly Terry was speaking about the early 1980s when homosexuality had been legal for over a decade but there was still a similarity with the unexpected tolerance demonstrated by working class communities throughout the scope of this study.

#### Tales From Out in the City

Out in the City is a group facilitated by Age Concern in Manchester for elderly gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people to socialise and enjoy the city's gay village on Canal Street.<sup>125</sup> In 2009 the members of the group, along with help from the Manchester Pride Community Events Fund, put together and published an anthology of memories of their experiences in the city and surrounding areas. Many of these memories relating to the 1940s and 1950s tell a similar story to Fred's and Terry's - sex between men (and boys) was a common yet mostly unnamed experience in working-class communities of the time. The collection has a chapter on childhood and growing up and what the majority of accounts in this section have in common is that they all refer to youthful same-sex experimentation as a normal part of growing up. For the men interviewed, this was the beginning of their homosexuality but one presumes

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> They were also responsible for the art exhibit about the Altrincham trial discussed in Chapter Four.

that for many of the boys they spoke of, it was a stage of sexual development. In speaking of growing up in Lancashire in the 1950s, Bill remembered feeling nothing when looking at girls but becoming aware of attractive boys. He had a very open relationship with his best friend with whom he could discuss sexual matters and he presented them both as being precocious in their self-knowledge. Of himself, Bill wrote:

The truth became obvious very quickly. By the time I was fifteen I was quite clear in my mind about my sexuality. There was no question of it being a 'phase'. I knew what was happening and I simply accepted it. I thought, "Oh, so this is how I am; this is how I am going to grow up."<sup>126</sup>

After this revelation he committed himself to finding other boys like him and during this quest, he had plenty of 'the usual schoolboy fun' and an affair with his best friend which had them 'at it' at every opportunity (these opportunities were sometimes facilitated by his friend's mother).<sup>127</sup> In the middle of the night after a night spent together, Bill's friend turned to him and said 'You know, I think we're very slightly homosexual' to which Bill was happy to agree. This matter-of-fact way of accepting their preferences combined with elements of parental collusion show how ordinary an occurrence this type of relationship could have been.<sup>128</sup> This normalisation was repeated in TC's brief anecdote about his schooldays. He went to Warrington Grammar School and had a large group of gay, bisexual and gay-friendly friends there in the late 1950s.<sup>129</sup> All of the collections of life stories mentioned previously contain recollections of boyhood experimentation - particularly at boarding school or at working-class

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<sup>126</sup> Out in the City, *Tales From Out in the City*, p.13.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, p.54.

schools. This was viewed by participants and in some cases by parents and teachers as normal and not necessarily an indicator of homosexuality. It did not become so (particularly amongst the working-classes) until a more fixed idea of sexuality and the psychology of such became currency amongst the authorities from the 1950s onwards. This knowledge did not filter through to the boys who were still engaging in these experimentations without a wider sense of the potential implications.

MT wrote a similar story of schoolboy experimentation that took place in his late 1940s classroom. During his time at school however, his headmaster gassed himself due to becoming engaged in a homosexual scandal:

We all had a call from the local policeman to ask if we had been called to Mr Loach's office and whether he had interfered with our private parts! ..... There was lots of talk about who had and who hadn't been to that office! I have no idea whether our small town was any different from anywhere else but there did seem to be an awful lot of casual sex going on around that time!<sup>130</sup>

MT had not been involved with Mr Loach but he was certainly left with the impression that casual, homosexual sex was a commonplace occurrence in his community and this reflects the evidence brought forward in the Altrincham, Rotherham and Barnsley cases discussed previously.

In some of the stories told, there is a disjuncture between the opinions of the experienced self-aware man looking back on his youth and the details of the descriptions given. IT finished his first piece with 'We just didn't know anything

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, p.15.

about sex and certainly nothing about being gay'.<sup>131</sup> However, he had previously described 'the odd fumbling' with male and female cousins, having anal sex with a male cousin and sex acts with the boy next door and the boy next door but one!<sup>132</sup> Looking at evidence in the life stories studied for this thesis, incest was not uncommon amongst working-class families who were forced to share beds and cramped living quarters. A significant number of men remembered having sex with their brothers, cousins and uncles. They did not paint this behaviour in a negative light but the negative implications are clear. Studies that deal with child abuse also point out how working-class living conditions could lead to incest.<sup>133</sup> Morality campaigners of the inter-war period saw this as a distinct social problem and this led in part to the systematic slum clearance campaigns that took place throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

Clearly, IT and his friends knew plenty about sex and sex with other men in their youth; it was the terminology and attendant implications that they were ignorant of. In the second part of his story, IT maintained this fiction of sexual innocence by claiming that 'during my childhood, sex hardly reared its ugly head ..... we remained totally innocent' but again went on to describe sex acts that occurred in the classroom in the middle of lessons.<sup>134</sup> This insistence of sexual innocence contrasted with overtly sexual behaviour is reminiscent of the interviews conducted by Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher with working-class men and

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, p.29.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>133</sup> Humphries and Gordon, *Forbidden Britain* and Louise Jackson, *Child Abuse in Victorian England* (London, 2000).

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, pp.57-59.



women relating to sex and birth control.<sup>135</sup> In both studies, when working-class people were interviewed they insisted on sexual innocence/ignorance but went on to describe a good level of knowledge (but not necessarily the attendant terminology). Sexual literacy was viewed by many as undesirable or as an indicator of a lack of respectability.<sup>136</sup> SC who grew up in the 1950s summed up this disconnection between experience, language and identity:

Young people may find it difficult to comprehend the innocence of my early days. They may say that I am looking back through rose-tinted spectacles. Of course people, both heterosexual and homosexual had relationships - some serious and committed, some casual - just as they do today. The difference, however, is that it was less open.<sup>137</sup>

IT finished his second piece by thinking about the same issue, he wrote 'It would not have been prudent to shout it from the roof tops! Tolerance only stretched as far as the lack of understanding.'<sup>138</sup>

Many of the experiences described above were done so in a very matter-of-fact way. However, two men's experiences showed that much more romantic relationships were both possible and desirable in small northern towns of the period. Andy was sixteen when he met Gordon as he was hanging around outside a local cottage. He knew what went on in such places but he was afraid to go in. Gordon (who was tall, blond and handsome) approached him and invited him out for coffee:

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<sup>135</sup> Fisher, *Birth Control, Sex, and Marriage in Britain*; Szreter and Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution*.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> Out in the City, *Tales From Out in the City*, p.30.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, p.59.

We talked and he listened as if I was the most important person in the world and I felt as if I was drowning in those deep blue eyes. I liked the way that the corners of his eyes crinkled when he laughed. It was lust at first sight.<sup>139</sup>

The date turned into a year-long affair that only ended when Andy realised that as a married man, Gordon could never give him what he wanted from a relationship. However, he was to remain grateful to him 'because he was gentle and kind and taught [Andy] how to love'.<sup>140</sup> It is not clear here what Gordon's real preference was but the depth of feeling involved between the two ensured that this remained a positive and influential experience in Andy's life. A further romantic episode that took place in the late 1930s was described by AE in a piece entitled 'My First Boyfriend'. The memory remained so present to AE that he chose to write in in the first person and his joy and excitement can still be felt today. He described the day when the boy that he had had a crush on at school kissed him and became his boyfriend. He remembered no guilt at what he felt but was pragmatic in how he knew that he would deal with this new relationship:

Anyway one thing was for sure. It wasn't something you told anybody else about - especially adults - because boys don't have boyfriends. At least they're not supposed to. It would just have to be our secret.<sup>141</sup>

It is clear that there was room for every type of same-sex relationship in northern communities in the 1940s and 1950s. The only stipulation seems to have been that one remained discreet. Relationships between men (and boys) were commonplace but the language of sexuality and identity that we are so familiar with today was not.

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, p.36.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, p.39.

## Conclusion

The experiences of the men analysed here present a diverse and yet ultimately complementary picture of how men who desired other men could live their lives in the north during the 1940s and 1950s. Working-class boys seemed to have grown up in a world where experimentation with their friends (and sometimes family members) was commonplace and this casual acceptance of sexual contact with other males could extend into the work place and adult life. The Lancastrians interviewed for the *Out in the City* collection contrasted opportunity with discretion and Terry told the same story. If one knew the right people or made the right friends then a congenial world was one's oyster. What these stories also highlight is the lack of a commercial network in northern towns and cities for homosexual men. This is in a direct contrast to London where plenty of specifically gay venues were available if one was in the know. The impression that these examples leave is of a world of tacit collusion - as long as sexuality was not flaunted. In fact many northern men who identified as homosexual in the north preferred to keep their anonymity and discreet lifestyle well into the 1960s, 70s and even 80s, as Terry's attempts to introduce gay rights to South Yorkshire showed. However, if the assumption of some of these men was that they were tolerated as long as they were not seen or heard, Fred's story illustrated the opposite. When he was outed and criminalised the men of his masculine community and career supported him and empathised with him. He led a happy and fulfilled life and never felt the need to leave his corner of Barnsley to do so. Clearly, by the nature of personal experience, it is difficult to generalise based on individual stories. However, many of the key points of

argument picked up throughout the other case studies in this thesis are given weight by the experiences of the men documented here.

## **Chapter Seven: 'Every effort is being made to prevent the spread of this vice': Public understandings of same-sex desire in the north**

In London, prosecutions for homosexual offences shot up in the post-war period. The reasons for this have been suggested in the historiography. They include a major change in the leadership and focus of the Metropolitan Police force; efforts to clean up the capital both for post-war regeneration and into the 1950s for the coronation of the new Queen; concerns that came from America linking homosexuality to communism (that were exacerbated by the Cambridge spies scandal of the early 1950s); and the wider public discourse of sexuality that was thrust into the spotlight by the Montagu and Gielgud trials.<sup>1</sup> Of all these reasons, the most entrenched is that related to the changes within the Met. It has often been accepted that the appointment of the devoutly Catholic Theobald Mathew as the Director of Public Prosecutions in 1944 and the appointments of David Maxwell-Fyfe as Home Secretary and John Nott-Bower as commissioner of police in 1953 exacerbated a witch hunt against homosexual men.

It has been argued that these men led a top down campaign to increase prosecutions and make stamping out homosexuality a police priority. This was achieved by the tactics of entrapment that had been used since the 1920s being increased to the point that attractive young men were favoured as police officers in areas known to be frequented by homosexual men. These officers were used in urinals and known commercial venues as agents provocateurs to lure men into approaching them - they could then have been charged with

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Higgins, *Heterosexual Dictatorship: Male Homosexuality in Postwar Britain* (London, 1996), p.163; David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain 1945-1951* (London and New York, 2008, first published 2007), pp.376-377; Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: The making of the Permissive Society* (New Haven and London, 2010), pp.41-48.

procuring or gross indecency (depending how far the policeman chose to take his job). The phenomenon of the 'address book case' also surfaced in this period - this was a situation where a suspected homosexual was targeted by the police and approached at his home (which was then searched usually without a warrant). The man's address book would then be taken and all the men in it approached and treated in the same manner. The late 1940s and 1950s have thus become known as a time of fear and persecution for homosexual men in the capital. In memoirs such as *The Naked Civil Servant* and *Against the Law*, this atmosphere of repression is vividly recreated and set against the loss of a more tolerant and optimistic time before and during the war.<sup>2</sup>

The above is in fact something of a myth. As Matt Houlbrook has demonstrated, the well-oiled machinery of persecution in the form of a united Met did not exist. He convincingly argues that even in the capital, policing was 'idiosyncratic and contingent, rendering specific practices and places invisible while bringing others into sharp relief'.<sup>3</sup> Rises in prosecutions could be traced to three main districts centred around the West End and these were driven by local officers who had developed a wider knowledge of the sub-culture and were concerned with the increased visibility of homosexual men - not by orders from above.<sup>4</sup> A return to a peace-time force allowed vice squads to be increased and officers to be dedicated to patrolling specific areas. If 'formal legislation implied a mode of surveillance that was draconian, pervasive and repressive' the actual day-to-

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<sup>2</sup> Quentin Crisp, *The Naked Civil Servant* (London, 1996, first published 1968); Peter Wildeblood, *Against the Law* (London, 1955).

<sup>3</sup> Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (London and Chicago, 2005), p.21.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p.35.

day operations of even the most organised and professional police force in the country often did little to represent this.<sup>5</sup> Whether a man fell into the remit of the law depended on where he was in the city (the West End was more dangerous than the East End), what time of day it was (night was more dangerous than day), what he looked like (did he wear makeup and flamboyant clothes or did he look traditionally masculine?) and how he carried himself.<sup>6</sup> Urinals were the most dangerous place of all and the 'address book cases' and prosecutions that occurred in private rooms (as documented by middle-class men like Wildeblood) were in fact fairly rare.<sup>7</sup> This meant that, as in earlier periods, the vast majority of men prosecuted were working-class as they often did not have private spaces to conduct their affairs.

As previously discussed, it has often been assumed that the atmosphere of repression described at the beginning of the chapter stretched into the rest of the country and that local police forces in the provinces aped these tactics and focussed their attention onto prosecuting homosexual men.<sup>8</sup> This thesis has proven that for the earlier periods, this was not the case in the north.

Houlbrook's reading of the policing in the capital in the post-war period suggests a fractured attitude towards homosexuality. If there was not a united strategy in the capital, how could there have been one in the north? It is unlikely that northern police forces took instruction from the Met when different boroughs had different attitudes towards the issue. It is also unlikely that if the higher authorities did not enforce a top-down strategy in London, that they did so in the

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, pp.36-37.

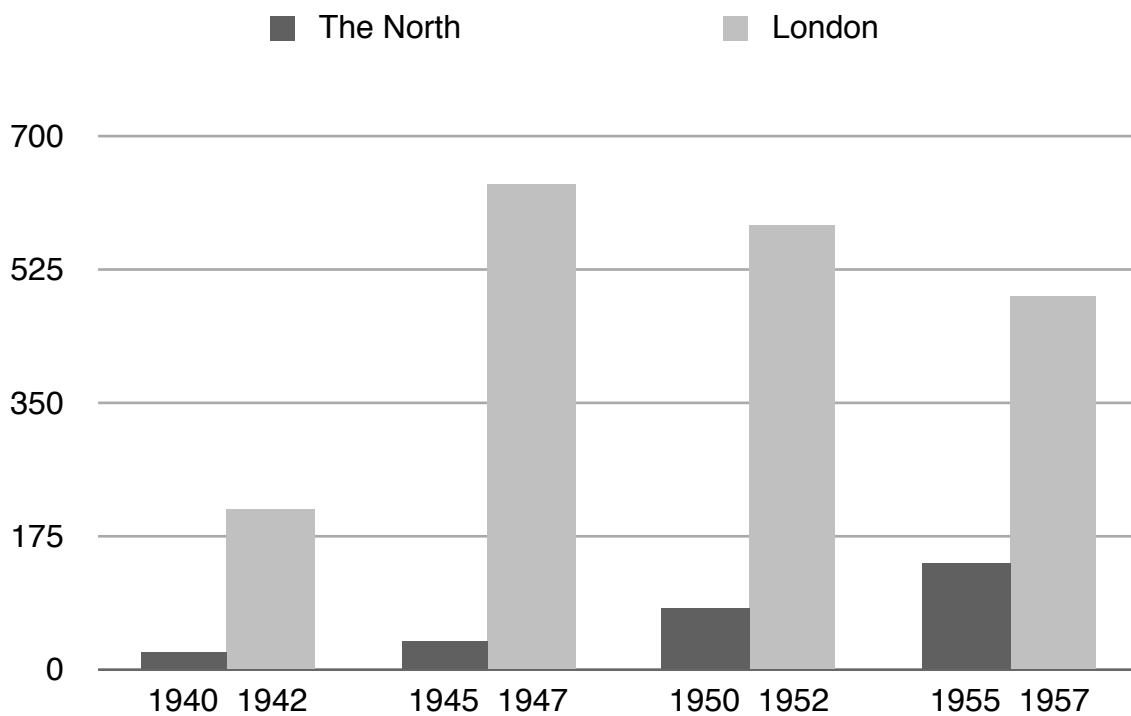
<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p.37.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>8</sup> Higgins, *Heterosexual Dictatorship*, p.166-167.

northern provinces. This chapter will explore this idea further. It will also examine prosecutions for homosexual offences during the period and analyse the press coverage of northern cases. The chapter will conclude by looking at the work of Richard Hoggart and Ferdynand Zweig and the impact of affluence on the sexual and social lives of northern working men.

### Prosecutions for homosexual offences



**Figure 7.1:** A comparison of men in London and the north who appeared before the courts for homosexual acts, 1939 - 1957.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> North Eastern Circuit Crown Minute Book: ASSI 41/38, North Eastern Circuit Indictment Files: ASSI 44/296, ASSI 44/297, ASSI 44/298, ASSI 44/315, ASSI 44/316, ASSI 44/317, ASSI 44/318, ASSI 44/331, ASSI 44/332, ASSI 44/333, Northern Circuit Indictment Files: ASSI 51/211, ASSI 51/212, ASSI 51/213, ASSI 51/214, ASSI 51/230, ASSI 51/231, ASSI 51/232, ASSI 51/233, ASSI 51/246, ASSI 51/247, ASSI 51/248, ASSI, 51/261, ASSI 51/262, The National Archive. All incidents cited here can be confirmed as homosexual acts. The information in the documents is sufficient to be able to distinguish between for example; buggery and bestiality or indecent assault on a male or female. They also include inter-generational encounters and what we would now class as child abuse and any aggravated encounters that included violence. The London statistics are taken from Houlbrook, *Queer London*, pp.273-274.



It is clear from the above table that the differences between the level of prosecutions in the north and in the capital were still significant in the wartime and postwar period. In the 1940s sample, prosecutions in London were seventeen times those in the north.<sup>10</sup> There is no explanation for this that can be linked to population as in 1951 the population of London stood at 8,348,000 against a northern population of approximately 13,000,000 people.<sup>11</sup> There were two clear differences between the areas that help to explain this differential: the north still did not have a visible subculture to rival that in the capital and policing methods in the north cannot have followed the precedent set by parts of the Met. As previously discussed, there were more developed gay commercial venues in Manchester and Liverpool but they were not in the same vein as the West End and Soho hang outs of London. Alongside this, there is not the same documentary evidence of the made up boys of the West Ends being a visible presence on the streets of northern cities. It would seem that even in known gay areas, the proliferation of 'Queens' was fairly small although in cases such as that in Altrincham detailed in Chapter Five, mention was made of a small minority of the men wearing make-up and being found in possession of women's clothing. The relatively small number of men prosecuted in the north cannot have been victims of an extended campaign of systematic persecution - there were simply not enough of them to demonstrate this. The prosecutions in the north also did not follow the same pattern as in the capital, they increased in each five year sample yet the same did not happen in London. London's prosecutions reflect the different campaigns in areas of the Met and the various events detailed above that drove their attitudes towards

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<sup>10</sup> This suggests that the greater opportunities open to homosexual men in the capital during the war also led to greater potential for arrest.

<sup>11</sup> B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1988), pp.25, 38.

homosexual men. It would be expected that if provincial police forces were following the Met's lead and acting on instructions from the capital then prosecutions would follow a similar pattern. The one major similarity between the two areas was that the vast majority of men who were prosecuted were still working-class.

Differences between the Northern and North-Eastern Assizes

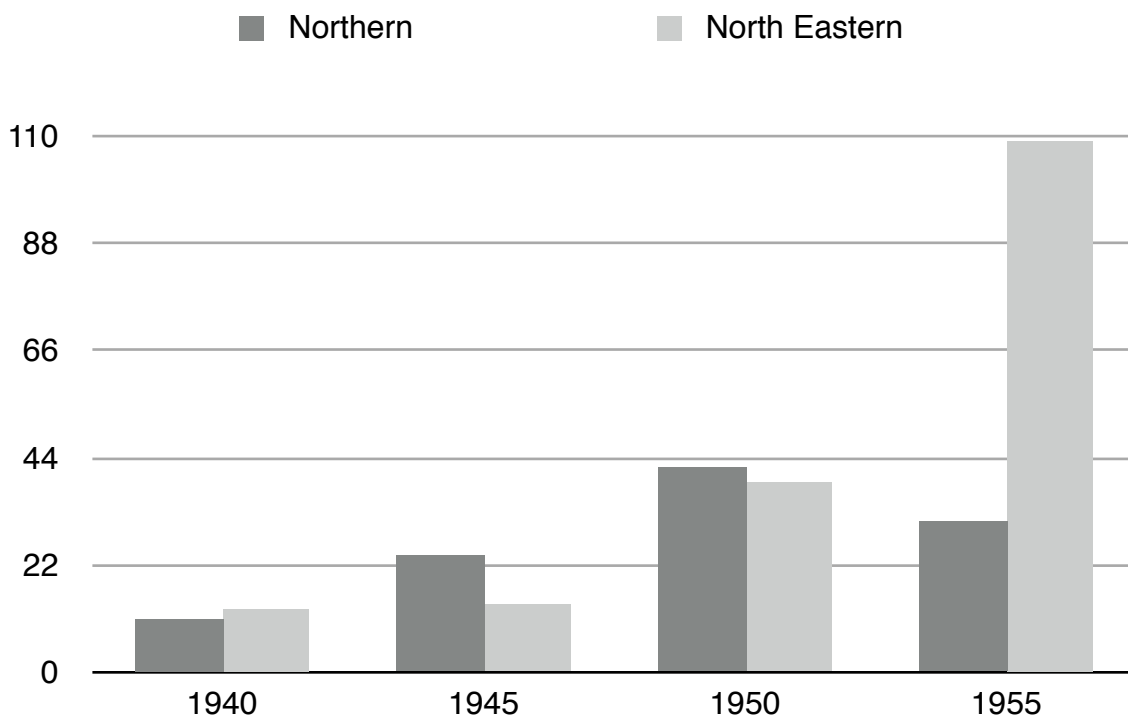


Figure 7.2: A comparison of prosecution figures for the Northern and North-Eastern Assize circuits, 1939 - 1957.<sup>12</sup>

Prosecution levels remained similar to the inter-war period in both circuits until 1955. The most significant change was that the North-Eastern circuit matched the Northern circuit in the frequency of its prosecutions and in 1955 the level was three times that of the Northern circuit. This is an anomaly when compared

<sup>12</sup> See the footnote for Figure 7.1 for full details.

to any of the other sample years analysed in this study. To ensure that this was not a similar situation to that in the Northern circuit in the late 1930s - that undesirable cases were pushed onto the Chester Assizes - the Chester and Wales Circuit for 1955 was checked. Seventeen cases were tried at Chester that year but all of them were for offences committed in the county of Chester itself.<sup>13</sup> There were no cases that were committed in Lancashire or Cheshire. It seems that there was very little police activity in the Northern circuit and correspondingly few arrests or that the severity of homosexual crimes had been downgraded to allow them to have been dealt with at local Magistrates Courts and Quarter Sessions.

Some light is shed on the proliferation of prosecutions in the North-Eastern circuit when one considers the two large trials discussed in Chapter Six. 1954 had been a year that placed South Yorkshire in the national press as a hotbed of homosexual vice. The local press had also reported in great depth about the circumstances and prevalence of working-class men having sex with other working-class men. These two cases placed homosexuality at the forefront of local public discourse and in doing so, removed a level of innocence around homosocial interaction that would never be reclaimed. The combination of this with the succeeding discussion of homosexuality as both a sickness and an identity in the national press could have encouraged ordinary people to give a name to and frown upon what had been tolerated before. In turn this could have led to more people being willing to interfere in people's private lives and report suspicions to the police that would have gone ignored before.

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<sup>13</sup> Chester and Wales Assize Circuit Indictment Files 1955: ASSI 83/61, ASSI 83/62, ASSI 83/63, The National Archive.

## Guilty or not guilty?

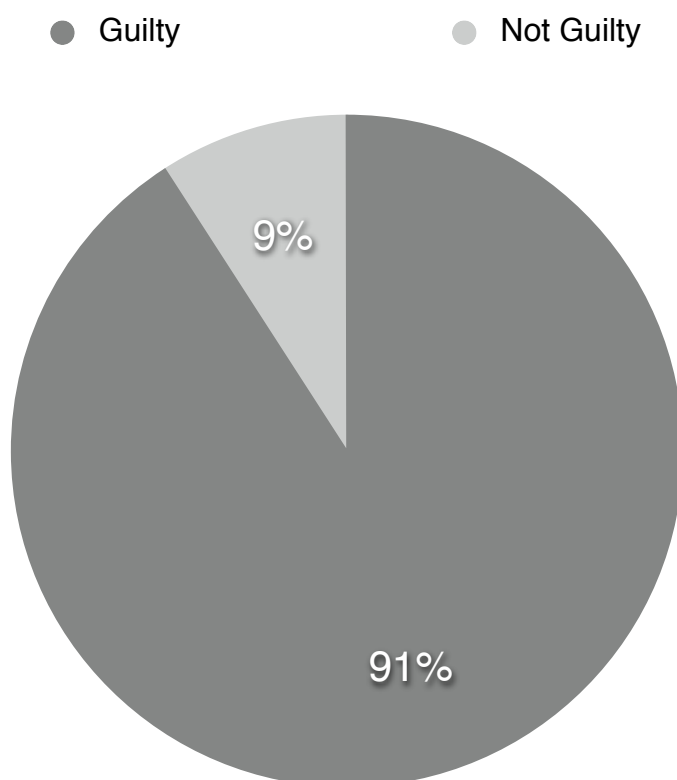


Figure 7.3: Guilty and not guilty verdicts in prosecutions for homosexual offences in the north, 1939-1957.<sup>14</sup>

A startling difference from previous years was the change in the likelihood of being found guilty for homosexual offences when prosecuted. It stood at 91% for both the Northern and North Eastern assize court circuits. This had increased by 10% for the Northern Assizes and doubled for the North-Eastern since the inter-war period. There is a simple explanation for this: the vast majority of men who were arrested confessed and pleaded guilty. It is not possible to determine whether they did this due to police coercion or ignorance of the potential legal severity of what they had done. Of the men who pleaded not guilty, the vast majority were found not guilty which demonstrated that if one had the strength to challenge one's arrest, a jury would have likely been sympathetic. Another area in which the sympathy of a jury seemed almost

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<sup>14</sup> See the footnote for Figure 7.1 for full details.

guaranteed was if the only witnesses to the crime were policemen or women. Most of those found not guilty were brought to court by police witnesses. Northern juries clearly still did not like police interference into the private lives of two (or sometimes more) consenting adults.

#### Local policing in the 1940s and 1950s

Further light can be shed when consulting the *City of Sheffield Police and Auxiliary Services Annual Reports* and *The Police Constable's Reports*.<sup>15</sup> In the annual reports, there is no mention of homosexual crimes being of specific concern to the city. The main concerns of the police force seem to have been drunkenness (exacerbated by the high levels of unemployment in the 1930s), brothel-keeping, betting, bigamy and juvenile petty crime.<sup>16</sup> During 1940 - when Sheffield had been targeted in the Blitz - the main concern was looting.<sup>17</sup> This trend is repeated in the *Police Constable's Reports*. Unfortunately those for the war years have been lost but when the records begin in 1948, there is not a mention of homosexual offences until 1953. For 1948 to 1953 the main concerns of the authorities remained fixed around brothels and betting houses. The 1948 report highlighted an increase in abortions and infanticide, and it is possible to attribute this to the way that wartime conditions had an impact on sexual morality as discussed in Chapter Six.

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<sup>15</sup> *City of Sheffield Police and Auxiliary Services Annual Reports 1935 - 1940*, Sheffield Local Studies Library, 352.2. These are the only surviving volumes of the document. *Police Constables Reports 1948 - 1958*, Sheffield Local Studies Library. 1948 is the earliest surviving volume.

<sup>16</sup> *City of Sheffield Police and Auxiliary Services Annual Reports 1935 - 1940*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

In 1953 however, homosexual offences became a pressing matter for the authorities as the report documented:

Unfortunately, the current national trend in regard to sexual and indecency offences is reflected by a local increase, although every endeavour is being made to prevent the spread of this vice in the city.<sup>18</sup>

What seemed at first to be a straightforward indication of Metropolitan involvement in provincial policing revealed itself as something less clear-cut later in the report:

A great deal of prominence has been given to this subject in the national press during the past year, and some at least of the increased number of reports is probably due to public interest and more vigilance by parents and others when suspicious incidents have been reported. The observations of the Lord Chief Justice and other prominent persons have particularly emphasised the seriousness of indecency offences between male persons, and every effort is being made to prevent the spread of this vice.<sup>19</sup>

This seems to demonstrate that local authorities were responding to perceived attitudes in the press and not to direct orders from London - thus highlighting the potential power of this press in this area. The Sheffield police force acknowledged that the press coverage of homosexuality was responsible for people bringing complaints to them rather than them being responsible for the increase in prosecutions themselves. Reference was made to observations that the capital's authorities had made in the press and not to state correspondence sent directly to the force. It is noteworthy that emphasis was placed on the fact that it was the Lord Chief Justice who found homosexual offences to be particularly serious, as by 1954, when prosecutions were still rising, the report

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<sup>18</sup> *Police Constable's Reports*, 1948, Sheffield Local Studies Library.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 1953.

referred to them as 'offences which, although deplorable, are comparatively trivial'.<sup>20</sup> This seems to ground homosexual offences as a moral issue rather than a strictly criminal one. The Lord Chief Justice may not have agreed.

Although one can trace the increase in prosecutions for homosexual offences during the 1950s, running parallel to this theme was one linked to race. During the 1950s, Sheffield, like many northern cities, had an influx of black and Asian men looking for work and for somewhere to settle their families. This seems to have been of particular concern to the authorities who restructured the police force to deal with it and assigned a plain-clothes sergeant and constable to be permanently engaged in dealing with issues that came from immigration. During 1953, there were numerous disturbances in dance halls and young girls were being monitored and 'taken away' when seen to be engaging in relationships with 'coloured men'.<sup>21</sup> Plain-clothes officers were also being used to bring prosecutions for distributing and printing indecent material which was probably still being sold in the slum shops mentioned by the men in *The Equipment of the Workers*.<sup>22</sup> It seems that by the early 1950s, plain clothes officers were being used in many areas of policing (as were the female officers mentioned in Chapter Five) and not just to entrap homosexual men as has previously been suggested. Placing it in this context puts the prosecution of homosexual men back into the bigger picture of the policing of perceived social problems and takes it out of the narrative of isolated persecution.

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 1954.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 1953.

<sup>22</sup> St Philips Education and Research Society, *The Equipment Of The Workers: An Enquiry By The St Philip's Settlement Education And Research Society Into The Adequacy Of The Adult Manual Workers For The Discharge Of Their Responsibilities As Heads Of Household, Producers And Citizens* (London, 1919), p.302.

The *Constable's Report* also provides valuable information about where one was more likely to be prosecuted in the city. 'B' Division, who were based at West Bar Police Station, were singled out for praise in 1953. They looked after the entertainment capital of the city - West Bar was comprised of the majority of city centre theatres, cinemas, pubs and hotels. The Grand Hotel had a known gay area in its bars and many favoured urinals were also in this district, which had long been known as the place to visit for pleasure and perhaps some vice. The plain-clothes officers in the area made sure that their prosecution rates for all manner of indecency (not just the homosexual kind) reflected this.<sup>23</sup> In 1954, 'B' Division were praised again:

Although there is a marked preponderance of young and comparatively inexperienced constables in the Central Division the standard of work has been maintained at a high level. In particular, a considerable number of arrests have been made as a result of unusual observation and initiative on the part of the officers concerned.<sup>24</sup>

One can only guess what the 'unusual observation and initiative' involved but what is clear is that the officers of 'B' division decided amongst themselves to work undercover and entrap homosexual men in the city's pleasure centre. Like the officers in the Met, it seems that it was up to individual stations to decide their own response to homosexual men, and in Sheffield neither the city's authorities nor the Metropolitan authorities dictated this. As in London, location decided the chances of being arrested. Police presence was concentrated on the city centre and places of obvious potential vice (in this case urinals and city centre pubs) whereas in the densely populated, working-class areas of the city

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<sup>23</sup> *Police Constable's Reports* 1953, Sheffield Local Studies Library.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 1954.



(where ironically much homosexual vice seemed to occur undetected) the police presence remained extremely low. The fact that the Rotherham and Barnsley cases of 1954 became address book cases confirms that this element of Metropolitan policing strategy had taken hold but it must be remembered that initial police involvement was almost accidental.

By 1956, the levels of prosecutions for homosexual offences remained high but they had once again become just one of many offences against the person. They were not given special mention as a particular concern - in fact this role seems to have been taken on by child abuse and carnal knowledge (although special mention must be given to a man who was solely responsible for forty-two offences in 1958).<sup>25</sup> It seems that the years 1953 to 1956 represented a very specific moment in both police and public understanding of homosexuality which led to an increase in prosecutions and a shift in how local communities regarded men who had sex with other men. By 1956 this new way of understanding the world had dulled into familiarity but this was not reflected by a fall in prosecutions. The press had had a role to play in bringing homosexuality to the forefront of the minds of the general public and the authorities (who, it must be remembered had no official guidance on how to prosecute such men) and this knowledge would not be forgotten. If it helped in the long term to bring about decriminalisation, in the short term it disrupted the privacy and corresponding tolerance that had prevailed in the north for decades.

### The press

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 1958.

The dominance of the national press over the local press, particularly the popular papers, had been assured by the post-war years yet local newspapers were still popular in the north and generally remained more sympathetic towards people whose private lives had landed them in trouble with the law - as they had since the days of Wilde. If *The News of the World* traded on salacious stories and *The Manchester Guardian* attempted to remain a bastion of morality then local papers such as *The Sheffield Telegraph* and *The Barnsley Chronicle* tended to fall somewhere in between the two. As the previous chapters have shown, the press is an invaluable source when attempting to extract details about homosexual cases particularly when so little information remains in the legal records. Without the local press, many of the details of the Rotherham and Barnsley cases discussed in Chapter Five would have been lost to history. What this section will now attempt to do is to use newspapers and legal records to determine how usual these cases were both in terms of their size and the coverage that they received.

### *News of the World*

It is clear and also expected that the types of homosexual cases from the north that were reported on in the *News of the World* were those with lurid details attached. It has previously been noted that the Rotherham and Barnsley trials received coverage but these were perhaps amongst the least unusual of the paper's stock-in-trade. Throughout the late 1940s and 1950s there were regular stories about men dressing as women, sometimes these were linked to homosexuality and other times they were not.<sup>26</sup> Various reasons were given as

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<sup>26</sup> For full analysis see Alison Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman! Women's gender-crossing in modern British popular culture* (London and New York, 2007).

to why men had chosen to behave this way: to be in disguise while trying to locate an errant wife, as a bet after watching a drag show, to entrap men into sexual relations and because it was an urge that could not be fought.<sup>27</sup><sup>28</sup><sup>29</sup><sup>30</sup> Perhaps some of these explanations were more convincing than others but it seems that men in drag were a part of the cultural landscape of the time. The baths cropped up fairly regularly as sites of deviant sexuality. Leeds public baths was named by a regular as a place where 'miserable behaviour' was commonplace.<sup>31</sup> Gerald Gafftarnick had been going every week for six years despite this but had decided on this occasion to report some sexual activity in the steam room to the manager. When he was being interviewed in court he was asked 'Would it be your view that these baths should be closed down as a den of iniquity?' To this he answered a definitive and resounding 'No'.<sup>32</sup> More details emerged that the baths were next door to the police station and the sexual activity had only been seen in the steam room - which was conveniently left alone by the attendants.<sup>33</sup> This shows a possible level of complicity by both

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<sup>27</sup> *News of the World*, 11 April 1954, p.10. This refers to George Inman, a labourer from Doncaster. The Superintendent involved in the case said 'The neighbours are very angry about this and if he is found again there will be serious trouble'.

<sup>28</sup> *News of the World*, 21 August 1949, p.9. This refers to Kenneth Croft, a bank clerk from near Huddersfield. He had been to a drag show with his friend who bet him £5 that he could not spend 48 hours as a woman while staying at a hotel. The magistrate told him 'What people do on stage is one thing; going about in public places dressed as a woman is another'.

<sup>29</sup> *News of the World*, 16 August 1953, p.10. This refers to Douglas Godley, a builder from Doncaster who picked up a man in his car while in drag. He propositioned him by giving him a book on sex but his potential conquest realised the truth and went to the police after writing his car registration number down. Godley told the police 'The clothes and things are mine. You know my weakness. I dress up in women's clothes. I wear these things and hide them in the car because I am afraid that my wife might find out'.

<sup>30</sup> *News of the World*, 28 August 1955, p.11. This refers to Maurice Bailey from Bradford who was caught in full make up, nail varnish and a hat with a feather. He told the court that he was 'willing to have any treatment which might be necessary. He had tried to overcome the trouble and succeeded for a long spell'.

<sup>31</sup> *News of the World*, 7 August 1955, p.12.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

those who worked in the baths and the police next door which was only shaken when someone made an active complaint. A further baths story centered around a C.I.D detective who had been observing Turkish baths for indecency throughout Manchester but was then convicted for committing indecency in a Turkish bath.<sup>34</sup> It is easy to imagine a mostly working-class readership enjoying the irony of this story.

There were other stories that linked homosexuality with ideas of death and punishment. Chapter Six noted the case of Kenneth Crowe who was killed for tricking a man into thinking he was a woman and kissing him.<sup>35</sup> Two more cases stand out as being in a similar vein. William Preston from Warrington admitted to committing the 'perfect crime' when he told of how he had murdered a sixty-four year-old who had 'behaved improperly towards him'.<sup>36</sup> Preston was found guilty but insane for this crime. In the second case, a charge of murder was reduced to one of manslaughter against William Hinton, an eighteen year-old from Bolton who killed 'a man in self defence and under extreme provocation'.<sup>37</sup> It was reported that there had been a struggle at his home following 'an attempted improper assault' by James Roughley. Hinton struck Roughley 'seven times with an axe causing terrible injuries'.<sup>38</sup> As there was no legal distinction between consensual sex and a real indecent assault, it is impossible to tell whether an attempted rape really did occur but the implication was clear - Roughley deserved what he got. A tragic case that must have appealed to the

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 19 July 1953, p.7

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 26 November 1950, p.8

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 12 February 1956, p.9.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 13 May 1951, p.11.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*.

*News of the World's* preferences both for drama and hidden sexual practices was that of Leslie Smith and Robert Allison under the headline 'Friends found shot on the Bronte moors'.<sup>39</sup> The invoking of the Bronte name suggested a doomed love comparable to that of Heathcliff and Kathy in *Wuthering Heights* and the reality was no more cheerful. The two young friends set out on their regular Saturday trip rabbit shooting on the moors but never came home. Smith's father and a search party found them side by side, both dead from shots to the head. Smith had married a year before and his wife was expecting a child. They were known as "quiet lads" who neither drank nor smoked' whose 'friendship' had continued past Smith's marriage but it seems that they felt unable to continue their secret lives.<sup>40</sup> The biggest surprise of this story is the sympathy and understanding with which it was handled.

Blackmail was another topic that was seized upon by the popular press as fodder for selling newspapers. It was an issue that would have been high in the public consciousness during the 1950s due to the high profile, celebrity cases involving homosexuality and the Wolfenden Report's concerns on the subject. Blackmail cases were regular occurrences in the press but the one reported on 3 August 1958 was particularly relevant to northern opinions on the matter. Charles Melling, a clerk in the tax office from Barnsley was charged with blackmailing three men throughout 1957 and 1958; he accused two of committing homosexual offences and the third, a publican, of cheating on his wife and allowing prostitutes and homosexuals to use his pub.<sup>41</sup> This seemed to

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 27 March 1950, p.15.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 3 August 1958, p.10.

be an ordinary case that had been replicated throughout the country but what was different was how the accused men felt able to go to the police and report Melling. This suggests that the crime of blackmail was much worse than the alleged crimes committed by the men in question and these men were confident that the local police would see it that way.<sup>42</sup> Melling was interviewed and admitted that he had no proof and that he had based his allegations on gossip as he was desperate for money.<sup>43</sup> He was sentenced to eighteen months in prison and local sympathy laid firmly with his victims, whether the allegations he made against them were true or not.<sup>44</sup> In the north, the whisper of homosexuality was not enough to affect a man's standing in the community.

Amongst the stories of blackmail, cross-dressing, errant policemen and priests, and murder was the final story that I wish to address from this newspaper.

Under the headline 'The Repentant Photographer', readers were told about Michael Walker, an entrepreneurial young laboratory assistant from Huddersfield.<sup>45</sup> He had been spotted by two railway policemen who had been keeping watch on a toilet at Leeds City station. Inside the toilet, he had been seen passing a note through a hole in a cubicle wall and holding up some photographs. When he was apprehended, he had '26 improper photographs in his possession. Five of these he had obtained from someone at the station that evening'. When the police searched his home, 'Many physique photographs were found.... They were not improper, but might have been used by

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<sup>42</sup> Angus McLaren, *Sexual Blackmail: A Modern History* (Cambridge, MA, 2002), pp.220-238.

<sup>43</sup> *News of the World*, 3 August 1958, p.10..

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 23 November 1958, p.14.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 13 April 1958, p.8.

homosexuals'.<sup>46</sup> The case was not as simple as it appeared. Walker 'had no homosexual tendencies', he had been selling the photographs. He had used all his savings to set up a small photographic studio that specialised in physique pictures. He had initially struggled to get custom but men sent him samples of the kind of photographs that they wanted to buy. In order to maintain his studio, he took these commissions and even travelled to France to get new material. It turned out that his mother, grandmother and fiancée were all aware and supportive of his business venture. Supplying men with pictures of other men was treated as a viable business opportunity. Because of his previous good character and reputation as a hard worker and the support he had from his family, the judge was lenient, only giving a fine of £25 when, as could be seen by the *Boy* trial in Chapter Five, things could have been much worse. What this demonstrated was that there was a lively trade in both physique pictures and gay pornography in Yorkshire in the 1950s and that this was not a great shock or a particular concern to the presiding judge or the women in Walker's family.<sup>47</sup>

What all the above stories have in common is that they did little to normalise sex between men as the Rotherham and Barnsley cases had done. The same cannot be said for the local press where more ordinary homosexual cases were reported on. In these cases, traditionally masculine working men were linked to the idea of sex between men and the often blasé reactions of working people were often reported. The national press had a larger role to play in stigmatising and marginalising homosexuality in the public discourse by associating it with strangeness and bizarre behaviour, with the breaking of trust and corruption.

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

What these stories also demonstrate is that the variety of homosexual life in the north could rival the capital for voyeuristic appeal and the ability to help sell papers.

### *The Manchester Guardian*

As would be expected, the tone of the articles dealing with homosexuality in the *Guardian* was very different from the *News of the World*. It followed a similar pattern in that it generally focussed on cases involving authority figures such as soldiers, priests and teachers but it used these stories to set a moral tone without the element of titillation that accompanied them in the popular press. The effect of this was almost to remove working-class men from the lively narrative of sexual identity that was developing in the public sphere. Where working-class men did appear, it was in the contradictory personas of victim to a dissolute man higher up the social scale or a predatory chancer after money or the potential of blackmail. The majority of articles were based around incidents in the capital or even abroad and, as in the earlier period, tended to focus on issues of policy and law rather than (inadvertently) giving a snapshot of what men experienced as was the case with the local press. This again had the effect of removing ordinary men and local experience from the wider narrative. This was significant because it was during the 1950s that ideas about what it meant to be homosexual were cemented into the cultural landscape, with many of these class biased, metropolitan-centric assumptions still holding currency today.



Although the *Manchester Guardian* set a moralistic tone that often linked homosexuality to child abuse and the abuse of power, it also maintained a humanistic, reasoned view on the subject and a surprising number of articles were printed amongst the laments for the state of the nation's morals and the length of ladies' hemlines. This was a far cry from the silent response to the Wilde trials in the 1890s. A story was reported in April 1941 of a man from Lancashire who sued a police constable for unlawful arrest after he was arrested for a supposed act of indecency.<sup>48</sup> He won his action. In 1943, another story was reported of a man from Bradford who had his conviction for gross indecency quashed due to an error by the police force.<sup>49</sup> These stories were reported during wartime, when restrictions on paper and print meant that newspapers had to think very carefully about what they could and should print. That these stories of triumph against the legal system by men linked to homosexual crimes were published proved that not only was the northern justice system willing to be reasonable about such matters, but that it was considered important to let the public know that such convictions could be challenged.

During 1953 and 1954, the paper was full of articles about the Croft-Cooke case, the Montagu case and interlinked with these the Wolfenden Committee's work. This increased visibility ensured that homosexuality as a social issue and as an identity was pushed to the forefront of public discourse. The end date of this thesis has been chosen partly to highlight the significance of the Wolfenden report to the broader history of homosexuality but also to interrogate the

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<sup>48</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 3 April 1941, p.3.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 14 December 1943, p.3.

meaning of this milestone for ordinary northern men. The research carried out by and for the committee was largely focussed on the capital and emphasised the tensions between what was acceptable both legally and morally both in public and private behaviour.<sup>50</sup> The homosexual men who were willing to speak to the committee and, in the particular case of Peter Wildeblood, the press and public through his memoir *Against the Law* were upper-middle or upper class and definite examples of respectable homosexuals.<sup>51</sup> All other 'disreputable' men, men of the working-classes and those that could be considered disruptive by the authorities were denied the chance to speak.<sup>52</sup> Thereby, the newly acceptable, respectable face of homosexuality was being created in the press. Between 1953 and 1958, *The Guardian* printed 248 articles about the report, many dealing with ideas of legality and sin and many pathologising and medicalising same-sex desire as a condition.<sup>53</sup>

In December 1953, the paper printed the exchange that occurred in the House of Commons when an M.P. from Cheadle asked David Maxwell Fyfe about the number of homosexual offences committed that year. This provided a platform for Fyfe to paint homosexual men as exhibitionist and a danger to the young. He also made a strong distinction between the 'true invert', who should still be imprisoned but allowed medical and psychiatric treatment, and 'pseudo-homosexuals, male prostitutes who come up on these importuning cases and sensationalists who will try any form of excitement and indulgence' who should

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<sup>50</sup> For full analysis of the creation of the report and its impact see: Houlbrook, *Queer London*, pp.254-263; Mort, *Capital Affairs*, pp.139-196.

<sup>51</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, p.255.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> This number is taken from a search of the *Guardian* online. The search term 'Wolfenden' was used.

face prison with no treatment.<sup>54</sup> If Fyfe promoted medical treatment for true homosexual men and strict punishment for men who happened to have sex with men, the opposite seems to have been practised in northern courts. Men with a homosexual identity like Hobson and Goodliffe discussed in Chapter Six were treated far more harshly (whether they agreed to medical treatment or not) than the majority of men who had slept with them without any obvious signs of their preferences. This demonstrates that it was perhaps the transgressions against more traditional notions of restraint, masculinity and privacy rather than different kinds of sex that troubled northern policemen, judges and juries.

By February of 1954, the argument for the legalisation of homosexuality was being reported in great depth. Robert Boothby's call was clearly stated and in it he acknowledged that homosexual men did not solely exist in the capital:

It was increasing steadily, he went on, and it was by no means confined to London. There was in fact a homosexual underground in most of our large cities of disturbing dimensions which was a continuous menace to youth, and we had now reached a situation in which no man with any regard for his reputation would dare to enter a public urinal after dark.<sup>55</sup>

He was referring here to the dubious police methods that had been employed sporadically to catch homosexual men, especially through entrapment in urinals, and he discussed this further for the rest of the article. The (possibly) inadvertent side effect of this statement was to alert any interested men who did not already know that they could find willing partners in urinals. It placed urinals centre stage in the public topography of homosexual life and this connection has lived on ever since.

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<sup>54</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 4 December 1953, p.4.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 20 February 1954, p.12.

Interestingly, this theme of dubious policing was followed up many times during the decade. It has already been seen that there were local concerns regarding this in the inter-war years and these concerns did not disappear. In April of 1954, a prominent article was published questioning policing methods and it painted homosexual men as potential victims of the police and blackmailers.<sup>56</sup> In August, a large article on the Lancashire criminal calendar lamented the 'eight fold increase' in sex crimes since the 1930s.<sup>57</sup> However, it also acknowledged that it was not that more men were having sex with other men, but that police activity had been increased in certain areas with a view to prosecuting such men.<sup>58</sup> This measured attack on police methods during 1954 was rounded off in December with the rare reporting of an ordinary case. In it, a charge of gross indecency made against a man was thrown out of court due to all the police evidence against him being ruled inadmissible. Policing methods had invalidated the evidence and the man was found not guilty. All this was important as it encouraged readers to question the authority of the law and to apply ideas of decency to men charged with homosexual offences.

An extremely unusual case that demonstrated sympathy for homosexual men both from the paper and from local authorities was one that took place in 1953 and highlighted some of the issues that were being raised by the Wolfenden Committee. A man from Huddersfield was tried for eleven offences against school boys at Manchester Assizes. However, this was not a simple case of a

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 29 April 1954, p.14.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 26 August 1954, p.4. Sex crimes here referred to homosexual crimes but also rape, indecency against women etc.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*.

man being held up for corrupting youth - as the case wore on, it became clear that the opposite was true. In November it was reported that Peter Smith was to go to trial but it was also reported that:

Some of the boys in evidence admitted that they had associated with other men in the Miles Platting district of Manchester and had played about a place frequented by men, two of whom had committed similar offences. In an alleged statement to the police, Smith said he first met the boys as he was passing through Manchester and they had pestered him and demanded money from him. "I thought they might go to the police and I had to carry on the association with them".<sup>59</sup>

The trial finished on 4 December and the verdict was reported under the headline 'Boys had been soliciting men'. The judge read from depositions made by six boys aged between ten and twelve and described them as 'repulsive little pests'. It was clear that they had been soliciting men to pick them up, 'almost beseeching them to do so ..... I have no doubt that once they had succeeded they would be prepared to resort to a little blackmail'.<sup>60</sup> Although Smith pleaded guilty, he was only given a £20 fine and the judge seemed reluctant to give even that. He told Smith, 'It is quite clear that you have not in any way corrupted these boys, whose parents will, I hope do something about their conduct'.<sup>61</sup> The emphasis here was on the idea of corruption rather than the sexual acts themselves. Age was not a deciding factor in ideas of who had corrupted whom - the assumption here reflected that made in many cases throughout this study. That if a man was offered sex with other men (or in this case boys), how could he be expected to turn it down?

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 14 November 1953, p.10.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 4 December 1953, p.14.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*.

Strangely, a similar case was tried in Newcastle in 1954. Leslie Stinson was charged with committing gross indecency with three boys aged between fourteen and fifteen. Although he admitted his guilt, he was conditionally discharged. The boys were described as 'not innocent' by the judge who decided to name them and publish their addresses:

A public service would be rendered in this case if the names and addresses of the boys were published. It would be a warning to men that these boys are hanging around public lavatories to tempt them .... [in summing up the judge told the accused] You have not corrupted these boys. If you had, you would have gone to prison for a very long time.<sup>62</sup>

It is astonishing that the judge felt it necessary to warn men about the temptation provided by the boys - the assumption being that should they be accidentally stumbled upon, they would prove irresistible as they had done to Sinson. The *Guardian* chose to preface the article with the line 'Tempted Men' which firmly placed the guilt of the encounter on the boys. During the same Newcastle Assize, seven more men from the same district in Northumberland were tried. All were miners and the offences had been committed with boys and other men but none were imprisoned.<sup>63</sup> Fred Rawes, was charged with three offences with boys and one with a man to which he pleaded guilty but his punishment was a £15 fine. Again, the judge said that the boys involved 'had already been corrupted' and in giving Rawes his fine told him:

You have already spent fourteen days in prison (on remand) and I have to ask myself if prison is likely to cure you of this practice of which I have

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 19 May 1954, p.9.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*.

some doubt. I do not think, myself, perhaps wrongly that the public conscience requires you to go back to prison.....<sup>64</sup>

This judge seems to have had a fairly understanding view of homosexual men and something of an obsession with young boys corrupting older men. One has to wonder if they already knew where to find men to tempt or if they used some entrepreneurial spirit and used Boothby's warning about urinals to their advantage.

### The Local Press

The local press tended to be much more prosaic about homosexual offences and stick to the reporting of local cases. The majority of mentions were restricted to the kind of brief court reporting that had characterised reporting style in the past. On 17 May 1941 readers of the *Sheffield Telegraph and Independent* were told of five men who had been convicted of committing gross indecency. The judge declared 'this gang has to be broken up' referring to the men - all of whom were lower working-class (one was a buffer, two were labourers, one a clerk and one a porter).<sup>65</sup> These men were portrayed as a 'gang', as if they shared a specific vice and this was unacceptable to the court. During the same year however, much leniency was shown at local courts. This could have been a consequence of the war years making such offences seem diminished in importance or it could have been a recognition by the authorities that with wartime conditions came a different set of morals and expectations. In December 1941, Clifford Clarke, a twenty-three year old machine knife grinder

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Sheffield Telegraph and Independent*, 17 May 1941, p.3.

and William Mitchell a twenty-five year old grinder (both from Sheffield) were sentenced to fifteen days in prison for pleading guilty to indecency. In fact, this sentence was the equivalent of immediate release. The men had been out celebrating Clarke's birthday and things had taken an amorous turn. The judge told the court that he had taken a lenient course 'because they were both men of good character on work of national importance'.<sup>66</sup> A similar case occurred later in the same month. Robert Vickers a thirty-three year old power house attendant and Albert Bailey a thirty-three year old ARP worker (again, both from Sheffield) pleaded guilty to indecency.<sup>67</sup> They were given the same sentence - one that equalled immediate release 'on account of the men's good character'. Here was further proof of the importance of the work that a man did and the strength of his character over his sexual preferences.

By the 1950s however, there seems to have been a change in what the local press reported. The ordinary cases showing working-men having sex with working men diminished to be replaced by a majority of cases dealing with child abuse and sex with minors. This of course highlighted a link between homosexuality and child abuse (that was being continually reinforced in the national and particularly the popular press) but also reflected the fact that the number of cases involving children had increased at both northern assize courts. The continuing importance of the legacy of Edward Carpenter to the city of Sheffield and the surrounding area was also highlighted. Even by the 1950s, fans of Carpenter were still attending memorial gatherings and visiting Millthorpe on a kind of pilgrimage. He was remembered as a 'Poet Philosopher'

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 10 December 1941, p.3.



in the local press and the city remained proud of its connection. It seems that although the Barnsley and Rotherham trials were unusual in their scale, they were not unusual in their circumstances. The depositions, case studies and newspaper articles discussed mirror the patterns of work place relationships, casual attitudes towards sex with other men and the importance of good character in determining a man's (or boy's) chances of success in the courtroom.

### The impact of affluence on northern working-class men

If public discourse on homosexuality and the theories of the psychologists and medical profession had little impact on the northern working classes, what was it that changed the patterns of living that allowed some men to have sex with other men almost as a part of ordinary life? Amongst the working-classes, particularly in the industrial north, it had always been material considerations that had caused the biggest shifts in social structure and interaction. Richard Hoggart was not being condescending when he wrote 'Working class people are only rarely interested in theories or movements'.<sup>68</sup> He knew that working people lived their lives in a pragmatic way and often remained unmoved by official lines of thought - either from the government or political parties. One of the most affecting material changes of the twentieth century occurred in the late 1950s with the rise of affluence. The impact of affluence was generally felt by the northern working classes later than in the south but by the end of the 1950s the changes in society were marked. Selina Todd urges caution in generalising too far. Pockets of poverty remained as did individualistic working-class

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<sup>68</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life* (London, 2009), p.88.

identities. At no time was there a 'solid, "normal", unchanging working-class' and poverty retained the ability 'to shape working-class life in the suburbs as well as the inner cities.'<sup>69</sup> However, for many, wages had increased allowing people to afford a better standard of housing and living, the majority of slums had been cleared and millions of people had moved out into council estates or the suburbs, and consumer culture had taken root in a way that allowed the majority of working people to participate to a level that their parents could not have dreamed of. Luxury items such as televisions, radios, fridges, household appliances and even cars were within the grasp of many and, unsurprisingly, people were all too eager to take advantage. This change was reflected in my own family. My grandparents married in 1950 and had my mother in 1954 while living in a room in my grandmother's parent's house (an old terrace in Rotherham). By the end of the 1950s, they had their own three bedroom council house with bathroom, fitted kitchen and front and back garden, a T.V., car and a two week holiday per year. My grandfather was a fireman in a local steelworks.

This focus on the home and the new pleasures that lay within combined with a post-war encouragement of companionate marriage ensured that centuries-old patterns of working-class sociability began to be broken down. Claire Langhamer argues that 'postwar affluence was undoubtedly a central factor in enabling modern domesticity to take hold; new housing stock provided more than simply a location for the home-centred lifestyle, and the memory of war heightened a desire for domestic stability'.<sup>70</sup> The norm for men switched from

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<sup>69</sup> Selina Todd, 'Affluence, Class and Crown Street: Reinvestigating the Post-war Working Class', *Contemporary British History*, 22 (2008), pp.501-518, p.514.

<sup>70</sup> Claire Langhamer, 'The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40:2 (2005), pp.341-362, p.361.

same-sex socialisation outside the home to a home and family centred life (if critics were to be believed - focussed around the T.V.). The impact of this on working-class culture and attitudes towards sexuality is difficult to overstate. Stephen Brooke convincingly argues that due to affluence and changes in patterns of work and housing, 'the sexual landscape of working class life was also changing' and that 'The male and female figures in that landscape may not have had the same meaning as workers, mothers, husbands and wives as they had in previous generations'.<sup>71</sup> He stated that 'the period witnessed a growing complexity of femininity' and that 'Contemporary literature of working women promoted the idea that this was reshaping the public and private spheres of working-class life.'<sup>72</sup> If gender roles and heterosexual sexuality were reconfiguring in this period, it stands to reason that same-sex desire would also have been effected.

This sense of upheaval was documented as it occurred by two scholars of working-class life, Richard Hoggart and Ferdynand Zweig. Hoggart was an academic who had risen from working-class roots in Leeds to become a professor of English at the University of Hull. One of his great passions was documenting working-class culture and in 1957 he published *The Uses of Literacy* which became an instant classic. The first half of the book documented working-class culture and way of life up to the point of affluence and the second part of the book talked about the cultural homogenisation resulting from affluence that, by 1957 was beginning to chip away at this. Hoggart had a unique perspective on the northern working-classes, as he had grown up

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<sup>71</sup> Stephen Brooke, 'Gender and Working-Class Identity in Britain During the 1950s', *Journal of Social History* 34:4 (2001), pp.773-795, p.789.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

amongst them in Leeds during the 1930s and never lost his connection to the area - this meant that he could document much from his own lived experience. Zweig was a sociologist interested in documenting the impact of the material changes brought about by affluence on working-class culture and modes of socialisation. Unlike Hoggart, he did not use the northern working-classes to represent the class as a whole but he did use case studies from many of the areas already discussed in this study. By using the work of both men, it is possible to understand both why the conditions of tolerance in the north that seem so unusual existed and how this was eventually forced to change.

### *The Uses of Literacy*

Hoggart based his observations of the pre-affluence working classes on experiences in the cities of Leeds, Sheffield and Hull. His childhood was extremely hard, he lost his mother at eight years-old and until that point had been living in what was essentially a slum. His grandmother took him in and although his standard of living did not much improve, he had a fairly happy childhood. He made clear throughout the book that he had tried not to romanticise the working-classes but it can be argued that he did not always succeed. Hoggart has been accused of being too dismissive of contemporary mass culture and of being too nostalgic when looking back to the pre-war working-classes. His comparison of the organic culture of the pre-war years with the artificial, mass culture of the post-war can be viewed as a literary device to allow for the obvious juxtaposition of the two halves of the book.<sup>73</sup> However, this does not diminish the value of Hoggart's work. Many of the assumptions that he

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<sup>73</sup> Graeme Turner, *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (3rd edn, London and New York, 2005, first published 1990), pp.38-41.

made about the working-classes and their traditions of tolerance and pragmatism find purchase in the case studies and prosecution statistics used within this thesis. It is also clear that by the end of the period, this was beginning to change. At the very beginning of the book he stated that the people he would be discussing were 'ordinary' people, not the extraordinary 'Jude the Obscure' type of working man who middle-class intellectuals might have met at a political meeting or lecture or the almost comedic working man portrayed by Orwell.<sup>74</sup> Throughout emphasis was placed on the core of working-class attitudes being focussed on 'the personal, the concrete, the local' - people were firmly (and happily) fixed in their own areas and individual towns and cities had their own codes for living.<sup>75</sup> In many cases, this kind of local life narrowed down to a particular set of streets where home, work and leisure could all be found.<sup>76</sup> In her introduction to the text, Lynsey Hanley emphasised the importance of locality and familiarity in forming a worldview.<sup>77</sup> This is reflected in an unusual way in the prosecution records discussed in earlier chapters. The majority of men were arrested for homosexual offences in their local areas and if they were arrested in a town or city centre they tended to actually live there.

The chapter 'Them and Us' details working people's attitudes towards authority and each other.<sup>78</sup> It echoes what has been written by Louise Jackson and Robert Roberts in that even by the 1950s working people held a healthy distrust

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<sup>74</sup> Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, pp.6-7.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, p.23.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, pp.49-50.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, p.x.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, p.57.

of authority which extended particularly towards the police and magistrates.<sup>79</sup>

The idea of 'Them' encompassed the middle and upper-classes, figures like the hated means test men of the depression, social workers and anybody who interfered with the rhythms of working-class life such as the police.<sup>80</sup> It was stated that when working people became involved with the law, they were 'aware of almost nothing of the vast apparatus of authority which has somehow got hold of them and which they cannot understand'.<sup>81</sup> This rings true when situated alongside the evidence of men being more likely to be found not guilty in court if the only evidence against them came from the police and the almost naive way in which many men who were arrested interacted with the police and the magistrates. The 'Us' of the 'Them and Us' binary came from a solid sense of class consciousness and self-respect that was intrinsically linked to work and the ability to cope in the face of what was often extreme hardship.

Respectability came from 'the pride of a skilled workman ..... the integrity of those who have practically nothing except a determination not to allow themselves to be dragged down by circumstances.'<sup>82</sup> Again, this was echoed by the fact that men could retain their good character and even be protected by it in the face of a prosecution if they were good workers. Perhaps, their stoicism in the face of a guilty verdict also enabled bosses, wives and communities to show their support despite the taint of what was supposed to be an unthinkable crime.

Hoggart emphasised the group living of working-class people but cautioned against the use of the word community. Community implied something entirely

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, pp.57-59.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, p.60.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, p.62.

positive and glossed over many of the tensions of working-class life, however this sense of being part of a group allowed people to take a 'We're all in the same boat' attitude.<sup>83</sup> He highlighted the way that everybody called each other 'Luv' and how people were more likely to help others and accept those that were different than in other social groups.<sup>84</sup> To emphasise this, he discussed how bachelors were treated and how this showed the 'tolerance .. extended to established exceptions within the group'.<sup>85</sup> Bachelors were an established part of every area, they might have lived alone or with relatives but they were 'respected'.<sup>86</sup> Their choice not to marry was not seen as unusual or 'selfish, queer or anti-social' and it was accepted that some men were 'born bachelors.... [and] therefore a real part of the neighbourhood'.<sup>87</sup> I presume that by the word 'queer' here Hoggart meant odd. However, it could have been a nod to the probable sexual preference of many of these bachelors. This was at odds with a more common view of bachelors as 'selfish, fussy and crusty or as "milksofs" tied to their mothers, not quite proper men'.<sup>88</sup> Particularly amongst the middle-classes, remaining a bachelor was only seen as respectable for young men. In order to fully grow up and attain adult masculine status, middle-class men were expected to marry and have children.<sup>89</sup> This challenges the notion that there was a homogeneity to working-class life that included pressure to conform to a

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, p.65.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, p.67.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, pp.68-69.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>88</sup> Katherine Holden, *The Shadow of Marriage: Singleness in England, 1914-1960* (Manchester, 2007), pp.8-10.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*.

set of standards that put one on a level footing with the neighbours. Different modes of life outside marriage and children were supported.

This is one of the first mentions of the word 'tolerance' that becomes symbolic throughout the rest of the book. In fact Hoggart suggests that one of the key signifiers of working-class culture was tolerance - that people exercised 'their strong traditional urge to make life intensely human, to humanize it in spite of everything and so to make it, not simply bearable, but positively interesting'.<sup>90</sup> This resulted in a 'live and let live attitude' that was born of shared hardships and a pragmatic take on life born from the worries of day to day living:

So to tolerance, 'living and letting live'; a tolerance bred both from a charity, in that all are in the same lower situation together, and from the larger unidealism which that situation creates. The larger unexpectancy encourages a slowness to moral indignation: after all, it's no good creating problems; there are plenty as it is: 'anything for a quiet life.'<sup>91</sup>

People had genuine worries about health, feeding and clothing themselves and their families and paying the rent - this left little time for worrying about morals and sexual identities. There was a 'mind your own business' attitude towards other people's private lives that sanctioned people to take what little pleasure they could, when they could.<sup>92</sup> This was further emphasised with working-class attitudes towards sex and sexual 'deviancy'.

Hoggart discussed the pragmatic attitude that working-class people had towards sex throughout the book. It was often seen as 'just natural' and not a

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, p.88.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, p.76.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, p.79.



cause for concern.<sup>93</sup> In an evocative passage he documented some phrases that he had overheard being spoken by women in a shop where housewives met to socialise. One stood out in particular ‘Y’ don’t look at the mantelpiece when y’poke the fire’.<sup>94</sup> In this context it meant that a woman did not have to be pretty for a man to have sex with her but it could also be applied to the casual way in which some men seemed to be able to switch the gender of their sexual partners. The aim was to get pleasure and pleasure was given a ‘high priority’ in most people’s lives.<sup>95</sup> Sex was a (usually free) source of pleasure and people were not judged for getting it where they could find it. Hoggart recalled prostitutes living on his street and remembered that they were accepted members of the community.<sup>96</sup> The gap between how working-class people were affected by theory and practice was highlighted by the fact that most people found it difficult to talk about sex and had little knowledge of the language of sex but were *having* sex frequently.<sup>97</sup> This echoes the interviews of Szreter and Fisher and *Tales From Out in the City* where people pleaded sexual ignorance but discussed having sexual experience. The ‘central place of sense-flooding pleasure in working-class life: sex where and when it can be snatched, ferocious home-fires and “tasty” food’ was emphasised and taken to show that a mild form of hedonism was inherent amongst the working-classes.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, p.xviii.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, p.17.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, p.115.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, pp.79-80. Although Hoggart has been accused of misogyny in his writing about working-class women, particularly in his representations of women as wives and mothers, see Brooke, ‘Gender and Working-Class Identity’.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, p.81.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, p.xvii.

Hoggart feared that advertisers and the publishers of new magazines and 'sex and crime' books would be able to take advantage of this contradictory acceptance of and ignorance regarding sex. He believed that the working-classes could thus be manipulated by advertisers into losing many of these old ways of life by buying completely into consumer society. The second half of the book was less of a lament and more of a prophecy of how mass culture would erode many of the described attitudes and ways of living. Affluence would mean that the tolerance and sense of class and place born of shared hardship and experience would slowly disappear. Locality was being eroded by mass national culture in the form of magazines, popular music and films. Of course, these were not new cultural phenomena but the way that they were sold and received in the 1950s was. As the younger generation began to identify with pop stars and the stories in their magazines more than with their class and communities - ties of morality, sociability and acceptance were broken down. Hoggart was careful to point out how slow this process would be in the north and he was correct. Although changes became obvious in his own observations and in the prosecutions of men discussed in this study, it has been argued that it was not until the 1970s that the full effects of Hoggart's predictions came to fruition.<sup>99</sup>

### The research of Ferdynand Zweig

In 1961, Ferdynand Zweig published *The Worker in an Affluent Society*. It was based on studies that took place at the end of the 1950s at five different 'works', two of which were steelworks in the north - in Sheffield and Cumbria. The purpose of the study was to examine the impact of affluence on working men

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<sup>99</sup> Dominic Sandbrook, *State of Emergency: The Way We Were: Britain, 1970-1974* (London, 2010), pp.15-55.

(and their families) in these traditionally masculine jobs. In some ways it was a continuation of *The Equipment of the Workers* as it attempted to find out how the economic situation had affected all parts of men's lives: in work, at home and at leisure. Zweig attempted to look at cultural, material and emotional changes that had taken place and offered explanations for why they had occurred. The book can be seen as the follow up to 1952 study *The British Worker* which examined working men in the period immediately prior to affluence but the purpose of *The Worker in an Affluent Society* was to highlight the new tendencies that Zweig found amongst his subjects.

One of the greatest shifts that Zweig noticed was regarding happiness within marriages. If the 1950 survey mentioned in Chapter Six stated that the majority of working-class people were unhappy in their marriages, by the end of the decade Zweig reported the opposite. On the whole, both the men and women interviewed in his study claimed to be happy and he put this down to the material benefits of affluence.<sup>100</sup> Unhappiness often stemmed from money worries, too many children, uncomfortable homes and the strains of making ends meet.<sup>101</sup> Better wages and cheaper consumer goods meant that money was on the whole less tight, families became smaller and it was easier to create a comfortable home. Wives were more likely to work and have a limited independence which took the pressure off marital relationships and televisions

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<sup>100</sup> Ferdynand Zweig, *The Worker in an Affluent Society* (London, 1961), p.29. In a recent article, Claire Langhamer also argues that affluence created a context where 'love could eclipse pragmatism in the making of everyday marriages'. Claire Langhamer, 'Love, Selfhood and Authenticity in Post-War Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, 9:2 (2012), pp.277-297, p.292. This was emphasised by Pat Thane's introduction to the article which states that in times of affluence, people could prioritise love in the search for a partner rather than the old priorities of who would make a 'good breadwinner or homemaker'. Pat Thane, 'Introduction: Exploring Post-War Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, 9:2 (2012), pp.271-275, p.273.

<sup>101</sup> Zweig, *The Worker in an Affluent Society*, p.30.

and cars allowed an escape from the drudgery of everyday life.<sup>102</sup> This new focus on a comfortable, family home helped to exacerbate the 'decline in heavy drinking' that had occurred by the end of the 1950s and of course helped to improve marital harmony.<sup>103</sup> Zweig felt that he was witnessing 'a considerable social change in husband-wife relationships in the working classes' and this proved to be the centre of the wider social change that saw single sex socialising at the pub or corner shop become spousal and familial socialising within the boundaries of the home.<sup>104</sup>

Like Hoggart, Zweig felt that affluence deeply affected the old ties and attitudes of working-class life:

.... this is perhaps the most significant development - for him to loosen the sense of identity with his own class, to which he is bound no longer by the common links of hardships, handicaps and injustices...<sup>105</sup>

However, it was documented that even by the late 1950s the men in the northern steelworks still took a great sense of pride and identity from their work.<sup>106</sup> There was also a sense of comradeship that these men valued. This was however, unique to the steelworkers. In the other factories represented, the majority of men said they took nothing from work but money and therefore their pride was linked to that money and what it could buy.<sup>107</sup> This was a demonstration of the fact that traditional attitudes were slow to die amongst the

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p.69.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p.76.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

industries of the northern working classes. Although comradeship was valued, a big change had occurred regarding how much time men spent with their mates. Workmates were still held in very high regard within the workplace but were held separate from home life. Zweig described this as 'a widening of contacts but at the same time with a definite decline in intensity'.<sup>108</sup> What he meant by this was that (for married men at least) leisure time was no longer spent with mates but with wives and children. A criticism of Zweig is that he overstated the early impact of affluence. One of the key rebuttals of Zweig's theories came from John Goldthorpe. In the conclusion to his study it was argued that even by the late 1960s, many elements of working-class culture remained as they had for decades and the fact that working people were better off did not always lead to 'embourgeoisement' and the aping of middle-class sociability and culture.<sup>109</sup> This must be taken into account when using Zweig's research but in terms of the north, much of what he argued seems correct if not slightly premature as cultural and educational differences limited the impact of affluence to some extent. However, if one compares Zweig's northern case studies to those in *The Equipment of the Worker* the changes in sociability as well as the similarities are clear to see.

Where the *Equipment of the Workers* documented that the majority of men's hobbies and pastimes took place outside the home (either with mates or alone) Zweig's survey noted a marked change. The most popular hobbies named by men were gardening, D.I.Y., being at home with the family and watching the T.V. In Sheffield particularly, outdoors pursuits were popular amongst a minority but

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, p.83.

<sup>109</sup> John Goldthorpe et al., *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure* (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 157-165.

the switch to a home-focussed social life was clear. The impact of the T.V. and the potential of owning a car were highlighted as particular forms of leisure that almost defied class.<sup>110</sup> This change emphasised the impact that affluence had on changing notions of public and private and what was acceptable and desirable in both realms. However, Zweig noted that this home focus was dependent on a man's stage of life. As mentioned, when a man was single, he was more likely to spend his free time with his mates. On marriage and raising a family, this would generally stop, however when a man entered his thirties and forties and his children were grown he would be more likely to look 'for new outside interests to refresh themselves in new relationships'.<sup>111</sup> This sense of life cycle is reflected in the ages of the men prosecuted for homosexual offences throughout the period of this study. On the whole they were in their early twenties or late thirties and over (particularly the married men).

Although the state of marriage seemed to have improved, the decision to get married was still not always based solely on love. Whereas in the thirties marriage could be delayed by a lack of funds to set up home, by the late 1950s the choice seemed to have been between marriage and consumer goods. One man told Zweig, 'I was courting and should have been married by now but instead I bought a car'.<sup>112</sup> He thought that this was a joke at first but heard variations of the same story so many times (for example 'I can't afford both a car and a wife, so I drifted away from my girl') that he realised this was a very real choice that many single men were then making.<sup>113</sup> Similar choices were

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<sup>110</sup> Zweig, *The Worker in an Affluent Society*, pp.96-110.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, p.118.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, p.155.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*.

being made between holidays and marriage. A surprising number of young men told Zweig of their intention to remain single, particularly those who told him 'I see how unhappy my pals are who married'.<sup>114</sup> Some even went as far as to declare their lack of interest in women and sexual relations with them.<sup>115</sup> They were still able to find fulfillment (and perhaps more) with their pals and the homosocial lifestyle that they could live as a single man. Due to the changes in marital expectations outlined above, men who felt like this could have been forced to make a choice between this and marriage whereas in earlier periods, they could have married and still lived an almost single life outside the home. These men formed a significant minority and suffered no loss in social standing due to their choices; this reflects Hoggart's own thoughts on bachelors and their place in working-class communities.

In his summary of the survey 'A New Mode of Life and a New Ethos', Zweig summarised the changes that affluence was beginning to inflict on working-class lives:

The picture of the working man which emerges from this study presents tendencies which are characteristic of the fully employed welfare state, with all the gadgets of the new age. These tendencies are still in progress, they mark the direction rather than completion of the trend. They are battling against the older forces of the traditional code, ethos and mode of living, and against strong group resistance all round. The battle is very fierce but the ascendance of the new forces can hardly be disputed.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, p.156.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, p.160.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, p.205.

Here, Zweig noted that the changes he was discussing were not all-encompassing and would take many years to develop, particularly in the northern towns where the steel workers and miners still retained such a traditional view of their work and its impact on their identity. He reiterated that the biggest changes were occurring in the security mindedness of working men, the focus on the home and the distancing from mates that married men seemed to partake in, the insularisation of working-class families (created by changes in living from back-to-backs to council estates) and the new acquisitiveness that was encouraged by an engagement with consumer culture. All this meant that:

There are deep changes not only in the mode of living but also in the code and ethos of the class as a whole. Large sections of the working classes are on the move, not only to higher standards of living, but to new standards of values and conduct and new social consciousness. The impact of these changes on social, political and economic life can hardly be foreseen. They are the augury of a new age, a new social horizon which is unfolding before our very eyes.<sup>117</sup>

Zweig made it clear that real, material changes had occurred at the end of the 1950s, both to working people's standards of living and the culture in which they lived. In the north, these changes would continue slowly throughout the 1960s and well into the 1970s.

## Conclusion

Hoggart's and Zweig's approaches were very different but they both came to similar conclusions - that affluence had the power to homogenise north and south and to undermine the distinctiveness of working-class culture. It is not a case of trying to decide whether the impact of affluence on the northern working

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<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, p.212.



classes was positive (it was - people were generally able to live above the poverty line and enjoy a better quality of life) or negative (it was - as old traditions of tolerance and male affection gradually disappeared) but a case of acknowledging the impact of affluence as a significant moment in the history of working-class life and sexuality. Affluence was not a theory or discourse, it was a very real assault on both ingrained poverty, unemployment and the cultural landscape of the north. These changes combined with the steadily increasing press obsession with sexuality and identity ensured that by the end of the decade men were not able to treat sex with other men as casually as they had done previously. If people were less tolerant (thus more likely to report unusual sexual activity) and the police were more aware then it is unsurprising that the number of prosecutions rose so dramatically. This upward trend continued alongside the impact of affluence until by the 1970s when most northern working families were comparatively well off the north had begun to gain a reputation for intolerance and homophobia.<sup>118</sup> The legalisation of homosexual acts in 1967 allowed men who had sex with other men to be visible and ironically this visibility which manifested itself in commercial venues in even the smallest northern towns helped to fuel the homophobia of later decades. Northern working people had been tolerant to what others did behind closed doors - it was the flaunting of private behaviour rather than the behaviour itself that would decide how homosexuality would be perceived in the later decades of the twentieth century.

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<sup>118</sup> Jane Mansfield, 'The Brute-Hero: The 1950s and Echoes of the North', *Literature and History*, 19:1 (2010), pp. 34-49. Mansfield argues that the Angry Young Men and northern-realist works of the 1950s and 1960s put the the image of the northern, working-class brute-hero into the public consciousness. The protagonists of books such as *This Sporting Life* (1960), *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* (1960) and *Room at the Top* (1959), all of which were made into extremely popular films, were working-class, northern, sexist and often showed traces of homophobia - as did other characters in their communities.



## **Chapter Eight: Conclusion**

The idea for this thesis began over a decade ago after a conversation with my grandparents. I wanted to know how they had met and fallen in love. It was the late 1940s and my grandfather, who was on leave from the marines where he was doing his national service, went to a local dance hall. My grandmother was there on the arm of his best friend Alf but by the end of the night, they were well on their way to becoming an item. I was a little shocked by this, 'didn't Alf mind?' I asked. 'No', my grandfather replied, 'Alf was a puff and your grandmother was his pretend girlfriend. He was happy that we liked each other.' After asking them to elaborate further I found out that my grandparents' circle of friends (all working-class and from Rotherham) knew about Alf and even had other gay friends. As a teenager, I had never seen my grandparents as being particularly liberal, but they certainly did not care about the unusual bedroom habits of their friends when they were younger. This casual acceptance was replicated when they met my own gay friends over the following years. The story stuck with me but I did not consider the wider implications of it for many years.

On reading the numerous histories of sexuality referenced throughout this thesis, it became apparent that either my grandparents were *very* unusual or more work had to be done in understanding the experiences of working-class northerners who desired their own sex. My grandparents were not unusual, their fathers had backgrounds in the steel industry, neither had been to grammar school or university and both came from traditionally respectable homes. And yet, my grandfather was unfazed by having a gay best friend and my

grandmother colluded with Alf to help him make his life easier and even to meet men. Alf was able to live as open a life as possible in a time when homosexuality was illegal and retain a large and supportive group of friends. How did this happen in the small and often conservative town where I grew up? The purpose of this thesis was to attempt to answer that question.

If this story sowed seeds in my mind of a level of tolerance towards sexual difference in the north, the reaction to my research at conferences has confirmed that most people do not have the same impression. One of the first things that academic colleagues ask after I have given a paper that has demonstrated the potential fluidity of working-class sexuality or unexpected levels of tolerance in the north is 'what went wrong then?'. Other variations of this question are 'when did this change?' and even 'but hasn't the north been a terrible place for gay people to live?'. There seems to be an assumption by many both historically or in contemporary life that either the north presents few opportunities for gay people to live open and fulfilled lives or that homophobia is rife. Reflecting on these assumptions has been part of the challenge of completing this thesis. Although in the current historical record it seems like men who had sex with other men in the north only existed rarely and in isolation as compared to the rich life that could be led in the capital, this was not the case. Many men were able to live lives that were just as fulfilled, albeit different to those in the capital. The more low-key lifestyles of many northern men can be taken as evidence of a discomfort with both their sexual preference and the area that they lived but it is also possible that it demonstrates a particularly northern understanding of sexuality. Many life stories of northern gay men that have been collected over the years convey narratives of escape from a dreary,

oppressive and often homophobic north to the bright lights and opportunity of an inclusive London.<sup>1</sup> However, many of these men were not the ordinary men discussed in this thesis. They were often artists, dancers and writers or were heavily politicised. Many of them wanted to wear their sexual identity as a badge to mark themselves out as different and it was perhaps this expression of their sexuality that made it impossible for them to find happiness in the north.

This thesis demonstrates that the north saw itself as distinct from London and the independence of the local press and police forces confirm this. The coverage of the Wilde trials discussed in Chapter Two was a clear indicator that the opinions of the press in northern towns and cities would not be swayed by those in the capital. The attitude of northern police forces throughout the period also shows that there was little communication with the Met and that it was the preserve of individual forces to decide how (and if) to tackle homosexuality. If homosexuality was viewed as a social problem by many in authority, this was not the case in the north. In fact the unconcerned attitude towards the issue shown by many of the men, employers, wives, policemen and juries considered in this thesis is striking. It seems that amongst worries about housing, work, fighting more obvious crime and the threat of poverty that many northerners really did not care very much at all.

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<sup>1</sup> For examples of this see: Bob Cant & Susan Hemmings (eds), *Radical Records: Thirty Years of Lesbian and Gay History* (London, 1988); Hall Carpenter Archives Gay Men's Oral History Group, *Walking After Midnight: Gay Men's Life Stories* (London, 1989); Alkarim Jivani, *It's Not Unusual: A History of Lesbian and Gay Britain in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1997); National Lesbian and Gay Survey, *Proust, Cole Porter, Michelangelo, Marc Almond and me: Writings by Gay Men on Their Lives and Lifestyles* (London, 1993); *Tales From Out in the City: An Anthology of Memories* (Manchester, 2009); Jeffrey Weeks and Kevin Porter (eds), *Between the Acts: Lives of Homosexual Men 1885-1967* (London, 1998).

The key to understanding how working-class men who desired other men experienced their life in the north lies in understanding how they viewed their identity as men. In the north, industrialisation had created a set of working conditions that gave men the opportunity to demonstrate their masculinity on a daily basis. Traditional industries such as mining and steel working expanded to allow entire towns and cities to be taken over. In doing such dirty, dangerous but often skilled and well-paid jobs, men were able to feel secure in their place as men and take pride in the job that they did. Chapter Seven demonstrates that even by the late 1950s, men in these traditional industries were able to take pride and a sense of identity from their work when their counterparts in factories and the car industry took only money. This focus on work as the central facet of a man's identity ensured that his competence at his job helped give him good character. Good character was essential in deciding a man's place in his community and amongst his mates. If a man was a good worker and a good friend many other issues could be overlooked. In the discussion of *The Equipment of the Workers* in Chapter Five, it is clear that effeminacy, ill-health and a preference for 'unmanly' pursuits could be overlooked in deciding on the popularity and position of a man if he was responsible, reliable and hard working in the workplace. Chapters Five and Six confirm that if a man was seen as a good worker, having sex with another man was not always enough to challenge his good character in the eyes of his family, employer or even the police.

What is highlighted throughout the thesis is the casual nature of many of the relationships between men. The evidence given in Chapter Three regarding the Carpenter circle and in Chapters Six and Seven regarding the South Yorkshire

trials and the deposition files show that working-class sexuality could be extremely fluid. The majority of men discussed worked in traditionally masculine roles and were often married but seemed to be able to move between sex and friendship with other men (often their workmates) fairly easily. This casual shifting of emotional and physical relationships was highlighted in the Rotherham trial as being particularly dangerous because if these men were doing it, how many others were too? The prosecutor's worry reflected the assumption made by Carpenter's nemesis O'Brien and in most other cases discussed that *all* men were open to desiring other men if the right temptation came along. On some occasions, if the temptation was too strong (as in the cases of Hobson or Goodliffe or the predatory urchins discussed in Chapter Seven) men were not blamed for taking such opportunities. This assumption is almost unthinkable now when ideas on sexuality and identity are so fixed but it seems like it was common currency during the period of this thesis and this could only have been the case if the fluidity demonstrated here was a fact of life.

The social and sexual landscape of northern working men during the period could have been responsible for much of this attitude. As discussed in Chapters Three and Seven, much of the north was a masculine environment and amongst working-class communities, even into the 1950s, men and women often socialised separately. There was much opportunity to socialise with the opposite sex in dance halls, cinemas and the streets but this seems to have been done with the purpose of meeting a girl/boyfriend or sex partner. Same-sex friendship was the norm for spending leisure time and discussing important matters and it is demonstrated throughout the thesis that before affluence

allowed love to become a priority in marriage, many people took emotional support and comfort from their friends rather than their partner. Male friendship often included physical affection and working men would have been used to each other's bodies. Workplace cultures in traditional industry revolved around physical horseplay and casual touching. The example of a textile mill in Hull demonstrates this, 'Outwardly all was friendly and intensely physical in an uninhibited way. Men touched each other very readily: all over there were mock fights and practical jokes.... In quiet conversation the urge was to touch, draw aside by an elbow, rest a hand on a shoulder or simply to lean close.'<sup>2</sup> This observation sounds almost romantic in nature. Much gossip and socialising took place in works toilets which became a hub for friends to meet on work time.<sup>3</sup> Another thing that quickly became apparent to observers such as Zweig was the prevalence of 'sexual play' in industrial workplaces including 'Mock-kissing and mock-embracing together with obvious sexual gestures'.<sup>4</sup> It is no wonder that this kind of behaviour sometimes blended seamlessly into actual sexual relationships and that these often happened in the workplace or workplace toilets. This kind of affectionate, at times eroticised, masculine culture was entirely separate to home and family.

Such an environment began to break down in the 1960s and 1970s. Many more women entered traditionally male industrial jobs and this altered the atmosphere and culture of the workplace. My own parents started working at a Sheffield steelworks in the early 1970s and by this time the 'horseplay' and sexualised

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<sup>2</sup> Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures, England 1918-1951* (Oxford and New York, 2000, first published 1998), p.129.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p.130.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*.



behaviour was centred around women - but not in the way that would be assumed. In this particular steelworks female crane drivers were the scourge of the works and they initiated new male employees by grabbing them, pulling down their trousers and rubbing oil on their genitals. This kind of female-centric hazing during the 1960s and 1970s is also invoked in a new collection of oral histories by David Hall. In the chapter 'Men of Steel', men often recalled being more frightened of some of the women at work than the men that had been there for years.<sup>5</sup> My parents were both teenagers when they began work at Hadfields but recall the men on the shop floor being kind and respectful and the women being terrifying. My father still works in a steelworks and by the 1980s any kind of disruptive behaviour was frowned upon in the workplace. A further reason for the cessation of male/male physicality can be linked to the increasing visibility of homosexuality as a viable sexual identity in the aftermath of Wolfenden and then decriminalisation. The kind of behaviour described above could no longer be perceived as 'innocent' or without meaning. It had become an indicator of sexual preference.

Chapter Seven discusses *The Uses of Literacy* and Hoggart's theory that much of the northern working-class attitude to life was founded on an idea of tolerance. This tolerance was based on shared hardships, a distrust of authority, a respect for the individual and an acceptance that pleasure should be taken when possible - as long as no one was hurt in the process. Although Hoggart has been accused of romanticising the working-classes and placing too much emphasis on this idea, the evidence in this thesis suggests that he was correct.

Local men's reactions to George Merrill's advances demonstrated more

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<sup>5</sup> David Hall, *Working Lives: The Forgotten Voices of Britain's Post-War Working Class* (London, 2012), pp.215-270.

tolerance that he would possibly have received today. In the Altrincham and South Yorkshire trials it became clear that in some cases, men's fiancées and wives were able to accept that their partners had had sex with other men. In both trials there was evidence that mothers had known of and even facilitated their son's relationships with other men. Both *The Equipment of the Workers* and *The Worker in an Affluent Society* demonstrated that men could choose to not have relationships with women and still retain their position in society. Working-class ideas of respectability and relationships were clearly not fixed. Many of the examples in this thesis show a willingness to take the many aspects of a person's character into consideration before deciding on their worth.

However, this tolerance had limits and those limits were linked to how a man viewed his identity. This is nicely illustrated in the case of Nella Last and her son Clifford. From reading Nella's diaries, it is clear that Cliff preferred men.<sup>6</sup> She wrote of him liking to sew and make things, of the long walks he took and sleepovers he had with special men friends and that he 'never was the marrying type'.<sup>7</sup> She and her husband were happy to let this continue, often under their roof until Cliff made it explicit and came out to them. After this point Cliff felt that his family 'found it hard to accept his sexuality' and he moved to Australia to start a new life.<sup>8</sup> Cliff was sure of his sexuality from an early age and he could not find fulfillment in the kind of unspoken gay life available to him in Barrow.

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Broad and Suzie Fleming (eds), *Nella Last's War: The Second World War Diaries of Housewife, 49* (London, 2006, first published 1981); Patricia and Robert Malcolmson (eds), *Nella Last's Peace: The Post-War Diaries of Housewife 49* (London, 2008); Patricia and Robert Malcolmson (eds), *Nella Last in the 1950s* (London, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Patricia and Robert Malcolmson (eds), *Nella Last's Peace*, p.288.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

However, Nella and her husband seem to have been unfazed by his preferences until he articulated them and they became his identity. While same-sex desire remained just another part of sexual experience it was tolerable for many in working-class communities. When it became the main focus of a man's selfhood and therefore a challenge to traditional modes of thinking it was often not.

The two main changes that disrupted notions of tolerance and what was acceptable in notions of working-class masculine sociability were the impact of affluence and the increased visibility of homosexuality which culminated in decriminalisation. The decriminalisation of homosexual acts redrew the framework of acceptable masculinity and sexual behaviour in the north. The Wolfenden report and the campaigns for and against decriminalisation brought the notion of a specific homosexual identity to the forefront of popular discourse. Popular films such as *Victim* and *A Taste of Honey* made homosexuality a subject that could not be ignored. Homosexuals were portrayed as a specific type and it seems unlikely that most men could have indulged in same-sex encounters without having to think about this and what it meant to them as a man and to their sexual identity. The popular media succeeded where the sexologists failed in reaching ordinary men and influencing their views. Frank Mort has argued that Wolfenden announced 'a new ethic of regulation, carefully separating the sexual public from the sexual private' and it is ironic that this new, public definition of something that had existed among the northern working-classes for decades was to play a part in changing those practices for good.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: The Making of the Permissive Society* (New Haven and London, 2010), p.195.

Affluence had a different but no less important impact on shaping men's identities. The many studies done on northern working men throughout the 1950s and 1960s indicated that a shift had begun to take place in the workplace. For many men, their selfhood became linked to how much they could earn rather than the nature of their work. Higher earnings began to allow working people to participate in consumer culture, marry when and whom they wanted and create comfortable, private home lives. This moved the emotional focus from the workplace and friends to the home and family. If Wolfenden had made distinctions between public and private in the sexual realm, a further consequence of affluence was a changed understanding of public and private in other aspects of social life. Work became a way to pay for a lifestyle that became synonymous with success and self-respect. The expectation of a comfortable home and happy marriage ensured that old patterns of being married but essentially living a single life became untenable. Therefore, seeking sexual release with workmates and affairs with men alongside a heterosexual identity became increasingly difficult. These two social changes forced men to make decisions about their sexuality and how they chose to live their lives. In effect, for the first time, they were forced to choose an identity based around their sexuality and in doing so homosexual men were further marginalised.

This thesis demonstrates that during the period of study, working men in the north of England had a surprising number of options when deciding how to live their sexual and emotional lives. The significant minority of men who desired other men were, on the whole, able to act on their desires with little interference from the local community or the authorities. Perhaps more importantly, they

seem to have been able to do so without questioning their masculine status and their role as workers and members of their communities and this was linked to their sense of both class and the region in which they lived. Of course, as has been addressed in previous chapters, the north was not a homogenous mass and regional differences were great. Liverpool and Manchester had the most in common with London and this was particularly highlighted by the details of the Altrincham trial. Hoggart and Zweig's version of the northern working man was rooted firmly amongst the industries of Yorkshire and it was here that old traditions and modes of living lasted the longest. Although the impact of affluence and decriminalisation had countless positive effects both for working people in general and men who desired other men specifically, it must be acknowledged that because of that impact, a way of life and understanding the world was irrevocably altered. A world that encouraged men to be gay, straight, bisexual and later queer often had no place for many of the men discussed in this thesis and it is the purpose of this thesis to remind the world that they existed.



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