

'SOMETHING THAT RIT BETTER'

Working-class Women, Domesticity and 'Respectability' 1919-
1939

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ABSTRACT

Although the inter-war years witnessed massive unemployment in areas of industrial decline, for those in regular work wages were rising. This fact plus state provision of working-class housing, an increase in the number of cheap houses for owner-occupation and smaller families made it possible for many working-class families to experience a form of domesticity greatly improved from their parents. This research is concerned to explore how improved living conditions influenced the ways in which working-class women experienced their role as wives and mothers.

In order to illuminate the tension between continuity and change in domestic roles I have chosen an approach which focuses on two interrelated themes - housing and 'respectability'. Ideologies of domesticity were reinforced and intensified during the inter-war period and working-class values of 'respectability' were closely identified with the home and its maintenance. Thus the increasing importance of the house as a measure of status makes it an important variable in any discussion of women's social identity.

This study draws on a series of interviews with women who lived in suburban York and Birmingham between the wars. The common factor linking the interviewees is that they all lived

in some form of newly provided housing, either for owner-occupation or a municipal council house and all perceived themselves as belonging to that sector of the working-class characterised as 'respectable'. Analysis of the interview material allows an examination of the part played by these women in maintaining this self-image and its importance for the family as a whole. It also allows for delineation of the variety of cultural perceptions which distinguished the 'respectable' from the 'rough' in terms of family size, childrearing practices, housewifely habits, attitudes towards drinking and the accepted roles of husbands, wives and children.

The thesis also assesses the benefits to women of commitment to values of 'respectability' and concludes that the price may have been to reinforce women's social identity as constrained to a single sphere - the home.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen a considerable body of research on the family life of urban working-class women in the early twentieth century. However, whilst such research has provided invaluable insights into the ways in which domesticity was experienced, it has, for the most part, neglected two important issues. The first is the fact that urban working-class women, like their male counterparts, were never the homogenous group assumed by many historians. Booth and Rowntree in their late nineteenth century surveys subdivided the working-class according to economic circumstances, using a series of categories to distinguish between those living in abject poverty and those experiencing relative prosperity. Such divisions were reinforced by cultural and environmental factors so that both middle-class observers and the working-class themselves could confidently distinguish between the 'respectable' poor and the 'rough' or 'residuum'. Moreover, such divisions were never static, as Rowntree's findings on life-cycle poverty revealed. Families in his relatively prosperous Class E could as easily descend into the poverty of Class A or B through unemployment, ill-health, the burden of extra mouths to feed or in old age. The cultural imperatives of 'respectability' were a bastion against being labelled as 'rough' at such times of economic crisis, and a potent means

ERRATUM

Please note that the sentence beginning 'Neither have women's history and feminist history....' on page 2 should read

'Neither have researchers involved in women's history and feminist history

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and thus the role of women as wives and mothers in maintaining 'respectability'. Neither have women's history and feminist history explored in any detail the effects of this commitment to 'respectability' on the experience of working-class women. Although the inter-war years witnessed massive unemployment in areas of industrial stagnation, for those in regular work wages were rising. This fact plus state provision of working-class housing and an increase in the number of cheap houses for owner-occupation made it possible for many working-class families to maintain and consolidate their 'respectable' status. In such circumstances women's domestic role became increasingly significant and complex and it is the purpose of this thesis to explore that significance in the context of such social and economic changes.

The second issue is the fact that from the early twentieth century onwards many working-class families lived in suburban areas. Most histories of urban women have concentrated on those living in central or industrial areas. The advent of council housing and the private building programmes of the twenties and thirties meant that suburbia was no longer the exclusive territory of the middle-classes although the term

of retaining self-respect and dignity in the face of financial insecurity. Historians concerned with such distinctions have stressed the male occupational role, emphasising wage rates and the status of skilled work but have neglected the cultural distinctions which, for the most part, focused on domesticity and thus the role of women as wives and mothers in maintaining 'respectability'. Neither have women's history and feminist history explored in any detail the effects of this commitment to 'respectability' on the experience of working-class women. Although the inter-war years witnessed massive unemployment in areas of industrial stagnation, for those in regular work wages were rising. This fact plus state provision of working-class housing and an increase in the number of cheap houses for owner-occupation made it possible for many working-class families to maintain and consolidate their 'respectable' status. In such circumstances women's domestic role became increasingly significant and complex and it is the purpose of this thesis to explore that significance in the context of such social and economic changes.

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suburban was often (and still is) used to denote a cluster of middle-class values associated with spurious gentility and materialism. Indeed academic interest in working-class suburbanites in the late fifties and sixties stemmed in part from a dislike of so-called suburban values and a commitment to arguing for alternative forms of housing at a time when large out-of-town estates were seen as the solution to housing problems. This generalised dislike of suburbia and its association with the middle-class, in particular the lower-middle-class, have led to a neglect of those working-class families who did inhabit suburban areas. The expansion of the suburbs of all cities and towns from the late nineteenth century onwards meant that, even before the development of council estates and cheap speculative building, there were rooms and small villas to rent for those working-class families who could afford them in the suburbs. The move away from industrial centres and established street communities began in the late nineteenth century for the families of skilled artisans. It was to gather momentum in the inter-war years with the expansion of the building industry and the establishment of housing as a priority on the political agenda for social reform.

This study examines a small group of suburban working-class women and their role in the home during the period between the two world wars. It draws on a series of interviews with women who lived in York and Birmingham at this time and will also

look at prescriptive literature and official policies to suggest the ideals and models of womanhood being offered. The common factor linking the interviewees is that they all lived in some form of newly provided housing, either a small privately built semi-detached or a local authority council house and were the first generation of women to benefit from state concern with working-class housing. Furthermore and perhaps most importantly, the group of women interviewed perceived themselves as belonging to that sector of the working-class characterised as 'respectable' often as a consequence of their improved housing conditions. I intend to examine the part played by these women in maintaining this self-image, its importance for the family as a whole and the effect of improved housing on women's perceptions of 'respectability'.

One of the issues I want to raise then is the relation between 'respectability' and housing and the ways in which this relationship effected the domestic role of working-class women. However, I was also concerned to set the empirical data collected from interviews alongside theoretical models of the modern family which claim that a self-sufficient, two generational, child-centred family is the primary form characteristic of a highly industrialised society. (1) I make no claim to a sociological critique of such theories, rather that my evidence is useful for extending our knowledge of the variety of forms encompassed by the term family which have

rendered such descriptions as modern or nuclear increasingly unhelpful. It may be more accurate to speak of the privatised family although this, as I shall show, is not without its ambiguities. Nevertheless, the housing policies and designs of the twenties and thirties emphasised the household's self-sufficiency and containment rather than its connection with the wider community. Individual bathrooms replaced public bathing facilities, washing facilities were provided indoors rather than in the communal washhouses of the back-to-backs and courts, and hedges, gates and gardens stressed the family's separation from neighbours and its removal from the collectivity of the older street communities. Privacy and 'respectability' went hand in hand and ensured improved material conditions for many working-class women. Yet, I would suggest there was a price; reserve, restraint and self-sufficiency, the hallmarks of the 'respectable' wife and mother, meant a loss of intimacy with other women and a certain emotional detachment from husbands and children.

Those, like Elizabeth Roberts, Lynn Jamieson and Ellen Ross, concerned to recover the lives of working-class women have to a greater or lesser extent drawn on the techniques of oral history in consequence of the paucity of written and documentary sources for such study. (2) The need to collect such information while it is still available has led to a concentration on the late Victorian and Edwardian period. As a result the inter-war years have tended to be ignored, with

the Second World War being seen as the point of change. Whilst I would not deny that changing employment patterns, greater affluence and accessibility to birth control had far-reaching consequences for women's lives in general in the post-war era, I would argue that subtle changes were taking place in the twenties and thirties. The move towards the greater privatisation of family life, slowly rising standards of living for those in work, and improved housing consolidated the status of the working-class housewife and made the cosy domesticity prescribed by an expanding market in women's magazines increasingly attainable, at least in theory, down the social scale. At the same time I want to draw attention to those elements of 'traditional' working-class family life which remained alongside emerging patterns and which make it untenable to argue that values of 'respectability' were simply the diffusion of middle-class ideals.

Sociological theories of the family

Sociological theories have been in the main concerned with explaining how the family in Western society has changed over time. In the process of explaining change two models were identified: the two-generational nuclear family and the extended family which comprised parents, children, grandparents and other relations. Functionalist sociology has argued that prior to industrialisation the extended family was the norm in a society that was relatively unchanging and

stable and that the upheavals of industrialisation brought with them the nuclear form which, they argue, was the form most suited to the needs of an industrial society. (3) This explanation has been widely criticized by the work of family historians and demographers who have shown that in pre-industrial times many families were of the nuclear type and that even in the late nineteenth century and beyond a form of the extended family was to be found, particularly in working-class communities. (4) Anderson has argued for the importance of kinship relations in mid-nineteenth century Lancashire, showing how co-residence could often be a means of survival and support in times of hardship and how parents might rely on aid from children in old age. (5) Willmott and Young found that the majority of families in Bethnal Green in the 1950s depended on a wider network of relations than the nuclear form allows for. In particular they stressed the mother/daughter bond and demonstrated how married daughters might live with their mothers until they could find a place of their own, how mothers were often instrumental in procuring houses for their married children and how, even where there was no co-residence, mothers and married daughters would almost certainly have daily contact with each 'popping in' each others' homes and helping out where necessary. (6)

However, whilst much of this work was useful as empirical evidence for the continuing existence of a form of the extended family, it concerned itself mainly with family

structures and did not ask how and why the actors themselves perceived change or adopted the form they did. Willmott and Young, for example, whilst detailing the extent to which kinship networks were important in working-class Bethnal Green, assume that the price of geographical mobility is the extinction of these networks and that sudden and dramatic change in family behaviour occurs as a direct consequence of change in social circumstances. This argument tends to ignore the importance of values, attitudes and norms as determinants of behaviour, positing a model which places the individual actor at the whim of changing structural forces.

The cultural approach which explored the significance of ideals, values and mores stressed the importance of changing attitudes to children and the ideals of romantic love and the sanctity of the home as vehicles for change. Stone approached the family from a cultural perspective arguing that the rise of the 'Closed Domesticated Nuclear Family' coincided with the rise of individualism, ideas about the privacy of the home and affective bonds between parents and children. (7) Aries has shown how ideas about the length and dependency of childhood have varied over time and how this will have ramifications for the structure of families. (8) The idea of the family as a 'haven in a heartless world' was used as the title of a work by Lasch in which he argues that the privatised family developed as a protection from a hostile and emotionally arid external world. (9)

All these accounts, despite their differences in approach, are agreed that there exists one emerging family form - the modern family - which is characterised by its increasing exclusion from the public world, its rigid demarcation of roles along age and gender lines, and an increase in the emotional intensity of husband/wife and parent/child relations. The housewife/mother role has become more clearly differentiated and home-based, and along with the growth of a belief in marriage for love has fostered a family form which gives a high priority to emotional and sexual relations. Furthermore these accounts claim that this form and pattern of family relations was well-established by the early twentieth century.

Recent studies have challenged both this timing and the idea of a single family form. Gittins lays more emphasis on twentieth century developments such as suburbanisation and the growth of the Welfare State as forces of change, and argues that the inter-war years saw the formulation of a complex ideology of domesticity based on the increasing privatisation of family life. At the same time she challenges the claims of those like Aries and Lasch who see the family as 'holding society at a distance' by suggesting that private decisions about family size were determined to a large extent by women's relations with the world of paid work, thus raising the question of rigid distinctions between private and public(10)

She also argues that it is misleading to think in terms of one single idea of the family,

The more one considers data...whether past or present, the more striking the variety of families becomes. Much of the problem lies in the very concept of the family and the apparent determination to conceive of the family always in the singular, thereby implying that there can only ever be *one* type of family at any given point in time. There is no such thing as *the* family - only families. (11)

This was borne out in my research where, although the majority of families were of the conventional parent/child type, a number did not fit this form. For example, I interviewed one respondent who lived with her two parents, two (married) who continued to live in the parental home, two who divorced (one of whom became a stepmother) and another who moved between the parental and the marital home and whose child, at different times, also moved between the two. It is misleading to assume that at any point in history there is one typical family: equally, as Hareven has argued, a family may go through a series of different types at different points in the lifecycle. (12) In one family I spoke to the grandparents had lived with the family for a temporary period of about two years. Later, grandparents and parents but not the grown-up children moved to live together in Wales, the original home of the grandparents. Thus the fluidity and flexibility of the reality of the family makes it problematic to extrapolate from the experiences of one form to an all-embracing concept of the family.

Furthermore even where something approaching the modern family of theorists might be found the criteria used to assess this are not always complete or unambiguous. Jamieson's work on families in urban Edinburgh has challenged a number of the claims of the 'classical accounts'. (13) The oral testimony she collected suggests that child-centredness and emotional intensity whilst not absent in the families interviewed were neither as absolute nor as straightforward as the 'classical accounts' suggest. She observes that

...one obvious lesson of the mismatch between the experiential accounts and "the classical account" is that theoretically presumed logical links between aspects of family life are not necessarily made in the everyday living. For example, the development of an emotionally intense separated-off "haven in a heartless world" type of family is not tied to the existence of a full-time housewife/mother at home (constrained by beliefs concerning "appropriate" gender roles and the absence of occupational opportunity). Gender differentiation is deep rooted but this type of family is not. Physical and social separation of the family household need not lead to a sense of the family as sanctity and haven, nor need a specialised housewife/mother role within a physically and socially separated household translate into a mother who is child centred. (14)

My respondents' experiences suggest that whilst suburbanisation led to an increasingly private household of whatever composition, it did not necessarily follow that this became emotionally child-centred nor that the companionate and egalitarian marriage claimed by Willmott and Young was complete. (15) Neither does my evidence support the argument that, for these women, twentieth century marriages were contracted primarily for love. Indeed the majority of respondents demonstrated a high degree of prudence and even

calculation in their choice of husband with romance or passion playing a subordinate role. Equally, it no longer seems feasible to use the nuclear/extended dichotomy: such terms fail to encompass the variety of family forms existing at any one time, nor can it be shown that one specific form predominated in any particular historical epoch. Such terms impose rigid categories whose usefulness is constantly undermined by the range of exceptions. For example, a family which consists of mother, father and adult daughter who cares for these parents, exhibits elements of both nuclear and extended groupings and is certainly not restricted to one historical period. I would concur with Gittins that it is both more accurate and useful to speak of 'families' rather than 'the family' and to dispense with terms such as modern or nuclear which ignore the fluidity and variety of family forms over time.

Nevertheless I would not deny that certain trends associated with the modern thesis were visible in the early twentieth century. Couples were having far fewer children and the state was playing a greater role in their rearing: schooling from five to fourteen was compulsory and welfare agencies were increasingly monitoring the progress and health of children. Furthermore, as I have suggested, the importance of privacy and self-sufficiency for family units was assumed by housing policy and design and the oral evidence shows clearly (see chapter eight) that women felt there was less community

contact in these new conditions, or at least that the conventions governing it were changing. Equally, the evidence reveals a dislike of intervention by welfare agencies into what were seen as private concerns - the physical care of children and standards of housewifery. Thus, whilst I recognise that certain elements of the modern account did exist I would reject the argument that these factors led to one all-embracing form - the nuclear family.

As such, this thesis complements work by Gittins and Jamieson which uses experiential accounts to question the lived actuality of theoretical models. If we are to accept the usefulness of theoretical explanations of the family we need to set these against detailed accounts of family life,

The history of the inter-war family - the textbook approach

Very little detailed work has been done on women in the home during the years between the wars. Mainstream social histories of the period subsume the experience of women under that of men, so that whilst the growth of suburban housing for an increasing number of families is noted it is viewed from the standpoint of the family unit and changing styles of family life, rather than from the individual experience of the women involved. (16) Where such histories do consider changes in family size, housing, work patterns and a rising standard of living for those in work, it is within a predominantly

masculine framework based on distinct divisions between work and home, distinctions which are frequently blurred for women's lives. For example, Stevenson cites

shorter working hours, paid holidays, longer life expectancy after retirement, smaller families and for some enforced idleness through unemployment. (17)

as reasons for the growth of a home-based culture and home-centred lifestyle. This, of course, only explains why *husbands* might have welcomed and embraced the concept of a home-centred and privatised family life; it does not explain how and why women interpreted or maintained this ideal. By 1945 most women, except those in the highest strata, were managing smaller families in smaller houses without the help of servants and this had far-reaching implications for widely-held concepts of a woman's role in the home, creating a more homogenous set of beliefs around the functions of wife and mother. (18) However, there is a tendency to emphasise changing middle-class family patterns with the demise of domestic service and the availability of small labour-saving homes and to assume, implicitly or explicitly, that in some mechanistic way working-class families gradually adopted the forms and styles of their 'superiors',

...many social changes start at the top and work downwards...So if there is a change visible at the upper end of the class spectrum it may well be a portent of a more general change. We have sketched out how we are going to apply these ideas to the family. (19)

This kind of approach fails to account for the specific economic position of the working-class family which, because it differs from the class above, will ascribe different

meanings to similar tasks. Thus Stevenson's interpretation ignores the fundamentally economic nature of household tasks seeing them as culturally linked to a middle-class ideal;

For the less affluent, home-making was itself becoming a conscious leisure activity. The new illustrated women's magazines of the 1930s enjoined women to devote more of their spare time to cooking, house-furnishing, dress-making and similar activities, now increasingly elevated to the status of hobbies, with special equipment, gadgets and literature. For some women these pastimes became a principal means of developing a more fulfilling life around the basis of inevitable domestic chores. (20)

To suggest that cooking and sewing have the status of leisure activities is to trivialise and undermine the contribution of these tasks to the wider economy. (21) Ellen Ross's work on working-class mothers in the pre-First World War period has shown how these activities were surrounded by profound 'emotional resonance' in a harsh environment: physical survival and a small measure of comfort could be assured by the housewife's work. Providing adequate food and clothing on meagre resources could maintain the male breadwinner in his role as material provider and could eke out the limited, often sporadic, income of the family. Thus, sewing, cleaning, budgeting, washing and most importantly the provision and preparation of food should not be seen as leisure pastimes for the working-class housewife; they were materially essential and emotionally charged tasks which could mean the difference between a family's survival or collapse. (22) Research on dockland families in inter-war Liverpool reveals the tensions, deceptions and even violence that might underly the struggle to achieve these tasks successfully and Elizabeth Roberts' oral

history of Lancashire has argued that the measure of a 'good' wife and mother was how efficiently she undertook her work as manager of household resources. (23) The oral testimony I have collected suggests that women continued to fulfil the role of manager of household resources and income and that their ability to perform these tasks capably continued to define both their self-image and their social image as a 'good' and 'respectable' wife and mother. Thus I prefer a hypothesis which allows an exploration of the ways in which working-class women more autonomously evolved a form of family life in response to the changing social and economic factors rather than an explanation which sees changes in family behaviours as being imposed from above.

New approaches - oral history, women's history and feminist history

Recent histories which do allow an autonomous and evolving response to working-class women have, however, tended to ignore the changes of the inter-war years, positing the Second World War as the point of departure. Roberts' oral history of working-class women in Lancashire testifies to the strategies, hardships and sheer grind involved in maintaining a family at a time of minimum social welfare on an often inadequate income. She accepts that

Less time and energy was spent in child-bearing and child-rearing and there was less housework to do. Many households, while still without almost all modern domestic appliances (e.g. vacuum cleaners) were easier to run: there

were more gas cookers, baths and inside toilets. There were some subtle changes too in women's relationships with their husbands. Some evidence can be found of more sharing in child rearing and domestic work, and certainly leisure activities were more often shared, with the relative decline in popularity of the pub and the rapid rise of the cinema. (24)

Nevertheless, she concludes that '[t]hese changes, however, were in their early stages and really had their impact after 1940'. (25) She arrives at this conclusion because, whilst considering the 'respectable/rough' distinction, she focuses on the central urban communities of streets and does not discuss in any detail the growth of suburban avenues and cul-de-sacs where many 'respectable' families could increasingly be found.

Chinn's work on working-class families in Birmingham does consider the geographical separation of 'rough' from 'respectable' and shows how whole streets could be seen as housing one or the other category. (26) However, his major concern is with a small, local area and with the lower working-class before the First World War. As a result he is not able to consider the significance of municipal housing developments or the expansion in speculative housing for working-class families. Nevertheless his research is invaluable for delineating the variety of cultural perceptions which distinguished one group from another but which also make it difficult to identify the 'respectable' from the 'rough' simply in terms of occupation or income. He speaks of the intrusion of that division [between 'respectable' and 'rough'] into locality and community, housing; schooling;

shopping habits; reasons for attendance at Sunday School; attitudes towards charity; marital behaviour; attitudes towards drinking, gambling and fighting, and the roles and responsibilities of men, women and children." (27)

However, like Roberts, Chinn's work on lower working-class women in urban areas concludes that,

Although the First World War generated social changes which would ultimately transform English society, and in the process drastically affect working-class life, many required the catalyst of the Second World War to bring them to fruition. As a result, the inter-war period was a time in which the urban poor remained living, for the main part, in much the same way as had their parents and grandparents. (28)

This was undoubtedly true for those families who remained in the congested living conditions of central urban areas.

Nevertheless a sizeable number of working-class families were able to benefit from the improved housing of the twenties and thirties as both Roberts and Sarsby recognise. If we are to understand fully changes in family behaviour and its relation to the economic system we need also to explore the experience of those who moved away from established working-class communities. (29)

Jacqueline Sarsby emphasises the relation between women's paid labour and their domestic role, highlighting the interchangeability of these roles as economic, social and personal circumstances dictate. (30) However, she focuses on one occupational category - female workers in the Staffordshire potteries and, like Roberts for Lancashire, is mainly concerned with an urban area dominated by a single industry. Her work covers an extensive time-span, beginning

just prior to the First World War and ending with contemporary accounts. Whilst this allows her to trace the processes of change over the century, particularly with regard to the marital relationship, smaller families and increased affluence, she nowhere questions the consequences of better housing, seeing this as the happy ending to a story of hardship and suffering - 'she eventually got a council house and lived there very comfortably'. (31) It is, of course, tempting to see the move to improved housing as solving many of women's domestic problems, as indeed it did - electricity, piped hot water and a cleaner environment all alleviated much of the drudgery of housework. Yet the fundamental structures of women's lives remained - low paid work, the sexual division of labour within the home, and lack of female-controlled birth control continued to constrain them to a single role.

Indeed, one of the major differences between the women I interviewed and the respondents of Roberts, Sarsby and Chinn was their relation to the world of waged work. The majority of Roberts' respondents augmented family income by their own earnings, either part or full-time, whilst the major focus of Sarsby's book is on the interplay between the demands of waged work and the demands of family maintenance. Chinn also recognises the importance of waged work to the lower working-class woman,

Lower working-class women may have lived in a society that was openly patriarchal in a decided fashion, but if they did so it was only because they chose it to be that way. That choice was made possible by the independence their own

earnings gave them, as well as by their control of the family finances. (32)

The Lancashire textile towns of Roberts' research, like the potteries of Sarsby's had a long tradition of married women working and it was not unusual for married women to work full-time. Only two of my respondents worked full-time - one was unmarried and the other was separated from her husband. The majority either did not work or engaged in part-time hidden work. Roberts stresses how most working-class women worked only in order to augment family income and how, along with their husbands, married women saw liberation and status as lying in the move away from waged work. (33) This is important for understanding the increasing importance my respondents attached to the home as their sole or primary workplace. It is also reinforced by geographical location: Sarsby and Roberts' respondents lived, for the most part, in easy reach of available work whereas those I interviewed in the suburbs of York and Birmingham lived some distance from the centres of available work and relied on a range of hidden activities for supplementing income where and when necessary. (34) Suburban life with its emphasis on 'respectability' and its geographical separation from industrial areas, encouraged the ideal of the full-time housewife. Where women did engage in paid work it was more likely to be part-time, casual and undertaken from home. It is surely significant that out of twenty-one respondents, ten said they did no paid work at all after marriage and nine undertook hidden activities, often

temporary, which included keeping a small shop, giving piano lessons, running a boarding house and charring.

The position of working-class women between the wars differed in one other important aspect from the pre-war years, that is in the range of occupations open to *single* women. Retailing, clerical work and semi-skilled factory work in light engineering or food processing offered an attractive alternative to domestic service for working-class girls. Such jobs offered higher wages, greater freedom, contact with other women and an apparently different kind of relationship to authority than that of servant. (35) At the same time strictures against *married* women working exacerbated the lack of employment opportunities for women once married. Formal marriage bars were established in teaching and the civil service in the nineteen twenties and the convention that women should leave paid employment on marriage was strictly adhered to by firms like Cadburys and Rowntrees, who would only re-employ married women on a part-time, seasonal basis. Although a number of valuable studies have examined the position of women in specific occupations, the tendency to subsume the inter-war years under a general period running from the late Victorian years to the Second World War has left unanswered questions about the effects of single independence on later married life. (36)

Indeed what distinguishes the oral histories of working-class women from feminist analyses is the latter's attention to the wider political and social structure within which women's lives are located. Any analysis of women's role in the home and family has to take account of the prevailing political debate around the role of women, the specific demands of the labour market and the changing relation of the working-class family to the economic system. Diana Gittins' Fair Sex: Family Size and Structure 1900-1939 (1982) has examined the relation of women's occupations prior to marriage to later decision-making in married life with particular reference to issues of birth control and family limitation. She argues that women who worked in jobs where contact with other women was readily available were more likely to have knowledge of and access to sources of information about birth control than women who had worked in the relatively isolated occupation of domestic service. (37) The whole issue of family limitation is of particular interest for the inter-war period as working-class couples increasingly began to limit the size of their families to one or two children, completing the trend begun by the middle-classes in the late 19th century. (38)

Whilst I do not intend to enter the debate as to why and how this occurred, it is worth making a number of points which have direct bearing on my research. Theoretical explanations for the decline in family size have ranged from the demographic to the socio/cultural. Apart from Gittins, no-one

has related the experience of women in the labour market to decisions about family size, tending to focus on mortality rates, the increasing availability of contraception and the economic position of the working-class family. (39) Her approach is particularly useful because, in her words,

[t]o explore the nature of the relationship between the broader socio-economic and political systems and the family, it is essential to consider how social phenomena are interpreted by actors, and how interpretations in turn influence behaviour. (40)

For this reason I believe that my data can reveal valuable insights into how a particular group of women interpreted their sexuality and their reproductive role at a specific moment in history. Although this raises certain methodological difficulties which I discuss in chapter two, it is important for historians to understand the interplay of attitudes, values and social norms which are as much determinants of family decision-making as structural factors such as the decline in infant mortality or the family's position in the economic system. Whilst all my respondents had smaller families than their mothers and most appeared to have made this a conscious decision, I would not wholly agree with Gittins that this was necessarily a result of occupation either before or after marriage but a complex combination of economic, cultural and personal factors which included the relatively widened horizons offered by new forms of employment. My findings corroborate those of Roberts who concluded that for the most part 'respectable' women continued to have little knowledge of contraception and tended to rely

on their husbands' willingness to control family size. (41)
However, in chapter eight, I shall argue that attitudes towards marital sexuality were changing in a way which may have given some limited power to women to control their sexual relationships with their husbands.

Gittins has also argued against theories of diffusion and shown that when the working-class chose to limit family size this was in response to their relation to the socio/economic system rather than an ideal learned from above. Her research shows clearly how the differing relations of men, women and children to structural forces determined the responses and choices made with regard not only to family size but to patterns of behaviour within the family. She posits a direct correlation between women's relation to the economic system and the glorification of domesticity. Thus, she argues, women who remained at home after marriage attributed a greater significance and meaning to the tasks of the housewife than those who continued in full-time employment. (42) Even trivial and routine activities resonated with highly-charged meanings and resulted in an elaborate ideology of domesticity centred around the concept of the 'good' wife and mother. This is of particular relevance to my research where housing conditions were conducive to the maintenance of such a role and reinforced by government policies which enshrined the normative size and mode of family life in its housing designs. In chapter six I examine the design and impact of improved

housing on this role and in chapter seven I discuss in detail the elaborate tasks and routines undertaken by women as housewives.

One of the key themes in Gittins' study is the contrast drawn between women's isolation within the family and their identification with external social groups. However, as her concern is with the distinction between women who worked in the labour market and those who remained at home as unpaid housewives, she does not consider in any detail the part played by geographical location or housing. Roberts, Sarsby and Chinn reveal the inter-connectedness of external social relations in urban areas and show how married women had a wide network of female relations and neighbours to draw upon for support and aid. This follows on from earlier studies, notably by Willmott and Young but also others, which stress the part played by the extended family and the neighbourhood in the daily lives of urban working-class women. (43) Roberts emphasises how important such networks were as sources of mutual aid as well as genuinely affective and in the process refutes Anderson's claim that relations with kin were fundamentally calculative. (44) Chinn stresses the importance of such matriarchies, founded on the community of married daughters and mothers, for maintaining and instilling social identity and mores. The part played by these matriarchies has to be interpreted in the context of a socio/economic system which provided mere subsistence but censored those who fell

through the flimsy safety-net as 'feckless', 'rough' and 'undeserving'. (45) Studies of post-war council estates and suburbanisation have claimed that the price of better housing was the loss of these kinship and neighbourhood networks. (46) However, such studies have focused only on large estates, geographically far removed from residents' area of origin where, not surprisingly, it was increasingly difficult to maintain daily contact with kin. (47) I have chosen to examine small pockets of suburban housing where the transition would have been considerably less dramatic and to question how far these networks were thus broken up. Whilst I did find considerable evidence that family life was becoming more privatised and focused within the home, the shift is neither complete nor unambiguous as I suggest in chapter eight.

Many of the women moving onto council estates and even into private semis came from backgrounds similar to those described by Roberts, Chinn, Sarsby and Ross. Poverty, large families and an over-worked mother were remembered by many, as was the mixture of gregariousness, hostility and gossip which characterised the city centre street communities. Kathleen Dayus' account of the day before her sister's wedding captures the sense of this as perceived through a child's eyes.

We wandered back home and when we entered the yard we were called in to go to bed early so we could get up to help in the morning. So it was bright and early when, with a clatter of buckets and bowls, we started to swill down the yard. The lavatories also had a birthday, and Dad left ours unlocked with plenty of fresh newspaper on the nail. The women even cleaned their windows...The clothes lines were taken down and rolled up by the dustbins, together with the

props. I couldn't remember such a bustle and hubbub in our yard before. Everyone was singing a different song out of tune and taking no notice where they were throwing the water. Several people ended up with wet feet and all the cats vanished and even the kids who were trying to help got the odd clout for "gettin under our feet". (48)

How girls growing up in such an environment perceived their mother's role would certainly influence their own interpretation of a 'woman's place'. All respondents accepted without question the values and mores taught them as children.

Carol Dyhouse has shown the power of this mother/daughter bond as an agent of socialisation in the construction of a girl's femininity in the late Victorian and Edwardian period and whilst schools undoubtedly had an important part to play in girls' socialisation the single most significant influence continued to be the family. (49) All respondents recalled a heavy load of housework as children but it was only a minority who questioned this or felt their mother to be harsh and over-demanding. Lynn Jamieson's work on mothers and daughters in urban Scotland argues that the apparent exploitation of daughters' domestic labour by mothers was a pragmatic and material response to perceived needs rather than a deliberate attempt to teach domesticity. (50)

Daughters' domestic labour was as much a material resource as male wages and essential to the family's survival; it is undoubtedly significant that respondents, living in improved housing, who were mothers themselves in the late thirties

appear to have expected far less domestic help from *their* daughters particularly amongst the more affluent. Chapter four examines the childhood of working-class girls using both respondents' words and evidence from autobiography and in chapter eight I discuss the significance of motherhood for these women. Jane Lewis' work on motherhood reveals the political issues which shaped attitudes to mothering in the early years of the century. The need to rear a healthy citizenship could be achieved more cheaply, she argues, by devolving responsibility onto individual mothers than by confronting the underlying issues of poverty, ill-health and inadequate housing. Thus educationalists and welfare agencies were encouraged to exhort mothers to higher standards of care and cleanliness, in conditions barely conducive to such responsibility. (51) Her work provides a valuable analysis of how an apparently private area of women's experience is subject to wider political debates, and I intend to show how this determined the parameters within which motherhood was experienced. The testimony of respondents can also go some way to answering questions about how such exhortations to mother 'well' were interpreted by women with better housing and resources, how far the prescriptions of welfare agencies and child-care experts were internalised by such women and the implications for their lifestyles.

Perhaps the single most important means to 'respectability' and status for my respondents was the choice of husband and

chapter five traces the ways in which girls met future husbands and the criteria used in selection. Both Sarsby and Roberts emphasise the importance of marrying wisely,

Having agreed to go out with someone, they stayed with them until the relationship developed into an engagement, or was dropped. Some people married and started having children in their teens, tending to have large families, but most people had long courtships...marrying wisely could mean a loving and enjoyable partnership, while marrying unwisely...could be a torment and, at worst, a death sentence. (52)

Not only were lengthy courtships an indication of the priority given to sustaining the family budget by working children; they were also an indication of the strict sexual self-control exercised by the great majority of young couples. (53)

and both describe the rituals of promenading - the Monkey Run - which was a popular and approved means of meeting the opposite sex. Virtually all my respondents had long courtships which evolved into long and apparently harmonious marriages and the majority believed strongly in saving for a home, sexual restraint and a general prudence, rather than passion, in their relations with men. This is important for understanding the expectations and meaning of marriage for 'respectable' working-class girls: a bad choice could mean remaining or sinking into that poverty which so many desired to escape. Many respondents had seen, in childhood, the effects of men's drinking on family life and were anxious to avoid this fate for themselves. As a result, as I shall argue in chapter eight, they encouraged husbands to centre their leisure on the home - a sober, home-centred husband was the ideal of 'respectability'.

In summary then the existing literature on the inter-war period reveals certain gaps. Firstly, a number of studies focus on specific occupations and whilst recognising that such occupations were generally and increasingly temporary prior to marriage, leave unanswered questions about why, given widened occupational opportunities, women were so willing to take on the single role of housewife after marriage. (54) Literature which specifically examines women's role in the home during this period studies poorer working-class families in established urban communities, and as a result there is little sense of any change taking place before the Second World War. The consequences of smaller families, better housing and increased incomes for those in work can best be sought and highlighted in the context of suburban life than in the fundamentally unchanging deprivation of the central urban areas. (55)

Whereas it is clear from the work of those cited above that urban families in established working-class communities experienced little change in patterns of family life during the inter-war years this was not the case for the more affluent working-class from whom my interviewees were drawn. Council tenancies and mortgages were dependent upon a secure job and a steady income and though there were undoubtedly some who found themselves in financial difficulties as a result of higher rents, my respondents, though never well-off, were able to meet their commitments. Material security allowed these

families to enjoy a more home-centred togetherness unknown to their parents whose lives were dominated by the facts of mere subsistence. Nevertheless, as Catherine Hall has observed, these benefits have to be understood within the parameters of the structures which constrain womens' lives

There is considerable evidence...that these women enjoyed a good family life and that they were able to have higher expectations of it than their parents had had. This was possible because of smaller families, less financial hardship and better housing. But this enjoyment must be understood within the existing ideological structures. (56)

In order to fill the gaps identified above I have chosen an approach which focuses on two themes - housing and 'respectability'. To my knowledge there is no research which links these themes and, whilst I recognise that values of 'respectability' are not necessarily exclusive to those in improved housing, nevertheless the importance of the house as a measure of status makes it an important variable in any discussion of women's social identity. Despite the independence gained during the war, the increasing range of occupations open to single women, greater educational opportunity and political emancipation, women's primary role was still perceived as wife and mother. Indeed, as I shall argue in chapter three, this housewifely ideology was reinforced and intensified during the inter-war period. As a result the house increasingly became the one place where women could demonstrate dignity and status after marriage.

Private or public domain? - women and their houses

James Duncan has argued that one of the hallmarks of an industrialised and individualistic society is a shift in the function of the house. (57) He posits a relationship between the structure of a society's social relations and the function and meaning of the house in that society. Thus collectivist social structures, generally those of less-developed societies, view the house as primarily functional - a container of valuable possessions (women and children) which themselves rather than the house denote status. Status in such societies, argues Duncan, is achieved through group rather than individual oriented consumption. He observes that,

In such groups where membership stays constant and loyalty to the group is highly-valued, the most efficient type of status seeking is through group oriented display, such as parties, weddings etc. (58)

Individualistic social relations such as those which characterise highly-developed Western societies will endow the house itself with status meanings, constructing it as an important object in its own right,

[w]ith the rise of individual display the house becomes increasingly a status object in itself and an arena of individual status display. (59)

Although Duncan's arguments are posited on a global scale, he recognises that within British and American societies it is possible to identify relatively collectivist groups such as the urban working-class communities of the early twentieth

century. Kathleen Dayus' account of her grandmother's funeral is an excellent illustration of the 'group-oriented display' noted by Duncan amongst collectivist groups.

By this time there was quite a crowd gathered in our little room. There was Mr. Phipps, Mr. Jones, Mr. Smith, the lamplighter and another of Dad's drinking pals, all having a drink and talking quietly. They were to be pall-bearers...I was fascinated by the splendid flowers and the well-groomed horses of the hearse and I forgot, for a moment my fear...When we went out the sun had come out and the horses' coats shone like black silk...Then the bearers carried the coffin out and the Salvation Army band struck up with "Nearer My God to Thee" just as we climbed into the carriage...We passed along slowly so that the cortege could be seen and all could have a last look at the coffin. I looked through the window and there were people lined up on both sides of the street, the women with black aprons and the men with their caps and hats off, bared heads bowed as we passed. (60)

The growth of suburban working-class housing in the inter-war period can be seen as a shift away from this group-oriented form of family life and towards a more individualistic ethos reflected in housing design and reinforced by economic changes. House design between the wars was greatly influenced by the Garden City movement of the pre-war era, with low density housing, situated in its own garden and off the street, becoming the ideal form of working-class home. Gardens were clearly one of the most dramatic changes for many city-dwellers, providing as they did a home separated off from neighbours and bounded by hedge or fence. As I shall show in chapter six the garden could itself become a measure of status and with regard to council tenancies the yardstick of a 'good' tenant. The function of the house was changing: family life was, so such designs implied, to be lived off the

street with leisure and recreation provided within in its own walls rather than in the community.

John Burnett's A Social History of Housing 1815-1980 (1986) is immensely useful for providing the economic and social context in which such housing was built; it provides a wealth of information about rents, prices, designs and the political forces which transformed designs into actual bricks and mortar. (61) A number of studies of local housing conditions and estates between the wars reveal the variations which could occur within a uniform design as a result of regional economic and political conditions. (62) Nevertheless, the fundamental ideal cited above was universal both for council and private houses but scant attention has been paid by historians of housing to the effects of design on the tasks expected of the housewife nor to the assumptions about family and social life which underly such designs.

Social surveys of housing estates and suburbia have focused on the perceived loss of kinship networks and the growth of a snobbishness associated with material possessions, frequently attributed to women. (63) As early as 1938 an article appeared in The Lancet identifying an emerging form of female neuroticism - 'The Suburban Neurosis'. This, the writer explains, manifests itself in anxiety about money, lack of friends and a false set of values, amongst other things! The answer, he believes, is to establish 'social non-religious

clubs catering for all possible interests...Such [clubs] would give the suppressed herd instinct of the unhappy inhabitants of the Every-suburb estate a chance to express itself.' (64)

Both Willmott and Young and Mitchell and Lupton felt women on housing estates to be more status conscious than their husbands,

women also attached more importance to symbols of superior status such as the television mast, the outward appearance of respectability and the need to "keep up with the Jones". (65)

Most of these surveys were carried out in the 1950s and 60s when large estates came to predominate as a form of working-class housing and at a time when there was a generalised dislike amongst middle-class intellectuals of the values of security and materialism associated with suburbia. In this context it is hardly surprising that researchers found what they were looking for! Yet, the picture they present has a continuing currency in constructing women in suburbs as isolated victims of an unhealthy materialism and superficial gentility. By focusing on an earlier period and analysing the actual experiences of women through their own words it becomes possible to present a reality in which many of these strategies can be viewed as essential to family maintenance and self-identity within a specific social and economic context.

To return to Duncan's theory of the house as status symbol. This has implications for the construction of women's role

within the home and family and creates a paradox, which, I shall argue, is ultimately constraining. Whilst the move away from relatively collectivist social relations - the street, the local group - to the isolation of the house in the garden may not have been as complete as earlier observers would have it, nevertheless initial assessment of others would be more likely to focus on external criteria such as homes and gardens. Thus the greater privatisation of family life within the home also opens the home as a public demonstration of that family's status. Women's function as presenter and maintainer of this demonstration means that their role becomes more public at the same time as their emotional life becomes more private. (66)

Rising standards of housewifery linked with the increasing importance of the house as a symbol of public status ensured more hours spent on cleaning, tidying and polishing above the minimum required for cleanliness and comfort. (67) This is borne out by my experience at interviews. Invariably I was offered a drink in the best china on a tray complete with traycloth and a number of respondents commented on how they had cleaned up prior to my arrival - all the homes visited were tidy and spotlessly clean. This will be discussed in detail in chapter seven but at this point it is important to recognise that cleaning, polishing and dusting were more than just a means of ensuring cleanliness and comfort. This social function of domesticity was increasingly reinforced during the

twenties and thirties by prescriptive ideals concerned to ensure standards of health and hygiene and by a changing economic structure, relying ever more heavily on a buoyant home market in commodities designed for and targeted at the housewife. Household appliances, cheap furniture, china and linen were all urged upon the aspiring housewife. Such items required cleaning and maintaining and there was an upsurge in commercially produced products to accomplish these tasks - a good example is Cardinal, a red polish designed to enhance quarry tiles, the universal flooring for kitchens and living rooms at this time. However housing, despite its significance, was not the sole criteria of working-class 'respectability'; a whole cluster of values, norms and attitudes ensured this and 'respectability' was not exclusively to be found in better housing, although this could undoubtedly reinforce such status.

The pursuit of 'respectability'

Social historians have long debated the centrality of 'respectability' to understanding distinctions within the working-class and to interpreting the relationship between middle-class ideals and upper working-class aspirations. (68) Hobsbawm, in a seminal essay, argued that there existed in Victorian Britain a sub-stratum of highly skilled labour, defined by income, occupation and lifestyle and responsible for social reformism, manifested in Trade Union gradualism and

moderate politics. (69) The identification of such a group is no longer at issue nor is its connection with values of 'respectability'. What does require further clarification and examination is the exact nature of this 'respectability' and its relation to the economic and social conditions which produce it particularly with regard to the period after the First World War. Problems arise with the growing emergence of a lower middle-class often recruited from this labour aristocracy which make clear-cut distinctions increasingly difficult to maintain in terms of income and occupation. (70) Nevertheless the distinction between 'respectable' and 'rough' remained a cogent perception, not only in the eyes of middle-class observers but also amongst the working-class themselves as Chinn recognises,

These divisions, this stratification of working-class society was widely recognised within the class as a whole. Each stratum covered a particular range of income, residence and occupation and embraced a way of life which, whilst including elements shared by the class as a whole, was specific to itself and its position. (71)

'Respectability', as Gray has argued, whilst adapting middle-class ideals, was closely linked with a strong sense of class identity. The Victorian ruling class praised the temperate and thrifty working-man for his commitment to dominant values and saw this as evidence of a downward diffusion of ideals. However, as in other areas, it is important to recognise that the adoption of certain forms of behaviour was also a response to a specific economic and social environment.

The chronic poverty and insecurity of the nineteenth-century subsistence line is relevant here; even the most "prosperous" occupational group faced the danger of falling to this level, and their collective organisation and mutual insurance arose from attempts to guard against that danger. Respectable behaviour was related to these problems of survival, and to the self-discipline imposed by the conditions of industrial labour. (72)

Thus adherence to values of 'respectability' did not mean identification with the middle-class. Collective support in the form of Friendly Societies and the Co-operative Movement was class-specific and considerably different from the individualistic 'ownership and control of one's means of livelihood' characteristic of middle-class groups. (73)

Equally, up until at least the 1890s home ownership was not associated with upward mobility and according to Thompson had been seen as

...primarily a quirk of a small minority of skilled artisans who set especial store on thrift and respectability, saw them as ideally embodied in house-ownership, and successfully pursued their ambitions through the machinery of local, terminating building societies. It was usual, therefore, for mid-Victorians to think of house-ownership as the preserve of a section of the upper working class, who were commendable in themselves for their self-respect and independence, but whose houses were a bit tainted with the fancifully tawdry embellishments and clutter which home-ownership without landlord control could sprout. (74)

This is important for understanding the perceptions of my respondents who despite improved housing and rising income, maintained a strong class identity whilst identifying distinctions within it. There was a tendency to look disapprovingly down rather than enviously up and a sense that they had achieved their desired status. Commitment to values of 'respectability' had, they felt, been one of the means to

this goal. What then did these values consist of and what part did domesticity play?

A witness to the Royal Commission on Friendly Societies in 1871 stated approvingly that,

They [savers in Societies] go home at night and cultivate their gardens or read the newspapers to their wives, instead of being in public-houses. (75)

Deficiencies in working-class family life were a major concern to social reformers long beyond the period of this quote. The 'respectable' working-class family was the family in which the breadwinner remained home-based rather than in the pub, saved through insurance or other societies against the vicissitudes of illness or unemployment, and whose wife maintained high standards of domesticity, feeding and clothing the family adequately and ensuring an orderly and moral upbringing for the children. Such ideologies of domestic 'respectability' were also held by the working-class although for different reasons. Financial independence, self-reliance, self-restraint and a clean and orderly home were means of avoiding the dependence and deprivation of an unstable labour market, the insecurity of privately rented housing and the abject poverty which could follow from large families.

'Respectability' for working-class families was a means to improvement as well as an end in itself and required a commitment from both husband and wife. Indeed, the woman's role in maintaining 'respectability' was crucial both in the street communities of late Victorian and Edwardian England and

on the suburban estates of the inter-war years. Robert Roberts and Richard Hoggart have graphically described the role of the moral matriarchs in upholding 'respectable' values in central urban areas and the oral testimony of this thesis suggests that such a role was continued, albeit adapted, in the improved conditions of suburbia. (74) Elizabeth Roberts' conclusion is one with which I would concur.

The oral evidence...has shown a large section of society following and upholding a clearly understood, if infrequently discussed, set of mores. These produced women who were disciplined, inhibited, conforming and who placed perceived familial and social needs before those of the individual. Women did not seek self-fulfilment at the expense of the family because they saw little distinction between their own good and that of their families. There was a low level of self-awareness. Women's considerable powers were all exercised, firmly, in the perceived interests of their families - that is how they saw their "place". (77)

Conclusion

The final point made above is not one that feminists (myself included) find comfortable. It may be that in our enthusiasm (rightly) to rescue working-class women from the status of victim we have tended to look for strong models of gritty independence. Thus, histories of working-class women have focused on women's struggle against poverty, drudgery and ill-health and have reclaimed a generation of strong-minded, tough women whose fight against insuperable odds in the service of their family fills us with admiration. However, if we are to understand women's experience of home and family in the past

comprehensively, we also need to look at those for whom the struggle was less dramatic. This is not to deny the experience of the very poor but to suggest that we also explore why, given better living conditions and smaller families, most working-class women continued (and continue) to see their primary role as the servicing of the family. As feminists we are uneasy with the idea that many women derived pleasure from cooking, cleaning, washing and polishing: we look for signs of resistance to this role and prefer evidence of conflict rather than harmony. Even if we accept the hard work and devotion that made these tasks 'a labour of love' we must also acknowledge that a price was paid, as I suggested in the introduction to this chapter.

In this respect this research complements the work on working-class women by the historians cited above. By focusing on the next stage in working-class living conditions, that is the move away from the city centres and industrial areas, I am able to suggest how the mores and values of an older way of life were transmuted and adapted under improved conditions. I am also able to show how the 'respectability' Roberts identified, shaped this new experience and intensified ideals of material and emotional self-sufficiency. In a wider sense this study is a useful addition to the increasing body of research on women's lives in the twentieth century. It remains true, despite the notable exceptions discussed above, that much women's history is concerned with the exceptional, with

trade unionists, suffragists and feminists; the ordinary housewife remains forgotten and invisible. Yet the experiences and choices of such women are of profound importance if we are to understand why working-class women continue to see their place as in the home.

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1. Although Parsons' functional model of the family is no longer acceptable, much theoretical writing which traces the development of the 'modern' family accepts certain characteristics as well-established by the early twentieth century. See Parsons T. The Social System Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1964; see also my fuller discussion of sociological theories below. There is such a huge body of work on the family that it would be impossible to cite all works consulted. The following are a selection of texts which have been particularly useful to me in provoking sociological insights.

Anderson M. Approaches to the History of the Western Family, 1500-1914 Macmillan, London, 1980; Aries E. Centuries of Childhood. A Social History of Family Life (1st. pub. 1962) Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973; Fletcher R. The Family and Marriage in Britain Penguin, London, 1966; Gittins D. Fair Sex: Family Size and Structure 1919-39 Hutchinson, London, 1982; Gittins D. The Family in Question. Changing Households and Familiar Ideologies Macmillan, London, 1985; Harris C. C. The Family and Industrial Society Allen & Unwin, London, 1983; Lasch C. Haven in a Heartless World: the Family Besieged Basic Books, New York, 1977; Laslett P. and Wall R. (eds.) Household and Family in Past Time Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1972; Tilly L. and Scott J. Women, Work and the Family Rinehart & Wilson, New York, 1978; Willmott P. and Young M. The Symmetrical Family Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1973; Zaretsky E. Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life Pluto Press, London, 1976.

2. Jamieson L. 'Theories of Family Development and the experience of being brought up' Sociology, Vol. 21, No.4, November 1987 and 'A case study in the development of the modern family. Urban Scotland in the early 20th century' Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1983; Roberts E. M. A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940, Blackwell, Oxford, 1986; Ross E. "'Not the Sort that Would Sit on the Doorstep". Respectability in Pre-World War I London Neighbourhoods" in International Labor and Working Class History, No. 24, Spring 1985 and "'Labour and Love": Rediscovering London's working-class mothers, 1870-1918' in Lewis J. (ed.) Labour and Love. Women's experience of Home and Family 1850-1940 Blackwell, Oxford, 1986.

3. Parsons T. op.cit.

4. Laslett P. & Wall R. op.cit. By using parish and legal records Laslett has shown that most people in pre-industrial times lived in small households of on average about 5 persons. Larger households might include farm servants rather than kin.

5. Anderson M. Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1971

6. Willmott P. and Young M. Family and Kinship in East London Penguin, London, 1962, but other surveys of this period also stressed the significance of the mother/daughter bond for working-class families. See Firth R and Djamour J. 'Kinship in South Borough' in Firth R. (ed.) Two Studies of Kinship in London Athlone Press, London, 1956; Kerr M. The People of Ship Street London, 1958; Mitchell G. D. and Lupton T. The Liverpool Estate Neighbourhood & Community Social Research Series, The University Press of Liverpool, Liverpool, 1954; Shaw L. A. 'Impressions of Family Life in a London Suburb' The Sociological Review No.2, Vol.2, December 1954.
7. Stone L. The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800 Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London, 1977. Stone argues that there have been three main types of family in Western society over the three centuries he covers. The 'Open Lineage Family' was a medieval form lasting until the early sixteenth century. This was distinguished by collectivity, wide bonds with kin but little, so he argues, in the way of intimacy between parents and children or husband and wife. His second type the 'Restricted Patriarchal Nuclear Family' was characteristic of the Tudor and Stuart period and vested considerable power in the husband/father as head of the family. This family patriarchy was a reflection of growing loyalties to the State and Church whereby the husband/father came to stand in for 'God' and/or 'King' within the family. The final form, the 'Closed Domesticated Nuclear Family', has lasted since the mid-seventeenth century and, Stone argues, coincides with the rise of individualism. Thus, according to Stone, it is possible to 'fit' historical periods with specific types of family.
8. Aries P. *op.cit.* Aries demonstrates how childhood in the middle ages, for example, ended at seven years old whereupon adult status was conferred.
9. Lasch C. *op.cit.* It has often been noted how the rise of state intervention in the family coincided with the idea of the 'private' family. More interesting are the areas which are considered acceptable for public intervention - child health, welfare and education, pregnancy and childbirth, whilst violence and sexual abuse are still considered private, areas of concern only to the individuals involved. Chapter eight discusses in detail women's attitude to outside intervention.
10. Gittins D. Fair Sex *passim*.
11. Gittins D. The Family in Question p.8
12. Hareven T. Family Time and Industrial Time: the relationship between the family and work in a New England industrial community Cambridge University Press, New York, 1982 pp.154-156.
13. Jamieson L. 'A case study in the development of the modern family.' Chapter 3.
14. Jamieson L. 'Theories of Family Development and the experience of being brought up' p.604.
15. Willmott & Young The Symmetrical Family Chapter 3.

16. See for example Mowat C. Britain between the Wars 1918-1940 Methuen, London, 1955; Branson N. and Heinemann M. Britain in the Nineteen Thirties Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London, 1971; Branson N. Britain in the Nineteen Twenties Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London, 1976; Stevenson J. British Society 1914-45 Penguin, London, 1984.
17. Stevenson J. *op.cit.* p.381.
18. See Halsey A. H. Change in British Society Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1981 3rd edition, 1st pub.1978; Wrigley E. A. Population and History Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London, 1969; Taylor P. 'Daughters and mothers - maids and mistresses - domestic service between the wars' in Clarke J., Crichton C. & Johnson H. (eds) Working Class Culture: studies in history and theory Hutchinson, London, 1979.
19. Willmott P. & Young M. The Symmetrical Family p.33.
20. Stevenson British Society 1914-45 p.381.
21. The recent feminist debate on domestic labour has highlighted the relation between domestic labour and the capitalist mode of production, although this is not without ambiguities and problems. See for example Delphy C. Close to Home: a materialist analysis of women's oppression (tr. and ed. Leonard D.) Hutchinson, London, 1984; Malos E. The Politics of Housework Allison & Busby, London, 1980.
22. Ross E. 'Labour and Love'.
23. Ayers P. and Lambert J. 'Marriage Relations, Money and Domestic Violence in Working-Class Liverpool, 1919-39' in Lewis J. (ed.) Labour and Love; Roberts E. M. A Woman's Place.
24. Roberts E. M. *ibid.* p.202
25. *Ibid.*
26. Chinn C. 'The Anatomy of a Working-Class Neighbourhood. West Sparkbrook 1871-1914' Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham 1986, pp.93-99.
27. *Ibid.* p.291.
28. Chinn C. They worked all their lives. Women of the Urban Poor in England, 1880-1939 Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988, p.10.
29. Burnett J. A Social History of Housing 1815-1985 2nd edition, Methuen, London, 1986, p.249; Roberts E. M. A Woman's Place; Sarsby J. Missuses and Mouldrunners. An Oral History of Women Workers in the Potteries Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1988.
30. Sarsby J. *ibid.*
31. *Ibid.* p.78.
32. Chinn C. They Worked All Their Lives p.114.
33. Roberts E. M. A Woman's Place p.137.
34. Although the Austin Motor Co. and Cadburys in Birmingham and Rowntrees in York were close at hand, none of these companies generally employed *married* women, although the chocolate manufacturers in particular relied heavily on *unmarried* workers.
35. See Davy T. 'A Cissy Job for Men; A Nice Job for Girls. Women Shorthand Typists in London 1900-1939' in Davidoff L. and Westover B. (eds) Our Work, Our Lives, Our

- Words, Women's History and Women's Work Macmillan, London, 1986; Ferguson N. A. 'Women's Work: employment opportunities and economic roles 1918-39' Albion 7, 1975, pp.55-68; Glucksmann M. '"In a class of their own?" Women Workers in the New Industries in Inter-war Britain' Feminist Review No.24, October 1986.
36. Although Copelman's interesting essay on married women teachers does address the problems raised for those who resisted the marriage bar in the nineteen twenties. Copelman D. '"A New Comradeship between Men and Women". Family, Marriage and London's Women Teachers 1870-1914' in Lewis J. (ed.) Labour and Love.
37. Gittins D. Fair Sex.
38. See Banks J. Prosperity and Parenthood Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1954; Habbakkuk H. J. Population Growth and Economic Development since 1750 Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1971; Wrigley E. A. Population and History.
39. Gittins makes this point forcibly in Fair Sex chapter 1.
40. Ibid. p.26.
41. Roberts E. M. A Woman's Place in particular p.96.
42. Gittins Fair Sex Chapter 5 especially pp.122-136.
43. See note 5 above.
44. Roberts E. M. A Woman's Place pp.167-169; Anderson M. Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire p.178.
45. Chinn They Worked All Their Lives pp.35-41.
46. See note 5 above.
47. Terence Young's pre-war survey, made for the Pilgrim Trust, examined Becontree, a large estate built to house families from inner London. Begun in 1921, building continued well into the nineteen thirties, particularly with the arrival of the Ford Motor Co. in 1931. See Young T. Becontree and Dagenham. A Report made for the Pilgrim Trust The Becontree Social Survey Committee, 1934. Post-war studies such as Willmott & Young's Family and Kinship were concerned to highlight the contrasts between ways of life, thus their choice of Bethnal Green and Greenleigh in Essex, a large municipal estate built to re-house Londoners displaced by slum clearance and bomb damage.
48. Dayus K. Where There's Life Virago, London, 1985, p.31.
49. Dyhouse C. Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1981; for the part played by formal education see Dyhouse but also Davin A. 'Imperialism and Motherhood' History Workshop Journal 5, 1978 pp.9-66.
50. Jamieson L. 'Limited Resources and Limiting Conventions: Working-class mothers and daughters in Urban Scotland c.1890-1925' in Lewis J. (ed) Labour and Love. pp.65-67.
51. Lewis J. The Politics of Motherhood. Child and Maternal Welfare in England 1900-1939 Croom Helm, London, 1980.
52. Sarsby J. Missuses and Mouldrunners p.80.

53. Roberts E. M. A Woman's Place p.73.
54. See the studies cited above in note 35.
55. See Spring-Rice M. Working-Class Wives. Their health and conditions 1st pub.1939, Virago, London, 1981 for a first-hand account of this deprivation during the twenties and thirties. Comparisons with the material in Pember Reeves M. Round About a Pound a Week 1st pub.1913, Virago, London, 1979, show the continuing conditions of poverty under which many families lived during the inter-war years. There are also a number of autobiographies for this period which illustrate the same theme. Of particular interest are Forrester H. Twopence to Cross the Mersey Fontana, London, 1981 and Forrester H. Liverpool Miss, Fontana, London, 1982 which details slum life in inter-war Liverpool from the viewpoint of a middle-class girl whose family have sunk into poverty.
56. Hall C. 'Married Women at Home in Birmingham in the 1920s and 30s' Oral History, Vol 5. pp.62-83.
57. Duncan J. S. 'From Container of Women to Status Symbol: the Impact of Social Structure on the Meaning of the House' in Duncan J. S. (ed.) Housing and Identity Croom Helm, London, 1981.
58. Ibid. p.38.
59. Ibid. p.55.
60. Dayus K. Where There's Life pp.15-16
61. Burnett J. A Social History of Housing Chapters 8 and 9.
62. Daunton M. J. (ed.) Councillors and Tenants: Local Authority Housing in English Cities 1919-1939 Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1984 has articles on council housing in Leeds and Bristol. Swenarton M. Homes fit for Heroes: the politics and architecture of early state housing in Britain Heinemann, London, 1981 includes a brief study of Tang Hall estate in York from which a number of respondents were drawn.
63. Much literature on suburbia has highlighted the growth of materialism almost as if it were a direct consequence of such housing and in the process tends to neglect the very real improvements that such housing could bring to people's every day life. Jackson A. Semi-detached London. Suburban development, Life and Transport 1900-1939 Allen & Unwin, London, 1973 charts the development of private housing around the London area, laying stress on the part played by advertisers and builders in 'conning' people that they were buying a 'piece of the countryside' and playing on what he sees, as their desire for spurious gentility.
64. Taylor S. 'The Suburban Neurosis' The Lancet 26th March 1938.
65. Mitchell G. D. & Lupton T. The Liverpool Estate p.49.
66. 'Among individualistic social groups the house, the woman's private domain has been ruptured and made more public and with it so has the woman herself.' Duncan J. Housing and Identity p.51.

67. Roberts E. M. A Woman's Place p.203 concluded that surplus time as a result of labour-saving equipment and improved housing was not spent on anything other than more housework and childcare. This argument is developed by Schwartz Cowan R. More Work for Mother: the Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave Basic Books, New York, 1983.
68. The relation between 'respectability' and the skilled artisan has been variously discussed with regard to nineteenth century labour history. See for example, Best G. Mid-Victorian Britain 1951-70 Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1971; Gray R. The Aristocracy of Labour in Nineteenth Century Britain c.1850-1914 Macmillan, 1981 and The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh Clarendon Press, London, 1977; Hobsbawm E. Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London, 1968.
69. This essay was first published in 1954 and reprinted as Chapter 15 of Labouring Men.
70. Crossick G. (ed.) The Lower-Middle Class in Britain 1870-1914 Croom Helm, London, 1977.
71. Chinn C. 'The Anatomy of a Working-Class Neighbourhood' p.99.
72. Gray R. The Aristocracy of Labour in Nineteenth Century Britain p.42.
73. Ibid. p.37.
74. Thompson F. M. L. The Rise of Respectable Society. A Social History of Victorian Britain 1830-1900 Fontana, London, 1988, pp.168-169.
75. Royal Commission on Friendly Societies, Parliamentary Papers, 1871 cited in Gray The Aristocracy of Labour in Nineteenth Century Britain p.37.
76. Hoggart R. The Uses of Literacy 1st pub. 1957, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1958; Roberts R. The Classic Slum: Salford life in the first quarter of the century 1st pub. 1971, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973. More recently Ellen Ross has called for research into the part played by working-class women in maintaining and upholding values of 'respectability'. See Ross E. "'Not the Sort that Would Sit on the Doorstep"'.
77. Roberts E. M. A Woman's Place p.203.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Feminist theory and method

All research, whether acknowledged or not, is based on certain premises and assumptions held by the author which will determine the methods used both to gain and interpret information. This research is no exception. However, adopting a feminist perspective does not merely mean looking at and writing about women so as to add this information to an existing corpus of historical writing, it also means a commitment to validating women's value, power and position in the service of rescuing us from invisibility and subordination. As Klein says,

For me, theory and methodology are closely interrelated in a dialectical relationship: a feminist methodology can help us to validate emerging feminist theory and indicate the need for modifications...If indeed feminist scholars want to be "agents for change" (Westkott 1979a) rather than simply investigating women as a new topic, if we indeed want to work towards a future that as Marcia Westkott (1979b) says "is not merely an extension of the present but more significantly a qualitative transformation of the present" then I think we need to consider which methods are best suited to our quest for feminist knowledge in which women's concerns are central and inspire our questions. (1)

Writing for women rather than on women implies an acceptance and acknowledgement of subjectivity and personal experience rather than an approach which treats women as research objects, positing the researcher as a neutral objective expert. I do not believe in one, complete social reality for

women which can be measured and described but in the existence of a variety of realities which can interact and co-exist in complex ways. This, of course, has profound implications for the traditional role of researcher who is no longer 'out there' discovering the 'truth' but an integral part of any piece of research involved in the social reality s/he attempts to unravel. At its simplest the questions I asked determined the answers I received and equally important the whole was a process in which the questions I wanted to ask changed over time as the responses I received generated new perceptions and understandings. Neither was the material received always malleable to the questions my wider reading suggested I should be asking and meant sometimes compromising between what I wanted to know and what it was possible to know. (2)

Thus the role of the researcher as 'truth-digger' becomes transmuted into something more akin to listener and subjective interpreter: my interpretation is mine but there are others - not least those of the women who willingly shared their experiences with me. The researcher enters into a dialogue with the researched in which learning and hearing become more important than testing cherished hypotheses. Because this approach foregrounds the experiential and subjective it leaves itself open to criticism by those who favour the objective collection of quantifiable data and makes imperative a full acknowledgement and consideration of its potential flaws. This chapter is therefore about these difficulties and

limitations but it is also about the value and usefulness of my approach.

My research is based on two premises which in turn affect the methods used to gain and analyse information. Firstly, it is founded on the assumption that gender is a crucial determinant of experience and perception and that explanations of socio/historical phenomena which subsume women's experience under that of men's are ipso facto inadequate and partial. Because women have a different relation to the socio/economic system their perception of ascribed roles will be different from the meaning attributed by men to these roles. Thus, commitment to 'respectability' may be achieved and perceived in significantly different ways by women, ways in which the role of housewife and mother is given equal importance to that of the male occupational role. Secondly, accounts which suggest the unimportance of women's role in the family as a subject for serious, scholarly study, work to reinforce the belief that the lives of ordinary women are insignificant and valueless - a subtle but powerful means of maintaining the status quo in which public, masculine roles are distinguished from private feminine roles with the public roles more highly-valued. In reality the spheres are less polarised than patriarchal ideology would have it. Public and private merge and intersect as feminists have long recognised in the phrase 'the personal is political': any truly feminist approach must be committed to breaking down these boundaries and revealing a

wider social reality in which the public and private are holistically integrated in a non-gender determined framework.

The ways in which women experienced their role as wives and mothers were determined by economic structures, official ideologies and their own socialisation. But that role was also shaped by the needs of women themselves within the parameters of an ascribed domesticity. None of the women interviewed relished the double workload of paid employee and housewife and all saw their lives as improved from the treadmill of their mothers' drudgery. The economic conditions and social forces of the inter-war years made this a very real possibility for this group of women. Thus the needs of women interacted with external economic and social factors to establish a re-formulated domestic ideology increasingly based on the privacy of the home but, as I shall show, never completely isolated from the wider community.

It seems to me that if we are to validate women's experience we need to examine domestic as well as public roles. Equally, if we are to trace and reclaim women's past we need to interpret the ways in which the family was a critical variable in that history. Family relationships can determine and shape our responses in the present and our hopes for the future: my respondents are mothers and grandmothers and their perceptions and experience are as important for understanding the present as are the political, economic and social forces of war,

affluence and welfare. The more complex our knowledge of structural factors, the more important it becomes to unravel the ways in which women fitted their lives around these and the meanings they ascribed to social institutions like marriage, motherhood and housing. What Vincent recognised as of vital importance for male working-class history is equally important for feminists concerned to validate both working-class and women's experiences.

The most sophisticated computer programme can never tell us how much a man loved his wife, or to what extent parents grieved over the death of a child, nor can it establish with any precision the way in which fundamental emotional experiences were affected by the material circumstances of the family. The central question facing the historian of the working-class family is how its reproductive functions, marriage and the raising of children, meshed with its productive functions, its role as the basic unit for acquiring and consuming the means of existence. The more elaborate our knowledge becomes of the range of structural factors to be taken into account, the more urgent is the task of undertaking a careful investigation of how the various members of the family integrated their activities within it. (3)

It was for this reason, amongst others, that I chose to use the oral retrospective interview for it is often the only source of information on women's attitudes to marriage, sexuality, birth control and childrearing. (4) Moreover, it offers the interviewed the opportunity to participate in creating their own history, placing the individual life within a collective pattern of women's lives, without denying that life's uniqueness. For this reason the collection of oral testimony seems particularly suited to a feminist approach - as Graham says it allows women to 'tell their stories' (5)

Whilst I recognise that it would be inappropriate to use data from a small sample thus collected to offer definitive conclusions or precisely calculated figures on how many women had acted, made decisions or felt in certain ways, I believe such data has a value for the details and sense of family life it can give. It can help us to understand and unravel the meanings attributed to family life by the actors themselves rather than those imposed by theorists and observers, particularly where these may be at variance. Thus, where appropriate, I have juxtaposed evidence of the stated ideologies of the period taken from the statements of prescriptive literature, women's magazines, and official sources. As my major concerns were to examine the part working-class women played in the construction and meaning of 'respectability' and privacy in the context of family life, this determined the criteria for selecting an interview sample which raised certain problems I shall consider below.

In summary then this study is an attempt to approach the qualitative experience and perceptions of a small group of women with the aim of raising questions as much as answering them. The whole is informed by a feminist perspective and an approach which sees ideology as a social construct, ascribing certain meanings to the concepts of the house, the wife, the mother. The limitations of this are obvious but do not, I believe, threaten its validity. The small sample and ensuing lack of breadth make it impossible to draw definitive

conclusions for other similarly placed women nor would I claim that this sample is either exceptional or typical.

Nevertheless I believe that my approach offers insights into what will always remain a subjective and speculative area. The lack of sources for working-class family history and women's lives in particular means that a range of methods and approaches must be adopted if we are to understand the lives of our mothers and grandmothers in anything other than a quantifiably measurable way. Qualitative accounts such as this can flesh out demographic and social statistics just as the latter offer a wider context in which to interpret and place the unique, individual life history.

Selecting a sample

Twenty-one women were formally interviewed, ten in York and eleven in Birmingham but I also spoke informally with a number of women known personally who had been wives and mothers during the period under review. I also used five transcripts collected by the York Oral History Project which seemed particularly pertinent to my areas of concern and one respondent in my sample was contacted through the project. (6) I append a list of respondents and short biographical details for reference but here wish to make a number of general points about the sample and the criteria used for collecting it.

I began with a fairly narrow set of qualifications for inclusion which caused considerable difficulty in selecting respondents for interview. I wanted to contact working-class women who had lived in either new council housing or in small privately-built houses during the years 1920 to 1939 but, not surprisingly, given the national figures for families occupying such accommodation, found that few perfect fits were readily available. Burnett has estimated that by 1939 only one-third of the working-class were rehoused in new accommodation and many, if not the majority, of these would have moved to improved accommodation during the building boom of 1933-8. (7) Both the shortage and the chronology caused problems for my original plan.

The eleven women interviewed in Birmingham were found as follows. Five were contacted through local churches and a Mother's Union group; four through friends; one through the local paper and one who was an old friend of the last. Five had occupied council housing and five had lived in suburban private housing before the Second World War. One had lived in rented accommodation in Birmingham's middle ring, pre-First World War housing, adequate but lacking the modern amenities of the newer housing. Although she did not fit the prescribed criteria I interviewed her for contrast, particularly as she came from the largest family in the sample. Three of the six in private housing were younger than the rest, being born at the end of the First World War. I interviewed them as much

for what they could tell me about their mothers who occupied suburban housing as for themselves, and have found the material particularly interesting for the light it throws on the mother/daughter relationship and the reproduction of values from one generation to the next.

One woman who lived in council housing did not marry until after my period because she remained at home to take care of elderly and invalid parents: she was a useful reminder that marriage was not always the only form of domesticity available. Perhaps more important, interviewing her revealed that whilst there were differing *forms* of domestic life, the *details* could be similar. Thus Mrs. Crowe washed, polished, shopped and budgeted in ways very like her married counterparts and does not appear to have perceived herself as different presumably because she was, like wives and mothers, fulfilling a domestic and caring role. She is, therefore, included in any general conclusions I draw about patterns of housework and home management.

The women interviewed in York fall into similar categories although more lived in council housing. This is however a fair reflection of the housing situation of both areas: south-west Birmingham from which my respondents come saw a more dramatic expansion of private housing during the 1930s than did York. (8) Seven respondents occupied council houses, one as a child; two were buying their own houses in York and one in

Scarborough (she later moved to York) before the Second World War. I included Mrs. Pearce because her account of domestic life and her criteria of 'respectability' were in line with those of all respondents and reinforced my conclusion that regional differences, where localities were not exceptional in the period under question, made little impact on the overall roles expected of working-class wives and mothers. Four of these respondents were contacted through a Darby and Joan club, three through Age Concern, two from a personal letter circulated around sheltered accommodation and one through the York Oral History Project. One woman did not buy her house until the early nineteen forties but I have included her because she was so very articulate on the subject of working-class 'respectability' and had a fine sense of the subtle distinctions thus engendered. Her husband had also been employed as a builder for York City Council and was able to talk to me separately about the actual building of one council estate in York in the early thirties.

Despite the differences amongst the women finally selected and the difficulties with my original criteria, they had several things in common. Firstly, they were all of working-class origin, taking classification as based on the occupation and income of father and all, except one, remained thus defined by their husband's occupation. Fathers' occupations ranged from the relatively unskilled, like lorry driving, to skilled trades and other occupations such as policeman, psychiatric

nurse and small shopkeeper. Husbands' occupations were all skilled or blue-collar varying from 'time-served' electrician to local authority work such as nursing or caretaker/warden. This is important because it ensured that respondents were married to men in regular, secure work commanding a relatively high wage. (9) Whilst few of my respondents can remember the exact amount of their husbands' wages, none were unemployed during the twenties and thirties, none were affected by long-term strike action and none were employed in casual or seasonal work - the poverty described by social observers at the time was not experienced by the group of women interviewed and only one woman recalled the kind of deprivation in childhood described below

I mean it was a poor life - Mum used to have to go to the pawnshop, and we used to have grocery from the corner shop, what they call the strap. And I know there was times when we couldn't pay the rent, when the rent man come. I used to have to go on the bus and take it on the weekend. (10)

Secondly, all the women, again except one, completed their formal education at fourteen: Mrs. Hutchings who went to Grammar School left at thirteen and later attended evening classes for typing and clerical work. Although Mrs. Matthews left school at fourteen her mother was an elementary school teacher before her marriage and Mrs. Matthews married a local authority weights and measures inspector. By this and income she was the most nearly middle-class of respondents. However, although these two respondents by virtue of income and education might be said to have attained lower middle-class

status, the distinctions remain very blurred and their accounts reveal more than enough common ground to treat the whole group as socially homogenous. None of the women lived at any time in the kind of family set-up described by Jamieson for her middle-class respondents,

The "middle-class" group were brought up in a range of styles from the "better-class" five roomed tenement flat with boxroom for maid, to grand detached houses of the suburbs with servants' quarters. Their household typically included parents, one or two siblings, and a maid. Their mothers did no paid work and the majority of fathers were professionals or businessmen. (11)

Moreover, all respondents felt themselves to be better off materially and emotionally than their mothers and this was an important factor in determining the choices they made about husbands, housing and size of family. It also significantly contributed to their perception of themselves as 'respectable' and distinguishable from poorer members of the working-class. By narrowly defining my original criteria to those occupying a certain kind of housing I ensured that those finally interviewed, even where compromises were made, tended to hold and aspire to a similar cluster of values and attributes broadly defined as 'respectable' as my detailed findings in later chapters illustrate. This was not inevitable and should not be taken to mean that all those living in improved housing were distinguishable by their 'respectability'. As my discussion of the 'good tenant' in chapter six reveals there were subtle distinctions on council estates and a number of families continued in their 'rough' ways, despite the efforts

at reform made by municipal landlords and welfare visitors. A further point to be borne in mind is that although all respondents presented themselves as adhering to the values of 'respectability' some of them might have been assessed differently by their ultra-respectable peers. Thus for example the cosy shabbiness of one respondent's home might well have been perceived as a tendency to 'roughness' by some of the others. Nevertheless, respondents' identification of themselves as 'respectable' testified to the power of such distinctions in shaping values and attitudes.

It is sometimes claimed that a self-selecting sample will be skewed in favour of the more extrovert, that it will only represent the views of the more outgoing as these are more likely to agree to be interviewed. Whilst I recognise this problem and did indeed encounter it I did not feel that it overly distorted my final conclusions. In fact the reasons given by four women who refused to be interviewed reinforced many of the points I make regarding 'respectability' and privacy. Three were unwilling to participate because they preferred 'to keep themselves to themselves' and did not relish the idea of an outsider entering their homes and their lives. One, although she was very interested in the project, felt she had little to contribute, that her life was so ordinary and uninteresting that I would be better talking to others and I was unable to convince her otherwise. This sense of 'having nothing of interest to tell' was frequently

reiterated by respondents, some of whom suggested that I would find it more advantageous to talk to their husbands. I encountered this response often enough to reinforce my belief in the practical importance of allowing women to tell their stories as a means of validating women's experience and de-trivialising it especially where it is concerned with the private and domestic. (12) It should also be noted that although the majority of respondents were contacted through outside agencies, four were approached through personal friends and were only willing to be interviewed because they already knew me - one in particular was reluctant and only allowed an interview as a favour. In the event she thoroughly enjoyed the experience and exclaimed at the end that she had never talked just about herself for such a long time nor had such a serious interest taken in her life.

One final point about sampling is worth mentioning. As Lummis has pointed out only those who survive can be interviewed and in this respect no set of oral history interviews can ever approach the true random sample of social science. (13) It can be argued that social and economic factors will determine the survivors and this may bias the sample in one particular direction. It may well be that there was more poverty and associated ill-health amongst those in improved housing than my sample allows for but those who experienced this have not survived to recount their experiences. Thus, I reiterate that although the oral testimony offers evidence of collective

values and attitudes *for this group* it should not be taken as representative of all working-class suburban families without further research.

Birmingham and York as selected locations

I did not set out to produce a detailed study of local areas but rather to capture the qualitative experience of a small group of women. As a result I have not attempted to document the detailed history of localities but to draw on their historical context where and when appropriate. However, there was a broad rationale behind my choice of locations and I remained constantly aware of potential contrasts and comparisons. All my respondents except one lived in York or the south west suburbs of Birmingham. (14) I chose these two areas for a number of reasons. Economic historians have drawn attention to the dual nature of the inter-war economy. (15) On the one hand there was massive unemployment and contraction in the 'old staples' of nineteenth century industrialisation such as shipbuilding, coal, textiles and heavy engineering whilst at the same time light engineering, chemicals and building boomed. This manifested itself in a geographical split in which areas around the south east expanded and became increasingly affluent at the same time as whole towns dependent on one of the 'old staples' experienced mass unemployment, related poverty and general stagnation: the economic structure of towns like Merthyr Tydfil and Slough

could be so vastly different as to make any comparisons about patterns of family life meaningless. For this reason I chose two areas which experienced neither exceptional economic growth nor exceptional stagnation, although as Pollard recognised both York and Birmingham were well-placed to take advantage of further urbanisation as industry shifted in type and location.

The growth of the inter-war period was also accompanied by further urbanisation, and it was still largely the rural areas that acted as population reservoirs for the growing towns. The main growth occurred in the smaller towns with growing industries (e.g. Oxford, York, Leicester and Norwich)...The conurbations remained stationery or declined in population, with the exception of London and Birmingham, whose unrestricted sprawl created some of the main social and transport problems of the age. (16)

Birmingham, whose pre-eminence had been built on a variety of metal trades, did not suffer as, for example, nail-making declined as this decline was offset by a growth in the expanding light metal industries: in the 1931 census thirty-seven per cent of those employed in industry or commerce were in the metal trades. (17) Birmingham's industrial structure was dominated by GEC, established in 1901, Cadbury's, the chocolate manufacturers, which by 1939 employed over ten thousand people and the Austin Motor Company at Longbridge, employing twenty thousand in 1939. (18) Both Cadbury's and the Austin Motor Company were sited on the south-west of Birmingham which led me to focus on that particular area of Birmingham. York, although much smaller, has some similarities: its two major industries were well-placed to

take advantage of the economic shift between the wars to transport and food-processing. Rowntrees Chocolate and Cocoa Manufacture employed twelve thousand workers by 1939 and the London and North-Eastern Railway Company had a workforce of nearly eight thousand in 1936, thus nearly twenty-five per cent of the city's population were employed in two industries. (19)

Both cities had a long tradition of civic and philanthropic concern with the Quaker chocolate manufacturers providing parks, libraries, further education and particularly housing for the working-classes. In Birmingham George Cadbury masterminded the Bournville Village estate on the south-west of the city, run by the Bournville Village Trust and offering well-planned, reasonably priced housing based on the principles of Ebenezer Howard's Garden City movement. In York Joseph Rowntree built the estate of New Earswick on the outskirts of the city to the designs of Raymond Unwin, a committed follower of Howard. Both New Earswick and Bournville were pioneering attempts to provide model village housing for the working-classes before the First World War and were to influence local authority housing designs throughout the inter-war period. As one of my major concerns was the effect of improved housing on women's perceptions of their domestic role, I felt that to draw respondents from areas which had a high commitment to housing reform would be useful. As a number of respondents worked for Cadburys and Rowntrees

at one time or another it was also interesting, though impossible to draw conclusions, to speculate as to how far respondents' commitment to sobriety and 'respectability' was shaped by the high principles and temperance beliefs of these employers and civic reformers. Much useful material on housing and, indirectly, attitudes to working-class 'respectability' is accessible from the surveys and reports of these philanthropists and I have drawn widely on it. (20)

In summary, then, south-west Birmingham and York offered a broadly similar industrial structure, commitment to housing improvements and a continuing tradition of temperance and social reform. Moreover they were not exceptional areas at the time, unlike the south-east, Lancashire or South Wales, and I hypothesised that findings would be comparable. In the event this was the case. I found no major differences between the two areas in terms of patterns or structure of family life, nor were there any marked differences in detail. Women in York and Birmingham managed the family budget, cleaned, shopped, cooked and washed, as well as rearing children in similar ways. Although my sample is too small to posit generalised conclusions for other areas, the evidence I have for this group of women does suggest an emerging homogeneity about the domestic role of the working-class wife and mother which could be confirmed or refuted by further research in other locations.

The Interviews

Having contacted women who appeared to meet the stated criteria I then made an informal and preliminary approach where I attempted to acquire an overall picture of their life history and various important points in the lifecycle such as date of birth, parents' occupations, age on leaving school, work prior to and after marriage, date of marriage, number of siblings and, in their turn, number of children and dates of birth, and finally where lived and when. Most women could remember with accuracy these key events and where there was doubt I was usually able to work out dates from later information. In a minority of cases where information could not be recalled or where it was unforthcoming I have left it out rather than attempt to speculate. After the preliminary contact and if the respondent was willing I conducted a further in-depth interview usually spanning two or three hours in the woman's home. In some cases these were longer and took two sessions, although in one case it was a little shorter as the respondent got very tired and was unwilling to continue.

These in-depth sessions took the form of a semi-structured interview in which respondents were encouraged to talk freely around a subject rather than give single answers. I was more concerned to introduce themes and issues than rigidly pre-constructed questions which demanded 'answer-size pieces' as I

believed the kind of information sought about perceptions, experience and values was best understood by allowing women the opportunity to select and tell their own story. (21)

However, I did attempt always to cover the same range of questions, themes and issues so that each interview followed the same basic framework. This was achieved by introducing questions based on the chronology of respondents' lives so that all the women were asked to talk in detail about the same set of issues for childhood, waged work, courtship, housing, housework, marriage and motherhood. (22) Each interview also covered themes such as contact with neighbours and relatives, the relationship with the mother and the process of change over time. A list of the topics and questions covered in all interviews forms appendix two.

This method obviously raises a number of problems. Oral historians have long recognised and well documented the difficulties inherent in relying on retrospective memory. (23)

Respondents may recall inaccurately, partially or even distort events which occurred many years ago particularly if they feel they are 'letting the researcher down' by being unable to answer a question or their memory fails them. I tried to ward against this by reassuring women that it didn't matter if they were unable to recall certain details. It is always difficult to know how far present accounts of events match the reality of the time. However the patterns which emerged from the material bore out the individual accounts so that for example

all respondents told me about cleaning their windows once a week. If this was retrospective myth rather than reality, it was a very powerful and collective one and for that reason alone deserves scrutiny.

...a community's myth...has a social meaning and value for the historian independent of its truth. It can be examined in relation to the changing occupational structure within the community and outside of it both historically and comparatively; and in its effectiveness in maintaining the community's solidarity. (24)

Equally, so many of the details which emerged are also to be found in written accounts and in observer's comments at the time that it becomes entirely justifiable to treat these women's memories as no more flawed or biased than any other historical sources.

Another problem which has caused difficulties for researchers using oral interviews has been that of 'faking'. Beere describes this as giving 'socially desirable responses rather than honest attributes' (25) but as Klein points out such 'faking' is often essential 'for the psychological survival of many women because, without faking, reality would seem unbearable'. (26) This was particularly pertinent for the women I interviewed, many of whom were quite elderly and, in some cases, recently widowed. To admit to conflict in marriage or doubts and guilt about their childrearing strategies would perhaps have been to expose their own vulnerability as well as profoundly questioning the values and beliefs on which they had built their lives. It appeared

unacceptable to me to disturb this status quo and, whilst I did not necessarily take everything reported on face value, neither did I resort to interviewing tricks in an attempt to uncover possible 'faking'. For example, the majority of women recalled their marriages as conflict-free. I suspected that this was not always the case and that beneath the harmonious picture thus presented lay unacknowledgable conflicts based on the unequal power relations inherent in these socially acceptable marriages. Therefore where I discuss the husband/wife relationship my conclusions are speculative and arise out of the material conditions of respondents' lives rather than from any knowledge of the emotional reality. Where respondents did admit to marital conflict this provided useful insights into the norms and expectations of marriage amongst this group of women and confirmed my perceptions about what constituted an acceptable and 'respectable' partnership.

In a minority of cases the husband was present at the interview and, whilst his presence may have inhibited respondents' responses to some questions, I did not feel it was appropriate to exclude him. Often this had beneficial side-effects as husband and wife were able to prompt each other's memory and I was able to gain insights into marital interaction as for example the woman who insisted on displaying her husband's good health as evidence of her superior housekeeping. Overall I felt the benefits of the husband's presence outweighed any potential inhibitions

although it would be interesting to know if these women would have told a different story interviewed on their own. I tend to doubt it as 'faking', reticence and reserve were common to all respondents and not just those whose husbands were present.

Equally, reticence on certain subjects need not be seen as a negative response - questions about sexuality and contraception are obviously problematic areas to cover in interview and were only asked if I judged the questions to be inoffensive to particular respondents. In the event I found it easier than expected to raise these issues as they often arose comfortably out of the material being offered. However, although respondents accepted the questions, responses were frequently guarded or the subject changed after a brief reply which suggested along with other information the taboo nature of such issues for 'respectable' women. Counter-argument might want to suggest that women had merely forgotten the details but, as I argue in later chapters, this reticence has to be seen and interpreted in the context of a pervasive lack of knowledge of their bodies and reproductive functions by all women.

One wider issue concerning interviewing is well-illustrated by the one abortive interview I encountered. Feminist theories have, rightly, challenged the hierarchical model of interviewing, citing the passive, subordinate construction of

interviewees as paradigmatic of the material and psychological structures of dominance and submission on which gender relations are founded. (27) However, my experience suggests that power and control are not quite the absolute preserve of the interviewer suggested by such theories. After the preliminary approach I was invited to interview but when I arrived the respondent refused to answer any questions except in monosyllables - 'Yes' or 'No' - and after an hour I was forced to abandon the attempt. In the event control lay with the interviewee who was well able to resist any attempts to talk or draw her out. This was an extreme example but I found there were other factors which questioned a one-way hierarchical model. For example, deference to age undoubtedly shaped the approach I adopted to interviewees so that politeness often found me listening to long-drawn out anecdotes which bore little relevance to the issues I was concerned with and one respondent insisted on watching 'Coronation Street' before she would continue! These incidents illustrate the potential control any interviewee has within the interview situation and are a salutary reminder that frustration and disappointment are as much a part of the interviewer's experience as passivity may be for the interviewed, particularly where we wish to respond in a sensitive and non-exploitative way. (28)

The Housework Questionnaire (Appendix Three)

All the women interviewed were also given a questionnaire on housework to complete after the interview and to return to me in a pre-paid envelope. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, it offered me a quick way of checking various details of accounts and secondly, because it was anonymous and removed from the interview situation, I felt it might allow women who were reluctant to admit to lower standards of housekeeping to acknowledge this privately. In the event anonymity was assured but this did not result in any new material being proffered. The results confirmed material in interview and with hindsight I believe it would have been more useful to have names in order to check for discrepancies with oral testimony. Fifteen women returned the questionnaire and although it was useful as a quick checklist it offered little information that was not contained in the transcripts.

The problem of historical chronology and oral testimony

One of the most taxing methodological difficulties arising from the research was the problem of the Second World War and how to categorise time periods. Historians have long recognised the dangers of periodisation, of dividing time into manageable and identifiable periods which differ in essentials from other periods. Individual lives do not always fit neatly into 'the pre-war period', 'the inter-war period', the Second

World War' or 'the post-war era'. This is a particular problem with oral testimony where respondents either confuse chronology or appear to be refusing the time categories of historians. I encountered both problems and the following is an account of how this occurred, what it might mean and how I chose to compromise or solve the difficulties without denying the validity of respondents' memories.

Although I was particularly interested in the period up to 1939 and the ways in which women had perceived and lived out their domestic role at this time, domesticity for most of the women interviewed had of course extended well beyond this date. A woman born in 1910 would only be twenty in 1930 and, given the relatively late age of marriage for this group, might well be rearing young children during the war years and possibly even after. Motherhood spans a number of years and what might be the case at the beginning could well have changed dramatically after ten or fifteen years. Thus the experiences of women who came to marriage and motherhood, in the early thirties could be very different from those experiences by 1944. In order to obtain a sample who occupied improved housing I was constrained to selecting women who were wives and mothers in the late twenties and particularly in the thirties when housebuilding boomed. I found it impossible to contact anyone who lived in local authority housing or a small semi-detached much before the late twenties which meant that the majority of respondents had wartime experiences of

domesticity as well as pre-war ones. This raised a number of problems in interview, some of which with hindsight I might have overcome by including a specific section on wartime experience.

The ways in which the Second World War changed women's lives have been well-documented and I do not intend to reiterate them here. (29) Husbands overseas or away from home, rationing and compulsory work altered the pattern of many women's lives in some cases dramatically. (30) This makes it impossible to discuss domesticity in terms which suggest it was unchanged by the war. Yet in interview I frequently found it difficult to know which period of their lives women were talking about and had to ask constantly 'Was this before the war or during it?' or specifically request that they related questions to the pre-1939 period. Many found this difficult, which raises a number of questions. Firstly, I think, in some cases, there was genuine confusion over dates which with a little prompting was overcome. Nevertheless, many respondents were unable to make distinctions between, say, 1938 and 1940, when talking about daily life and although I would not want to claim that the outbreak of war made no appreciable difference, it was only infrequently raised spontaneously. This may well be a result of the questions I was asking. I did not set out to ask questions about the war; had I done so the responses would possibly have been very different.

However, I still felt dissatisfied - why, if the outbreak of war was so significant for women, did so few women talk about it unprompted? Because I did not systematically question women about the war I have no reliable evidence on how many of their husbands were away or overseas although I gained a very general impression that the number serving overseas was small and one or two were almost certainly in reserved occupations. The Schedule of Reserved Occupations which came into effect from 1939 protected many skilled men from conscription and was only slowly altered over the next two years. Age limits, often as low as thirty, also kept those in reserved occupations out of the armed forces. (31)

As regards women's work the same applies. Because I did not ask specifically about war work I have only impressions to go on. I suspect that prior to 1943 few of my respondents were called up for civilian work. Those who had been involved in hidden work such as cleaning appear to have continued in this and those who remained at home had small children which may well have meant exemption. The concern of inter-war feminists about the double burden of work and domestic commitments on the health and well-being of working-class women along with conventional views about the duties and place of mothers and wives ensured that the Women's Consultative Committee recommended that no mother with children under fourteen be conscripted into war work and that a category 'Household R' should exempt housewives fully occupied at home. (32) It was

not until 1943 that state legislation determined that many housewives were eligible for work and A Control of Engagement (Directed Persons) Order in 1943 greatly increased the numbers of women working part-time. (33) This reinforces my impression that in the early years of the war the majority of women with small children (which my respondents were) continued to fulfil their pre-war domestic role. Rationing did not really start to bite until about 1942/3 and for my respondents living in south-west Birmingham and York air raids were relatively infrequent. Indeed York only remembers one air raid throughout the war - most were further afield on isolated airfields.

In one way then the impression I gained of life going on the same was not entirely false at least up until 1942. The war was to change many things, not least the structure of women's waged work, and many of my respondents engaged in part-time paid work after the war as their children grew older. Moreover the spread of affluence in the nineteen fifties allowed all of them to purchase labour-saving devices such as fridges and washing machines and many of them remarked on this as a period when they felt their daily lives to be improving. This generation of women were the first to benefit from the expansion of part-time work in the post-war era, frequently just at the point when their children were old enough to leave unattended. The higher standard of living thus generated made an appreciable difference to their daily lives, allowing many

of them to take annual holidays and purchase a small car. Whilst I recognise the limitations imposed by lack of evidence, I think it is justifiable to speculate that for the small group of women here studied daily life did not change dramatically before 1942 and that far-reaching structural changes in terms of income, occupation and stage of the life-cycle reached did not occur until at least 1946. For this reason I have included evidence and testimony which relates to these early years of the war although of course the major part of respondents' testimony is concerned with the years prior to 1939.

Conclusion

Finally, perhaps the greatest limitation was myself. As an educated, middle-class, feminist I set out with certain preconceptions and ideas about what I would find. Some of these were confirmed, many were not and the process of reformulating one's own ideas about women's experiences is not always comfortable. I hoped to find resistance and often found adaptation; I looked for conflict but frequently had to acknowledge harmony. Nevertheless I would ultimately concur with Finch that

...evidence of women successfully accommodating to various structural features of their lives in no way alters the essentially exploitative character of the structures in which they are located. (34)

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CHAPTER 3

IDEALS OF DOMESTICITY BETWEEN THE WARS

In chapter one I stated that smaller families and the decline in domestic service had implications for assumptions about a woman's role in the home, 'creating a more homogenous set of beliefs around the functions of wife and mother'. In this chapter I want to elaborate those assumptions and beliefs in order to set the oral testimony of later chapters in a wider context of prescriptive ideals. The cinema, prescriptive manuals and women's magazines were all part of a developing media which increasingly reached a wider audience during this period, disseminating certain ideals of womanhood. There are, of course, problems with prescriptive literature as a source. It is always difficult to know how many women read such literature, from what class they came and indeed whether the messages were assimilated. However, many of the manuals I quote from were either loaned to me by friends who had inherited them or were picked up at jumble sales and bazaars: they were popular rather than 'expert' guides and as such were unlikely to be found in academic collections. On the whole I suspect they were read by middle-class rather than working-class women but one, Real Life Problems and Their Solutions (1938), was given to me by a working-class family and I later saw a copy on a respondent's bookshelf. Despite the problems of ascertaining by whom and in what way such literature was read, it is undeniable that the home-centred image of women

presented by the media was one to which women of all classes were *expected* to aspire. How far they did so and in what ways is one of the themes of this thesis.

Educational policy was predicated on the assumption that women would only engage in waged work prior to marriage and thus educational provision need only prepare women for 'filler' occupations. This was reinforced in the labour market where single women were to be found in routine, semi-skilled work with a minimal career structure. Married women were expected, if not compelled, to leave their jobs on marriage: the work of wife and mother was thereafter supposed to be their sole occupation and means of fulfilment. There was a proliferation of manuals and advice books on all aspects of this role, from baby and infant care to cookery, health, beauty and sexuality - all, as I shall show, assuming that the main focus of a woman's life was her relationship with a man and, later, her children.

Official policy, concerned to restore stability in the wake of the upheavals of war, focused on the family as the political means of achieving this. The slogan 'Homes fit for Heroes' was not, as Brookes has pointed out, simply about providing adequate housing for returning servicemen.⁽¹⁾ Implicit in it was the idea that a return to the normality of established gender roles, particularly those of housewife and mother, would secure and reinforce wider social and economic

reconstruction. Baldly put, the state would provide houses, wives would make them homes and husbands would provide the economic resources. Policy makers assumed that all married women would remain financially dependent on their husbands and even the minimal welfare provision of these years continued to assume the existence of a family wage. National Health Insurance did not cover dependents: married women were only entitled to benefits if they joined the insurance scheme as insured workers. As married women were discouraged from working the numbers benefiting from this safety net must have been small. Much social policy of these years was concerned to support and buttress women's role as mother. The ill-health of army recruits in the First World War had led to a growing emphasis from all political parties on the need to rear a healthy citizenry. Infant mortality and the ill-health of working-class children were to be solved by exhorting mothers to a greater recognition of their responsibilities rather than by confronting the underlying environmental and economic problems.

Thus although political emancipation, greater educational opportunity and increased job opportunities for single women suggested a general broadening of horizons for women, this applied to middle-class rather than working-class women and to single rather than married women. The First World War had loosened the restraints of the Victorian ideal; it was now acceptable for single women to enter the labour market and

their leisure activities were allowed to be wider. But marriage and motherhood remained the primary function of a woman's life and a married woman's lifestyle was still circumscribed by certain unquestioned assumptions. She would leave the labour market (although she might move in and out of casual, part-time work as circumstances dictated). She would remain within the confines of monogamous, heterosexual marriage, accepting her dependency on a male breadwinner and the sexual division of labour within the home consequent upon this. She would be expected to have few interests or little life outside the concerns of home and family, although she should take a lively interest in the world around her in order to be a more stimulating companion to her husband than her Victorian counterpart.

This ideal was fostered and subscribed to by official bodies and the expanding media and to a very considerable extent negated the advances achieved by pre-war feminism and the independence of the war years. Inter-war feminism was dominated by a commitment to improving women's conditions as wives and mothers. Eleanor Rathbone's struggle for family allowances and the work of the Women's Co-operative Guild were based on a feminism which saw women as 'equal but different'. True equality, they argued, was to be achieved by ascribing value and status to women's roles in the home rather than fighting for opportunities in the public world. (2) Mothers,

in particular, were seen as having an especially valued place within the family and, by definition, within the home.

The abiding maternal personality plays a large part in the stubborn persistence of the family tradition. Although with the increasing opportunities and complexities of social organisation, the activities and interests of the other members of the family tend to multiply, the magic of the hearth remains unchallenged. Undoubtedly it is rooted deep in all human nature, but the mother is the human anchor which holds it fast. (3)

This accorded with the desires of many working-class women who believed the single role of housewife to be infinitely preferable, if economic circumstances permitted, to the double burden of paid employee and unpaid housewife which had been the experience of so many of their mothers. Inter-war feminism at least demanded better conditions and an adequate income on which to fulfil this single role. The prescriptive exhortations of women's magazines and manuals to maintain quasi-scientific standards assumed a certain level of income beyond that of most working-class women and whilst explicitly offering a service to readers, implicitly insisted on standards and models by which housewives might judge themselves. This overriding concern with domesticity was a double-edged sword. On the one hand it highlighted the inadequate conditions and intolerable pressures under which many women struggled to maintain a family. On the other hand it was ultimately constraining, making it almost impossible for women to reject marriage and motherhood unless they were either rich enough to survive without, or strong enough to

endure the opprobrium meted out to those who preferred to remain single or childless.

Women and Employment

The First World War, though not the watershed often claimed, did bring about shifts in attitudes to women's paid work. The middle-class Victorian ideal of the passive, ornamental woman was no longer tenable, given the need for women's labour in occupations previously defined as male. To concede women's ability to work in place of and alongside men at the same time as insisting on their inferiority in these Victorian terms was increasingly impossible. Nevertheless, the gains made by women in skilled and semi-skilled industry dissipated rapidly after the war: married women returned to their homes and family and single women went back to the pre-war female occupations of textiles, clothing, hosiery and domestic service, or entered the new, but equally low-paid and routine, occupations opening up in clerical, retail and light engineering work. As Braybon has argued, the war did not mark any significant shift in prevailing assumptions about women's primary role. Women, as well as male employees and employers, saw their wartime employment as a temporary response to an emergency situation(4)

Despite a number of factors in the years between the wars which it might be assumed would encourage greater female

participation in the labour market - smaller families, expanded job opportunities and greater access to education - this never occurred in any significant way until after the Second World War. (5) Although new occupations were opening up opportunities for single women particularly in the clerical, secretarial and retailing sectors, domestic service remained the highest employer of women as late as 1939. (6) More significantly it was amongst young single women that the most noticeable increases in paid employment occurred. One contemporary survey records that in seven out of ten of the major female-employing industries, forty per cent or more of the women were aged between twelve and twenty-five and likely to be unmarried. (7) Jane Lewis has estimated that between 1911 and 1931 approximately ten per cent of married women were economically active; this of course excludes married women working in casual, temporary or home-based jobs such as childminding, washing, sewing, taking in lodgers and cleaning, work undertaken to fit in with domestic chores and childrearing. Moreover, the figure of ten per cent would be unequally distributed regionally - Lancashire for example had a higher proportion of married women working than the South East or South Wales. (8) Lewis does point to the increase in the employment of younger married women in the thirties as a result of the demand of new industries for semi-skilled labour on conveyor belt processes but this was linked to areas of relative affluence in the south-east. (9) The main employers of women in York and south-west Birmingham were the large

chocolate manufacturers whose cultural assumptions about the place of married women undercut the industry's need for semi-skilled workers on factory processes. However, their labour requirements were seasonal; demand for chocolate products was higher at Easter and Christmas and this led them to employ married women on a temporary part-time basis at certain times of the year whilst maintaining their position on the primary place of married women. As a result work for married women in these areas was seen by both employers and women as part-time and casual. Although Gittins cites Birmingham as an area with an average proportion of married women working (ten per cent), most of these would have been employed in the small workshops of the central urban jewellery quarter or the Black Country. (10)

By 1939 a new occupational pattern had emerged, hastened to some extent by women's employment in World War I and buttressed by a changing ideology which could no longer posit single women as the delicate, fragile creatures of the Victorian ideal. It was now acceptable for single girls of all classes to undertake paid employment between school and marriage and indeed they were encouraged to do so. New technology and greater bureaucracy at both local and national level as a result of wartime experience, led to a demand for relatively cheap female labour to fill the numerous clerical posts as well as to undertake semi-skilled work in light engineering. (11) Retirement on marriage and the low rates of

pay for young females made them an attractive proposition to employers anxious to recruit the cheapest labour available.

The writing assistant class of the shorthand-typist and typist classes are confined to women...In our view there are two main reasons which make it advisable that the present practice should be maintained. First it is undesirable...that persons who have capacity for better work should be kept too long on routine work. A turn-over of staff is therefore an advantage in this connection, and the retirement of women on marriage is an important factor whether or no such retirement is compulsory. If the staff for these duties is recruited from girls alone, the problem of avoiding blind-alley occupation is less acute than it would be if the class was recruited from...both sexes. (12)

and with reference to the Printing Trade,

Major M. C., speaking at a luncheon of the London Master Printers Association said...they would have to consider the introduction of a class of labour at a lower rate than the skilled rate. The trade unions were realising the difficulty of dealing with boy labour when the age of 21 was reached, and were prepared to regard with sympathy an extension of the amount of work women and girls could do...If girls were employed instead they could still afford to keep them when they became adults. (13)

Such recruitment was rationalised by reference to women's 'nimble fingers' and greater suitability for monotonous, repetitive work,

...it is generally agreed that in some occupations, especially those requiring delicate finger-work and those imposing on the worker a tedious routine [women] are more efficient...Men, it is said, are in general more adaptable and versatile than women...over an important range of occupations where work is still unstandardised and liable to produce surprise situations of one sort and another, men, it is said, are in general more resourceful at dealing with such situations than women. (14)

The claim that women were less resourceful than men in the work situation was somewhat ironic given that it was these very qualities which were celebrated in women's 'natural' ability to mother,

Women of today with their higher education are very intelligent and capable and are much better fitted for Motherhood [sic] than were even their own mothers. (15)

Full-time paid employment then was the preserve of single women; once married women were expected to devote themselves to the demands of home and family. This ethos was given official sanction by the introduction of marriage bars in the civil service and teaching in the nineteen twenties. Economically, the changing industrial structure of the inter-war years, as the 'old staples' of coal, shipping and heavy engineering gave way to an expanded tertiary sector of service and light engineering industries, created the need for a supply of cheap female labour to fill routine, semi-skilled jobs, requiring little investment in training and adaptable to rapid turnover. Ideologically, marriage and particularly motherhood continued to be seen as women's primary function and the locus of their emotional fulfillment. Thus the dictates of the economy interacted with the assumptions of ideology to produce a normative pattern in which women supposedly moved from single independence to married dependence, a pattern well-expressed in the words of Sir Charles Cheers Wakefield,

...a small wage, some leisure and more freedom, is all that the young, intelligent, and above all attractive girl needs until she marries some five or six years later...many girls are so obviously and happily destined for the married state, that their parents need not very seriously consider an alternative location as a permanent one. (16)

In reality, as my oral evidence testifies, working-class girls enjoyed little freedom between leaving school and marriage. Long hours of work and a continuing burden of domestic chores, coupled with the expectation that their wages would go to their mothers, meant that adolescence was as much a period of dependency as marriage would be later.

The Single Girl

'Young, intelligent and above all attractive', this image of the single girl is to be found in much of the literature of the period where robust resourcefulness is the way to a man's heart and the delicate fragility of the Victorian ideal is regarded as 'soppy'. Popular reading such as Elinor M. Brent-Dyer's Chalet School series or Agatha Christie's detective novels offered 'spunky' tomboyish heroines such as Jo Bettany and Tuppence, whose intelligence and resourcefulness had a free rein until marriage claimed them, whereupon these qualities were utilised in the service of a prolific fecundity. (17) Prescriptive literature in the form of magazines and health and beauty manuals followed the same pattern, rejecting the fragile, semi-invalid of the Victorian ideal, in favour of healthy robustness. The ideal girl of the twenties and thirties was, according to the Woman's Book of Health and Beauty

As far as health is concerned... generally well equipped. She has, it is true, periodic variations of energy and a liability to backache and headache, but on the other hand

she usually has robustness in resisting small ills which is often absent in her brothers, and which serves her well. (18)

She was exhorted to discipline herself physically and morally, develop hobbies and recreations, take an active interest in the outside world, particularly through voluntary social work and generally take charge of her life.

Nevertheless, such self-actualisation remained circumscribed by the feminine ideal of service to others. Working-class girls were encouraged to join youth movements such as the Girl Guides where their energies could be channelled into 'public spirit, a high sense of honour, esprit de corps, and a desire to give themselves in the service of others.' (19) Much of the prescriptive literature implicitly manifests a fear that given greater freedom before marriage girls might resort to unbridled promiscuity or reject their future role as wives and mothers if their energies were not channelled in acceptable ways. Ideology which posited the single girl as independent, robust but above all concerned for the welfare of others looked forward to her future role as a mother when these attributes would serve both her family and her country. Numerous stories in women's magazines of the period focus on the self-sacrificing heroine who cares for elderly parents or a widowed mother, working long hours to keep them, until 'Mr. Right' appears to carry her off to a life of wedded bliss in which her sterling qualities can be exercised in the nurture of home and children. Woman's Weekly, one of the most popular

magazines of the twenties and thirties with a wide range of readership, ran a 'true life' feature on such a girl. The author firmly admonishes readers thus,

Janine has an educated heart. She is the kind of girl who would sacrifice her happiness in order to save someone else's feelings. Think of that all of you. Learn to be grateful and gracious, brave, unselfish and above all, learn to be kind. (20)

Formal education emphasised training for marriage rather than training for the labour market. Housewifery and mothercraft were important elements of the elementary school curriculum and even the more academic secondary schools recognised the importance of domestic subjects for their pupils. (21) Many elementary schools had a self-contained set of rooms, a home where girls could learn cooking, laundrywork and cleaning, with particular emphasis on nutritious cooking, plain sewing and thrifty budgeting as befitted the future wives of working men. (22) The prevailing view was well-expressed in an article 'Mothercraft for Schoolgirls' published in the magazine National Health,

We have reached the stage when it is regarded as an accepted fact by all enlightened people that motherhood is a profession for which training and study are needed; now we must go a step farther and try to give this training to every girl because of her potential motherhood as she grows up to womanhood. The girls of today will be the most important part of the population in ten or twelve years time because by then most of them will have joined the army of England's mothers. (23)

This official concern with standards of housewifery and mothering was a direct result of army recruitment during both

the Boer and the First World War which had revealed the extent of ill-health amongst working-class males. Along with high infant mortality rates and a decline in the birthrate amongst the middle-class, there was a fear of 'race degeneracy'. The solution as perceived by successive governments was to educate and train working-class mothers in higher standards of hygiene and nutrition. This belief in the ignorance of working-class mothers led to unprecedented state intervention in the construction of suitable curricula to teach girls what was constantly propounded as their natural role. Although the oral evidence suggests that most girls felt themselves to be little influenced by the teaching of domestic skills at school, nevertheless, the emphasis on cleanliness and hygiene must to some extent have reinforced the messages about 'good' housewifery learned at home. Girls aspiring to 'respectability', as I shall argue in Chapter (vii), quickly learned its association with cleanliness.

Domestic skills were also seen as the answer to female unemployment and the servant problem. (24) Governments provided considerable resources to encourage girls to enter domestic service and to some extent they were successful. The numbers of women in service increased from 1.1 million in 1921 to 1.3 million in 1931 although many of these worked on a non-residential basis in hospitals, schools and offices. (25) Domestic training centres, junior instruction centres and Day Continuation schools all propounded the message that domestic

skills would not only increase a girl's employability but also prepare her for her future role as wife and mother. It is hardly surprising that out of sixty-four working-class girls interviewed in Liverpool by the Pilgrim Trust, sixty-two said their ambition was to get married: they saw their future as marriage and took little interest in the paid work offered them, fantasising instead about marrying someone with wealth. (26)

Education for marriage was reinforced by attitudes to spinsterhood, which despite the surplus of women over men in the population, was still viewed with suspicion. It was not so much that objections were raised to women living singly per se; after all the woman who denied herself marriage to care for frail or elderly parents could be held up as an example of true womanhood. What was threatening was the idea that women might choose the single state rather than be denied it, especially at a time when economically, at least in theory, marriage was not the only option. The twenties saw a burgeoning literature on sex and marriage - a literature whose main message was to extol the benefits and joys of heterosexual love within marriage. Post-Freudian sexual reformers like Havelock Ellis exhorted married men and women to free themselves from Victorian repression and to engage uninhibitedly in sexual intercourse for physical and emotional well-being. Marie Stopes' Married Love, first published in 1919, was immensely popular and, whilst celebrating a somewhat

mystical view of marital sexuality, encouraged women to seek pleasure in sexual relations. 'Frigidity' was to be deplored; leading to 'neuroticism' and 'hysteria' it became closely allied with spinsterhood, with those, so it was argued, who would not or could not engage in sexual relations with men. The distinction between single and married women reached heights of cruelty in Haldane's attack on the danger of allowing spinsters to hold responsible positions,

We do not yet have the means to investigate the psychological effects of permanent virginity in great detail but enough is known to make us aware that in entrusting responsibility towards individuals and the State to elderly virgins we may be acting unwisely. (27)

The psychological explanations and supposed consequences of rejecting marriage were the realm of sexologists and as such were unlikely to be read by working-class girls making decisions about their futures. Nevertheless, magazines and advice manuals diffused a popular version of this expert opinion. A popular Odhams publication Real Life Problems and Their Solutions (1938) devoted a sub-section to 'How to Handle Tomboys' in which it is advised that girls who resent menstruation and adopt a 'hostile' attitude to men, marriage and motherhood can be 'greatly helped by the friendship of a happily married friend'. (28) In time such friendship, it claims, can result in a girl coming 'to see how prejudiced many of her views had been'. Another section deals with teenage girls and make-up and suggests there is little harm in the moderate use of this as it shows 'a positive attitude to

life which is all to the good'. (29) Girls who are 'unwilling to adopt [this] more adult role' should be helped to do so if they are not to reject 'the idea of womanhood and all that it entails.' (30) A number of my respondents commented disparagingly on older spinsters they had worked with and how they had resolved not to be like them. The perception of such alternative models to marriage as negative was a measure of the power of an ideology which assumed the normality and inevitability of marriage for all women.

Marriage and Motherhood

According to magazines, advice manuals and psychological works 'modern' marriage had replaced the repressed and tyrannical unions of the Victorian era. (31) 'Modern' marriage, they claimed, was characterised by companionship rather than domination and mutual sexual pleasure rather than prudery and hypocrisy - by 1942 Beveridge could speak of marriage as 'a partnership of equals'. (32) Yet this companionate ideal was based on an economic and legal foundation which continued to place wives in a subordinate and dependent position. Despite the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1923 which allowed both parties to divorce for adultery, divorce remained prohibitively expensive and attitudes at large continued to assume a double standard for men and women. Even Sarah Burton, the

emancipated and single headmistress in Winifred Holtby's South Riding (1936) suffers guilt, shame and a fear for her professional position as a result of her (in the event chaste) night with a local Councillor. (33) Furthermore, cruelty did not become grounds for divorce until 1937. Thus, for much of the period the law continued to enshrine the belief that husbands' bullying and violence were justified within marriage and that a wife's sexuality was at the service of her husband.

Within the family the roles of husband and wife remained segregated with the wife caring for home and children while the husband worked outside the home for a wage on which to maintain them. Trade Union negotiations were underpinned by the belief in an adequate family wage for the male and thus jealously guarded male prerogatives on skilled jobs and resisted any change which might undermine the payment of higher family wages to men. Yet such wages were frequently inadequate and continued to be supplemented by the casual or part-time earnings of wives. Widows and single mothers bore the brunt of social and economic policies based on the concept of the family wage, whilst single men were able to earn enough to maintain non-existent dependents. Roberts' work on women in Lancashire demonstrates the myriad ways in which working-class wives might supplement inadequate earnings and Oren has shown how wives might reserve larger meal portions for the husband and frequently ensured that he got the family's supply of meat. (34) Phyllis Willmott's autobiography describes how

her father was entitled to his cigarette and beer money even at times when little or no money was coming in and Kathleen Dayus' account of her marriage reveals the endurance required in maintaining a family's subsistence when the husband drank heavily and was frequently unemployed. (35)

Rising living standards for those in work during the twenties and thirties offered the possibility of escape from the trap of poverty, ill health and excessive drudgery. A 'good' husband was one who did not drink and who could and did work steadily and hard to provide a level of material security for his wife and children. The badge of 'respectability' for working-class husbands and wives was an income which did not require supplementing by women's earnings. Witness the humiliation experienced by the unemployed Hardcastle in Walter Greenwood's Love on the Dole (1933),

He felt his confidence slipping again. Sally, too, had given her all, so had Harry. They had been living on each other. These last few months since he had knocked off the dole he had been living on Sally's earnings. Living on a woman!...The canker of impotence gnawed his vitals. (36)

Given a system in which the husband's income was perceived as primary and the wife's as secondary, women, as these reports from the Pilgrim Trust show, might gain little satisfaction from taking on the breadwinner role,

...the woman had left her work because she could not bear to be the breadwinner while her husband, young and fit, did nothing. (37)

and another where the wife is recounting how she used to lie awake listening to her husband,

tramping up and down the garden path, or up and down in the parlour, and it nearly made her mad; and it nearly made her mad to feel that she was keeping him by her earnings and they were gaining nothing by her work. (38)

Kathleen Dayus, although the main earner for her family, felt bitterness and rage at her husband's inability to fulfil his role as breadwinner,

I was so bitter...he had just selfishly gone out drinking with money he had yet to earn instead of thinking of me and the kids...He did keep the job for a few weeks too, and even brought part of his wages home to me but the rest he spent on drink. We quarrelled often and I refused to sleep with him. (39)

This was a far cry from Griffith's 'perfect comradeship': poverty and continuing pregnancies engendered hostility rather than 'a union of spirit, mind and body'. (40) Arguments over money and drink were a common feature of many working-class marriages and the mean, bullying husband of the Victorian type described by Roberts had by no means disappeared. (41) A 'good' marriage for self-respecting women was one in which the husband handed over regular wages, did not drink, bully or sexually abuse his wife. Nevertheless, the ideology of marriage propounded by women's magazines lays the blame for husbands' misdemeanours firmly at women's feet.

I am terribly sorry for you but much of this trouble is your own fault. You have let yourself get dowdy and obsessed with your babies.

was the advice given to a young wife complaining of a recalcitrant husband. (42) Men's cruel and unacceptable behaviour was, as Sarsby has noted, if not forgiven, frequently accepted by women who justified it in terms of the

long hours, hard work and poor pay or repeated unemployment of working-class men. (43) Even the strong and independent Kathleen Dayus excused her husband's drinking in terms of the conditions of his work, 'I suppose visiting all those public houses to sell sawdust presented too much temptation and he would have a drink in each.' (44)

Good or bad, worthy or not of respect, assumptions of male superiority underlay the whole ideology of male/female relations. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the area of sexuality. Despite the general unavailability of reliable contraception, women were exhorted to engage freely in sexual intercourse with their husbands,

...any bride who really wants to hold her husband and share his ecstasy, should learn to free herself from any sense of shame, wrong-doing or fear of hurt. (45)

Yet sexual harmony had to be learned, particularly by women. It was the husband's role to guide and teach his wife, preparing her for the 'full submission' of sexual intercourse,

It is the young husband's task to remove doubts and to win his wife over to a happy confidence. This may be an affair of weeks, possibly months, and can be a severe strain upon the patience and goodwill of an ardent lover. But it is tremendously worthwhile. (46)

Such advice was mirrored in the fictional heroes of women's magazines where men, without exception, were portrayed as strong, masterful and above all firmly kind. Modern Marriage and Birth Control (1938) recommended that the ideal marriage is the one where the husband is older than the wife and therefore, presumably, more knowledgeable and wise. Implicit

in this was a belief in the natural submissiveness of women both sexually and emotionally: authority and mastery remained the husband's prerogative and female sexuality, despite its apparent liberation from pre-war censure, was seen in terms of 'yielding' and in the service of the male within marriage. (47) This ideal was continually represented in romantic fiction and magazine stories where intelligent, assertive, single heroines happily and willingly yielded to the strong embraces of 'Mr. Right'; where strong men took care of 'little wives' and even an ex-concert pianist could say,

Maybe I could do housekeeping in the mornings and teaching in the afternoons. Oh, I'll make you a home somehow darling...I'll find a way. (48)

Closely allied to the ideal of the self-sufficient, companionable marriage was the glorification of motherhood. Motherhood was endorsed by government, welfare agencies, the medical profession and even feminist groups as not only an individual obligation but a social and national duty. Feminists such as Sylvia Anthony and Vera Brittain might challenge women's relationship to the labour market, Marie Stopes might argue for accessibility to contraception and Eleanor Rathbone might powerfully articulate the need for Family Allowances but the idea that anyone other than the mother should be responsible for rearing children was never questioned. Indeed, as Lewis has argued, motherhood became a political issue: as the birth rate fell and fears of a population decline grew it became increasingly important to

ensure that women not only bore children but reared them adequately. (49)

The Maternity and Child Welfare Act of 1918 established local authority responsibility for providing maternal and infant welfare services in the form of professional midwives and health visitors, infant welfare and ante-natal clinics, cheap dried milk and food supplements for the poorest. Birth control advice was not readily available: advice and help from the state was given to women only when pregnant, thus emphasising their natural duty to bear and care for their children. (50) As Brookes has pointed out,

It is perhaps symbolic of the whole thrust of the inter-war years that while women received no employment protection (and indeed became subject to regulations demanding their resignation on marriage), schemes were laid for the protection of motherhood...The semblance of equality granted to women by the 1919 Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act, therefore, was paralleled by a potent child welfare movement which put the responsibility for children's welfare firmly on mothers. (51)

Rather than confront the underlying causes of ill-health and infant mortality such as poverty, inadequate housing and lack of family planning, policy makers chose to 'reduce them all to one fundamental cause: maternal ignorance.' (52) This belief in the ignorance of working-class mothers led to an emphasis on scientific motherhood which stressed the importance of established routines, hygiene and standards of nutrition. The ideal mother of the inter-war period was a clinical figure, measuring out her time, scrubbing and scouring to remove dirt and germs and providing well-cooked, nutritious meals or

feeding the baby at rigidly set intervals. (53) This clinical approach to childrearing reached its apotheosis in the principles of Truby King's hygienist movement,

The leading authorities of the day - English, foreign and American - all agree that the first thing to establish in life is *regularity of habits*...The establishment of perfect regularity of habits, initiated by "feeding and sleeping by the clock" is the ultimate foundation of all-round obedience. (54)

Scientific mothering was easily extended to the psychological care of children where authoritarian relations between parent and child could be reinforced by the adoption of the 'objective' tenets of behaviourism.

There is a sensible way of treating children. Treat them as though they were young adults...Let your behaviour always be objective and kindly firm. Never hug and kiss them, never let them sit in your lap. If you must, kiss them once on the forehead when they say goodnight. Shake hands with them in the morning. Give them a pat on the head if they have made an extraordinarily good job of a difficult task. Try it out; in a week's time you will find how easy it is to be perfectly objective with your child and at the same time kindly. You will be utterly ashamed of the mawkish, sentimental way you have been handling it. (sic!) (55)

At the same time mothers were being told that 'no neurotic was ever the child of a really happy couple or had been brought up in a home where peace and harmony reigned.' (56) Although it is doubtful whether working-class mothers read such advice, those, such as health visitors, trained to guide them almost certainly did and many respondents believed in an authoritarian, non-demonstrative approach to child-rearing as preparation for working-class adulthood, as I shall show in chapter eight.

Smaller families, the development of expert advice services and the political impetus to improve child health all worked to promote an ideology of motherhood which gave sole responsibility to the individual mother - sick or disturbed children were entirely her fault and a result of her failure to adhere to the advice so readily available. At the same time motherhood was a service to the nation and therefore open to constant checks and intervention. It was also promoted as women's greatest fulfilment. As the foreword to The Motherhood Book succinctly put it,

There can, we imagine, be no greater satisfaction in life to a woman than to watch her family growing up healthy in body, efficient in mind and faultless in character. (57)

The ideal of motherhood as women's primary goal, their greatest fulfilment and their national duty ensured that they remained firmly in the context of the home and family despite the greater social and sexual freedom now open to them. The growing emphasis on the needs of children through state policy and by an increasing body of experts made it difficult for women to challenge this role. To do so could appear to be denying the very real physical and emotional needs of the children they loved. Yet, as I suggest in chapter eight, working-class mothers had little time for experts: it is more likely that their commitment to motherhood stemmed from a class specific role learned from their mothers and acted out in the urban street matriarchies. This perception of motherhood was not necessarily linked with the child-

centredness we associate with post-Second World War families, concentrating as it did on physical care and moral training rather than emotional well-being.

The gap between the ideal as propounded by magazines, romantic literature and advice manuals and the reality of marriage and motherhood for many working-class wives was huge. Yet elements of the ideal were, not surprisingly, attractive to those aspiring to escape a life of poverty and drudgery. The cosy magazine image of the housewife, mistress of her small domain, loved and respected by her husband and children elided the inherent tensions of a structure based on economic and sexual dependence.

Women's magazines and the cult of domesticity (58)

The years 1920 to 1939 saw a vast expansion in the publication of magazines directed at women and focusing primarily on their role in the home. Prior to the First World War women's magazines had fallen into two categories: those produced for women with large servant-run establishments and those like Peg's Paper targeted at working-class women and consisting mostly of escapist and romantic fiction. (59) Home Chat and Woman's Weekly, both launched before the war, were forerunners of the new service and information magazines which proliferated in the inter-war period: magazines aimed at middle and lower middle-class women with small, servantless

homes and the more affluent amongst the working-class. As such these magazines deserve attention - widely read they played an important part in disseminating housewifely ideals to their targeted readership.

In 1927 a survey carried out by the London Research and Information Bureau revealed that from a sample of twenty thousand respondents, divided into middle, lower middle and working class, Home Chat enjoyed a universal popularity with readers drawn from all classes, though the majority fell into the lower middle-class category, defined by the survey as those with 'buying capacity limited but same buying habits and social outlook as the middle-class'. (60) Woman's Weekly had a similar appeal with its readers coming mostly from the lower middle-class and working-class. Working-class was here defined as 'steadier types of workers' and excluded those in slums or poorer areas. (61) By 1938 both magazines were in the 'top ten' with Woman's Weekly coming second only in popularity to the new mass-produced, colour-gravure Woman, with a circulation figure of 498,000. Such figures only show who bought the magazines. The number who read or glanced at them was likely to be larger still for such magazines were often shared, passed on or available in hairdresser's and doctor's waiting rooms.

Despite the evidence that they were read by working-class women, both magazines adopted an image of the housewife which

was predominantly middle-class. Recipes, home furnishings and clothing all assume a level of affluence beyond the means of most working-class women. The image of the housewife presented by these magazines is of a tidy, well-dressed, middle-class woman and any suggestion of class or role tension was carefully avoided. The message is clear - women everywhere are basically the same, beset by the same problems of housewifery, sharing a common set of values focused on the home and family, their sole concern what to have for supper.

Even were it possible to estimate accurately how many women read such magazines, it would still remain impossible to know how they were assimilated and interpreted. Nevertheless, it is significant that circulation figures for the magazines mentioned above increased over the period and the highly successful Woman, launched in 1937, showed no radical departure from the content and tone established by its forerunners. The home-oriented magazine was undoubtedly successfully catering for the demands of its readership although oral testimony suggests that it was the recipes, clothing patterns and 'handy tips' which attracted most women rather than the romantic fiction which made up the bulk of these magazines. Woman's Weekly for 9 July 1932 comprised seventy-five pages, of which twenty were given up to romantic fiction of the boy meets girl variety, eight to advertising, four to sewing and knitting, three to advice on relationships and one each to children and cooking. The remaining pages

were a mixture of all the above with a small section on holidays and what to wear for them. This stress on femininity and domesticity was reinforced by advertising. Advertisers, aware of the growing spending power of the housewife, recognised the value of women's magazines as a forum for their products. Out of thirty-one advertisements in Home Chat for 5 September 1925, eleven were for beauty products, eight for foodstuffs, four for home medicines (a category in which the distinction between health and beauty was often blurred), three for children's items and two for household products such as soap. Large full-page advertisements centred on foodstuffs, childcare and household items.

The editorial philosophy of these magazines was to provide information and expert advice on all aspects of home-making to a lower middle and upper working-class readership. Fiction and editorial comment relentlessly expanded on the joys of cosy domesticity. Housewifery and childcare were given a quasi-professional status requiring skill and intelligence and Good Housekeeping celebrated women's commitment to the home and family,

Any keen observer of the times cannot have failed to notice that we are on the threshold of a great feminine awakening. Apathy and levity are alike giving place to a wholesome and intelligent interest in the affairs of life, and above all, in the home. We believe that the time is ripe for a great new magazine which shall worthily meet the needs of the housekeeping woman of today. (62)

There was never any mention of the drudgery or tedium of housework nor was the possibility of another role ever

seriously entertained. Although Good Housekeeping like Mother was targeted at a more middle-class audience the messages these magazines offered were in line with the prevailing ideology offered to women of all classes. Mother magazine ran a serial about a young woman who valiantly attempts to run a home and career until her husband's flirtation with her non-working friend causes her to realise the mistake she is making. Rather than lose her husband she gives up her job and becomes a full-time housewife. (63) The advice given to a woman who felt her life to be monotonous and her talents wasted was as follows,

I have read your letter through carefully and it seems to me that you are too self-absorbed and not sufficiently interested in other people or outside affairs. Try to develop sympathy, kindness, unselfishness and the ability to love your fellow creatures. (64)

Reading these magazines, it seems women were being asked to perform an impossible juggling act. They must be lively, interested, healthy and robust companions, able to maintain a sparkling home, produce nourishing meals whilst rearing healthy, well-adjusted children. They were warned against being too fussy and houseproud, learning not to wince if cigarette ash was dropped on the carpet, yet neither must they become 'slovenly' or 'dowdy'. Roaming husbands were, the magazines claimed, the inevitable consequence of a 'wife [who] has fallen down on her job too badly' and Mother for November 1936 ran an article entitled 'A Business Girl's Warning to Wives' in which competition for men is assumed as normal and the loser entitled to little sympathy for she has only herself

to blame. (65) The way to keep a husband, women were advised, was to remain attractive, thrifty, neatly-dressed and above all cheerful - nothing, according to numerous advice columnists, irritated a husband more than 'whining' or 'nagging'. Husbands' superiority was assumed by these magazines and the editorial tone, with its mixture of coy friendliness and admonitory condescension suggested, perhaps more clearly than anything else, the place women should adopt in their relationships. Readers of Home Chat, for example, were frequently addressed as the 'little wife' or 'little mother' in her 'little home'.

Passion, in these magazines, was kept firmly in check by prudence, whilst the primacy of true love was stressed. This led, at times, to somewhat contradictory messages. On the one hand fiction and editorials emphasised that 'true riches can't be bought' and that a couple could be poor but happy (as if wealth and happiness were mutually exclusive!) at the same time as urging prudence and common-sense on their readership. One reader, anxious about her fiance's job prospects, was advised to be cautious particularly if he was not in regular employment but was also reassured such considerations should not be allowed to stand in the way of true love,

Of course if he is never in regular employment it is another matter. I agree with you that love in a cottage is better than all the riches in the world. (66)

Moreover, Agony Aunts such as Home Chat's Mrs. Jim acknowledged that romance alone was not enough - hard work,

faith and boundless optimism were more important requirements. Her common-sense approach implicitly refuted the ideals of romantic fiction.

No woman ever yet found Mr. Right ready-made. No! But in time her Jim or her Gerald grew into Mr. Right because she believed in him to the top of her pitch and shared with him life's sweetest and gravest responsibilities. (67)

The increasing popularity of such magazines suggests that many women found them a source of pleasure and information. How far they internalised the messages offered is impossible to know. Their popularity was, I suspect, greater than books precisely because they were easy to pick up and put down, dip into and browse through. Housework and childcare were not conducive to uninterrupted reading and sustained concentration, and magazines fulfilled a need for short bursts of enjoyable reading, whilst providing hints and information. Readers were often invited to contribute their own tips and recipes and even personal stories of particular interest. In this way women themselves reinforced the ideological tone by positively re-affirming the magazine's values in their own lives and communicating this reality to other readers. Certainly, such magazines offered reassurance that 'respectable' values would be rewarded - chastity before marriage, fidelity, devotion, thrift and cleanliness within would ensure the love of a 'good' man. If reality turned out differently there could be some comfort in the knowledge of moral certainty.

The Cinema

Birmingham and York both witnessed a boom in cinema building between 1919 and 1939. Birmingham boasted one hundred and nine cinemas in 1939 as opposed to fifty-seven in 1915 and in York there were ten cinemas by 1939 with an estimated weekly attendance of fifty thousand. (68) Cinemagoing was undeniably the most popular form of leisure activity for working-class people between the wars and as such deserves attention for the ideals it offered. In particular, as chapter five reveals, it was the meeting place of the young. Rowntree estimated that seventy-five per cent of cinema attenders were women and fifty per cent children and young people. (69) The popularity of the cinema gave rise to concern about the leisure activities of working-class girls and formed part of the continuing debate as to what was deemed suitable entertainment for the working-class. By 1941 concern was leading educators and observers to deplore, what they saw, as the long-term effects of such activities,

...constant picture-going and dancing, when carried to excess are fundamentally sterile ways of recreation and it is folly to allow thousands of adolescents to waste such a large proportion of their energies on these pursuits. (70)

The constraints of time and space as well as the impossibility of viewing a wide enough sample of films make it difficult to posit any generalised conclusions about the ideological content of films. Nevertheless one or two points are worth

bearing in mind. Romantic Hollywood films were much enjoyed. Respondents spoke with nostalgic affection of Rudolph Valentino, Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers and Greta Garbo but equally popular were British films starring personalities like George Formby and Gracie Fields. (71) Films like Sing as We Go (1934) and Sally in Our Alley (1931) emphasised optimism and a determined refusal to be beaten by adverse circumstances. Gracie Field's heroines in these films were cheerful, spirited and indomitable, very similar to the 'spunky' heroines of popular literature and in line with the robust cheerfulness propagated by magazines and manuals. A number of respondents commented upon their enjoyment of the parts played by Gracie Fields. Their pleasure derived in part from the humour, cheekiness and, as they perceived it, solid common-sense of such films. Hollywood glitz and romance, whilst enjoyable, were seen as essentially escapist - some respondents dismissed such films as 'silly' or 'soppy'. I suspect the down-to-earth Lancashire Gracie Fields was more readily identified with than the unreachable Garbo or Dietrich. It was an image more in tune with the realities of working-class aspirations.

Conclusion

Thus, the domestic ideology of the inter-war years was firmly focused on women as full-time wives and mothers. The ideal of the 'respectable' housewife was given official sanction by economic and social policies which buttressed the male family

wage. Married women's employment was discouraged whilst motherhood was reinforced by state intervention to protect the interests of children. Female sexuality, whilst partly freed from Victorian censoriousness, was sited firmly within marriage although, as yet, little birth control advice was available to working-class women. All these factors worked to produce a climate in which 'respectable' housewifery was virtually the only way in which working-class women could aspire to some form of status and dignity for themselves and their families.

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58. All the magazines I quote from are accesible at Colindale, London. I sampled a range of magazines across the period 1919-1939, taking an equal number from the twenties and the thirties and including Woman's Weekly, Home Chat, Good Housekeeping, Mother and Woman. As the magazines are bound in runs of three or six months, depending upon whether monthly or weekly, I sampled whole runs at a time. For example, I looked at Home Chat for three months in 1925 and three months in 1935 and I did the same with Woman's Weekly for 1922 and 1932. Because I felt Mother was targeted at a more lower middle/middle class readership I only sampled a run of one year (1936), with an edition each month. It was, like Good Housekeeping, a glossier magazine but content tended to be along very similar lines to Home Chat and Woman's Weekly. I did not sample Woman or Good Housekeeping in a systematic way but skimmed them for general impressions. Good Housekeeping was targeted at a distinctly more middle-class readership and Woman was not published until 1937 although it quickly gained in popularity.

59. Home Chat was launched in 1895 and ran until 1958; Woman's Weekly began in 1911 and is still running. White C. Women's Magazines 1693-1968 pp.311-313 and pp.96-98.
60. Ibid. p.117.
61. Ibid. p.117.
62. Launch issue of Good Housekeeping 1922 cited in White C. Women's Magazines p.103.
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CHAPTER 4

CHILDHOOD AND SOCIALISATION

All the women interviewed were growing up between 1900 and 1939: the eldest amongst them were children before and during the First World War whilst the youngest were growing up during the inter-war years. Despite the variety and uniqueness of individual accounts, common themes and patterns emerge which can also be found in numerous autobiographical accounts of childhood at this time. Dyhouse has shown how a girl's sense of her female identity and the adult role expected of her were shaped by her early experiences in the family and reinforced by formal education and the expectations of appropriate female behaviour offered by her widening social world as she grew to adulthood. (1) In this chapter I want to consider the ways in which respondents learned and, in the main, accepted a primarily domestic role. For, despite the social changes brought about by the First World War and a changing occupational structure, all, except one, opted for marriage and motherhood. More importantly, all were well aware of the drudgery inherent in their mothers' lives, yet all eventually emulated her domestic role and accepted the conventional model of a primarily home-based lifestyle. Indeed the most striking aspect of these accounts is the powerful and enduring influence of mothers. School, fiction and, for a while, peer-groups may have reinforced behaviour but it was the mother who remained the continuing touchstone. One of the main arguments

of this thesis is that women adopted values of 'respectability' as a means of endowing their domestic role with dignity and status. Many of these values were learned from their mothers; improved housing and a measure of affluence allowed them to elaborate them in their own families when the time came.

My respondents all agreed that parents were strict and insisted on adherence to certain 'proper' behaviour. In some families it might be the father who fulfilled this authoritarian role, in many it was the mother. It would be misleading however to see these working-class families as stereotypically structured with a strict, bullying father and passive, collusive mother. Some, like Mrs. Kitchin's did fill this image,

My father was very strict. I remember I used to go to school, and it was a good twenty minutes walk from school but if I wasn't home, I went out of school at half past four, and if I wasn't home by twenty to five, he used to wallop me one, wanted to know where I had been...He used to have an army belt with a big buckle on and you tell any lies or swear or anything that you shouldn't and you would get that round your back.

Who used to do that?

Father, he was ever so strict. (2)

but in many others, like Mrs. Jones', it could be the mother who determined what was 'proper' behaviour.

She made us do everything right and she got very annoyed if we did do anything wrong...my father was very quiet and he sort of went along with everything she did...My father was ...he wasn't over strict, not like May's father, he was terribly strict, he wouldn't let her do anything but my father would. (3)

Childhood for these women was a time for learning rigid rules and correct behaviour whichever parent was the major disciplinarian. 'Respectable' working-class values and mores were transmitted through the family as was a sense of appropriate gender behaviour. The structure and organisation of family life, and in particular the role of the mother, offered girls few alternative models of femininity. Working-class girls rarely saw women in any other role than that of wife and mother, nor did they see men involved in domesticity except on rare and emergency occasions. Schools as we have seen in chapter three, reinforced gender distinctions both through the curriculum and in more subtle ways as I shall show.

Family Life

The male invisibility noted by Katherine Chorley at the end of the nineteenth century in the middle-class suburb of Alderley Edge was also a characteristic of working-class children's lives. (4) Working-class men worked long hours and were simply not available during most of the child's day.

Well, he [father] used to leave at half past five [in the morning] and he never got home until half past six... He used to work Saturday mornings as well then. Used to work until about half past twelve on a Saturday. (5)

The early years of childhood would be spent with the mother and often other female relatives,

After my mother did her housework she'd go and help her mother and grandmother too, older people. But she didn't go out to work. (6)

Even where mothers were engaged in some kind of hidden work daughters perceived their mother's primary role as being in the home and often vehemently denied that she worked. The mother of the respondent quoted above kept a public house with the grandmother for a while before running a small shop and Mrs. Jones, as a child, often helped out in both. Yet she stated categorically that her mother 'didn't go out to work'. Mrs. Hutchings revealed the same ambivalence to women's casual work, remembering more vividly the domestic tasks expected of women.

Well, a few did [work] but it was only what we would have called charring, just going out to do heavy work or help with washing, but most people had so much to do in their own homes and so many children to care for. If you think of making bread and all that sort of thing. (7)

Thus girls from an early age would be surrounded by a range of women whom they perceived as involved in unpaid domestic work of one sort or another.

These early lessons in the economic sexual division of labour would be reinforced by the organisation of the home and the sexual division of labour within it. Girls learned from their mothers that men worked hard to keep them and therefore had a claim to the best food and some uninterrupted leisure time. Phyllis Willmott recalls her mother's unquestioning assumption that a man's needs took priority,

We always got home before it was dark: we had to get home before Dad got in. Not that he minded us being (with Mum at any rate) in darkness. The point was that the table must be laid for his tea when he came in...But anyway our tea had to be eaten and cleared away before Dad arrived..."If we don't

hurry your Dad will be in" set us all moving rapidly homewards. It never occurred to us to ask "Does that matter?" Like so many rules governing our little lives it was beyond question. (8)

Mrs. Crowe's mealtimes as a child were organised around her father in the same way,

We used to have our dinner at night, we never had dinner at dinnertime...my father used to have his dinner at night.

And so you would have it with him?

Half past six because she didn't have to rush back early to get tea for him. [He didn't get home from work until 6.30 p.m.] (9)

The absence of men during the daytime (even those on night shifts were rarely seen as they slept most of the day), and the organisation of family life around the needs of the father demonstrated more clearly than any spoken words the roles expected of men and women.

Sarsby has observed that despite absence, drunkenness and even violence, attitudes to fathers were more tolerant. (10) This is borne out in my interviews and in autobiography where there is a distinct lack of the intensity which characterised so many accounts of the mother/daughter relationship. Mrs. Porter continues to blame her mother for her stepfather's desertion,

She was a very excitable woman. Flared up and was very spoilt because she was the youngest of ten children. My stepfather left home a few times, he didn't know where he was, poor man. (11)

and, despite her father's drunkenness which led to the family's poverty, Mrs. Harris reserved her hostility for her

mother. Mrs. Crowe, like Kathleen Dayus, saw her father as an ally against the injustices meted out by her mother. Neither questioned the conditions of their mothers' lives which led to mental illness for the one and alcoholism for the other. (12) Tolerant affection and a desire to please Dad may well have reflected mother's own behaviour and was undoubtedly a manifestation of a femininity which taught that men were different, unaccountable to the rules governing female behaviour, but nevertheless to be placated and deferred to, for in myth, if not reality, they offered protection from a harsh world.

Nevertheless all the women I interviewed remarked on the hard work undertaken by their mothers in running a home. Fathers may have helped out occasionally but the tasks they would do were strictly limited. Mrs. Walters' father helped with the washing-up (infrequently) but never cooked or cleaned; Mrs. Godfrey remembers her father cooking breakfast on Sundays and Christmas Day but cannot recall him helping with any other chores; and Mrs. Crowe thought her father 'marvellous' because he brought his wife and daughter a cup of tea in bed every morning and helped to peel the vegetables at weekends. Most domestic tasks were seen as below a man's dignity and some men, like Phyllis Willmott's father, refused to do any domestic chores even when off work,

However long the weeks off work dragged on Dad did not expect to be asked to help with the household chores. Not even when Mum...took on a morning charring job...Dad was only prepared to do jobs which were appropriate for men. (13)

Such jobs were generally seen by both men and women as helping out - washing-up, making a cup of tea and taking the children out on Sunday mornings to allow the mother to prepare Sunday dinner. A number of men might see decorating as a manly task, as did Mrs. Butcher's father,

The only thing that he would ever do was, Christmas week, he'd paper the living room. Never do it before Christmas week. (14)

but others would expect this to be done by their wives. Mrs. Wilkes recalled helping her mother to wallpaper and decorate late at night after all the other chores were done.

The majority of respondents accepted this division of labour within the home seeing domestic chores as women's work. They also learned that they were expected to help with housework from an early age particularly where they belonged to a large family. Mrs. Godfrey could not remember a time when she didn't have to help out,

And even when she had a washing day we used to have to clean up because those days it was an old boiler that you used to have to put the coal on to underneath and scrub all round and then scrub the back kitchen. Clean the mangle down. (15)

Mrs. Kitchin recalled that even at eight or nine she was expected to

Black lead the grate. It was all black leaded so we used to have black leading to do. Polishing, cleaning windows and the tables. You know, scrub-top tables and you had to scrub them...Used to have to go up the yard to do the washing and used to have to do most of the errands, used to send you on the errands. (16)

Mothers could be hard task masters, demanding a high standard of cleaning from their daughters even when quite small. Mrs.

Wilkes found this had repercussions later when she went to work and her comments might well explain why so many working-class girls resented formal education,

If there was a little mark at all at the side she would make me do that over and over and over again...it had to be done right. She used to say to me "if you can't do a job right, don't do it at all". Or "it's not worth doing" but she would teach me and I hated anybody standing over me and telling me to do anything when I was at work because it was drummed into me that much you know when I was young, but I realise now that she was in the right. (17)

The high standards of housework demanded of many girls bred resentment in some. Mrs. Holder recalled with anger getting the cane at school for being late because her mother had insisted she stay behind at home to re-clean the hall floor and Mrs. Porter still feels the injustice of having to play little mother to her brothers,

She used to clobber me one with anything handy [but] in her eyes the boys were angels. They never did anything wrong for her. I had to do all the looking after and if he [the youngest] wasn't looked after then I was in trouble.

However, anger and resentment tended to be directed against the mother rather than a system which posited women as household drudges. In a series of interviews with women, many of whom were children during this period, Sheila Rowbotham and Jean McCrindle commented on the bitterness and hostility expressed towards mothers:

We were surprised by this hostility until we realised that teaching a daughter her role as future housewife can all too easily develop a sadistic quality when the mother herself is tired, over-worked and oppressed by her own existence. (18)

It may well be that some mothers vented their frustrations on their daughters but I prefer an explanation which sees the apparent exploitation of daughters as a necessary and pragmatic response to a specific situation. Working-class mothers were hard-worked. 'Respectability' demanded that homes should be sparkling clean in conditions which constantly mitigated against this; the family wash before piped hot water was an arduous and time consuming task: large families, perhaps more than anything else, meant that a woman's work quite literally was never done. For many of the families interviewed an inadequate male wage meant that much of this domestic work was combined with casual work such as washing and cleaning to make ends meet. In such circumstances a girl's domestic labour was a vital resource in maintaining the family. Without the help of daughters many mothers would have been unable to fulfil all the tasks expected of them - a girl's unpaid domestic work was as important in the household economy as the part-time earnings of boys and the male wage. (19) Mrs. Harris accepted that without the children's help her mother would have been unable to take in the washing which supplemented her father's inability to maintain the family,

We were very poor because my father was a man who liked his drink, and my mother used to take washing in when we were children. I always remember that because there was full days of washing and the back kitchen floor was flooded with, you know, peggy tub and washing and oh dear, dear, we used to come home from school and we used to have to help clean the floor and things like that. (20)

However, Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Walters did not recall having to help much with housework as children. Both are younger than the other respondents and both came from smaller families. This would seem to suggest that the larger the family the more highly-valued was a daughter's contribution to housework. I have tried to avoid inferring mothers' attitudes from the obviously partial accounts of daughters but it may well be that adaptation to specific circumstances rather than a desire to teach domesticity was the motivating factor in many families. Thus those born into large families would find themselves with a correspondingly greater burden of housework. This as much as position in the family would determine the extent of a daughter's involvement with domestic tasks. Mrs. Dickens, the youngest of seven children, was still expected to help with housework, as her brothers had in their turn,

Oh yes, you had to wash up and scrub the back kitchen floors and things like that. Oh yes you had to help, go to the shops and things...The boys were at work by then and they missed out, you see, and they were bringing money in.

Did you think that was unfair?

No, not really, they had done it in their turn. (21)

Mrs. Godfrey's account illustrates how the role of household help could be passed down as each daughter left home,

She wasn't cruel or anything like that but I had to...and then me sister, the sister next to me, lived across the road from Mum and she had no children and she used to come over to Mum and used to help her a lot but even when I left home there was Morah [and then] there was Olive. (22)

This need for a daughter's labour could work to prevent girls taking full advantage of educational opportunities. Mrs. Pearce did not take up her place at a Grammar School because her family could not afford for her to go. It was not only the extra cost but the loss of an unpaid domestic worker once homework became important which had to be taken into account. Helen Forrester's autobiography recounts the anger the young Helen felt towards her mother for making her stay at home to mind smaller children. If her mother would only 'stay at home, like other mothers do' Helen would be freed to undertake paid work and train for a career. (23) Mrs. Hutchings, who did take up her Grammar School, place remembered that 'it was hard, very, very hard for them [her parents]'. In the event economic necessity forced her to leave at thirteen, despite her father's relative affluence as a small shopkeeper. The majority of girls were expected to help their mothers with the home, to enter paid employment as soon as they could leave school and contribute to the family economy until they married.

However, it would be misleading to see tension and resentment as the dominant or only characteristic of mother/daughter relationships. Respect, affection and a desire for mother's approval are evidenced alongside conflict. Many felt their mothers had made considerable sacrifices for their well-being. Mrs. Hutchings was one and Mrs. Harris recalled how her mother would go without food to provide for the children. Mrs. Jones

recounted how her mother was anxious for the children 'to get on' and encouraged her to take exams for Grammar School education,

My mother wanted me to sit it, she wanted me to go to a Grammar School but I didn't pass. The headmaster said I should have done but I didn't...she tried always to get higher things, tried to get us on the piano and my brother did stick it but I didn't. Even when I was at school she tried to get me to learn another instrument so I started the violin. (25)

Mrs. Jones' failure to pass the exam or stick to the piano may have been forms of resistance to her mother's aspirations but, nevertheless, she undoubtedly respected her mother and was close to her in later life.

It also has to be remembered that mothers themselves may have been uneasy in their social role. Mrs. Porter castigates her mother for being 'a good time person. So she ended up with practically nothing' (26) and Mrs. Jones' account of her mother presents a restless woman, finding outlets for her considerable energy through aspirations for her children and a series of small business ventures. Girls did not necessarily have static, consistent models to emulate. The mother's role in the socialisation process could be inconsistent and ambivalent, fuelled both by concern for a daughter's future and a desire to curtail unrealistic day-dreaming. Phyllis Willmott, sensing her mother's fatigue and depression, promises,

Poor Mum, you have such a hard time because of us. But when I'm grown I'll buy you everything you want, even a fur coat for the winter.

to which her mother replied,

When you're grown up you'll be doing the same as I am now - worrying where the next penny is coming from to feed *your* kids and how to keep their feet dry, never mind fur coats. (27)

Within this framework mothers and daughters could be bound by intense ties of love and ambivalence; bonds of identification and understanding developed when daughters became wives and mothers in their turn. Indeed what is striking in many accounts is the sense of gratitude daughters later came to have for their mother's teaching, feeling that this had, more than anything else, prepared them for their roles as wives and mothers.

Daughters may have resented the domestic work expected of them or mitigated its harsher aspects by focusing on specific tasks they especially enjoyed - Mrs. Porter loved cleaning the brasses and polishing and Mrs. Godfrey enjoyed dollying the wash. What is certain is that girls quickly perceived the link between a woman's worth and her domestic role. Numerous respondents celebrated their mother's good housekeeping seeing this as a measure of her ability as a mother.

She was a good cook when she wanted to be...she was a very good housekeeper considering she never had any training. (28)

and

She was a right good mother...Yes, she was a good mother...we never wanted for any food and clothes. (29)

These values of mothering were primarily transmitted through girls' experiences in the family and were later taken into

adult life where, as we shall see, many women continued to see their mothering role as providing for the physical needs of their children. This is not to deny that affection was present but that it tended to be expressed through the provision of food and clothing rather than by cuddling, talking or an understanding of emotional needs.

The teaching of 'respectable' values

As I have observed, respondents felt their parents to be strict, authoritarian figures who laid down a set rigid and unbreakable rules of conduct. These ranged from what was seen as suitable clothing to unquestioning obedience to the authority of the parents. Punishment to enforce rules was seen as essential although this could vary from a hard look to actual physical violence. Paradoxically, this constant surveillance of appropriate behaviour was matched by considerable physical freedom. All respondents remember playing in the street and even at quite a young age being able to roam freely in the neighbourhood. Those who were brought up in rural areas recalled going off for the day with brothers and sisters for picnics.

We used to play out and we used to go, when there were holiday times, rambling round the bluebell woods and over the Lickeys. (30)

Children were expected to make their own amusements and generally keep from under their parents' feet. Mrs. Harris

who lived in the centre of York remembered how as children games could roam quite far afield,

We all mixed as children...we used to paper chase, bits of paper and go round Lord Mayor's Walk and St. John's College in them days and around the Bar Walls, climbed the Bar Walls and all round that because it was all in our area and we would play hopscotch. (31)

Independence and self-reliance in terms of play were expected during daylight hours but children always had to be in by about seven o'clock in the evening.

Before I left school I had to be in about seven thirty, washed and in bed and ready for school the next day. (32)

For Mrs. Harris' mother there was a pragmatic purpose behind this associated with the provision of 'respectable' clean clothes even down to underwear,

You had to be in by seven p.m. as [mother] had our vests to wash for morning. She was a spotless woman, for all we had no clothes and you had to get bathed in the tub in front of the fire and your vests were washed and put on there ready for morning. (33)

Early bedtimes seem in many cases to have been a practical necessity when there were no changes of clothes and washing needed to be done, rather than a moral issue, although, as we shall see, it was to become this as girls grew to adolescence.

Spotless and suitable clothing was an important badge of 'respectability'.

I was never allowed to wear short socks, lovely white socks...I had to have black stockings, those thick ones, I mean and when I had gone to school I would turn them down to look like socks and by the time I had got home I had to put them back up before me mother and father saw them...Oh it was not becoming of you to wear socks, it was disgusting, and things like that you see...it was very cheap and common and that is how my mother and father would think it in those days and your frocks, you couldn't wear a short frock. I

used to tuck mine up when I had left home to go to school [and] you had to wear a pinny. (34)

Mrs. Fellows remembered that button boots were considered 'classy' although a nuisance to have to cope with. Her mother would get a pair from a second hand stall on the Saturday market in York for her to wear on Sundays, the day when all children and adults wore their best clothes.

I always remember she got me a pair of button boots, fastened up here with a hook...oh, I hated every minute of wearing them - they were supposed to be classy and what a job fastening them. (35)

White, starched pinafores were standard wear for girls of this period and best clothes were nearly always white. Keeping children clean then before the advent of washing machines was not an easy task and dirtiness was something that many respondents recall being punished for. It was not, of course, purely practical: grimy children belonged to 'rough' families and mothers would go to considerable lengths to ensure their children looked clean and well-dressed at all times. Mrs. Crowe remembers her mother's violence when she got dirty,

She got me ready to take me to my grandmother's, all in white, beautiful, I was dressed up lovely and I went and played with the kid next door making mud pies...Well, she couldn't take me because I was filthy, filthy dirty and she gave me a damn good hiding. Oh, she didn't half give me a bashing she did. Lost her temper. (36)

Others recall being scrubbed till it hurt and fetched back 'by the hair of your head' to have a wash if they did not meet the standards of cleanliness laid down by parents. (37) This emphasis on cleanliness did have a practical basis - the

environment was frequently sooty and dirty and keeping clothes clean was a continuing problem. Equally, vermin and head lice were common; scrubbing, it was believed, would keep them at bay. Nevertheless dirt was associated with 'rough' families and those aspiring to 'respectable' status had a full-time job maintaining standards of cleanliness. This distinction was reinforced by the prevailing emphasis on educating mothers in standards of hygiene and disease prevention, though oral accounts suggest that the desire to be seen as 'respectable' was as great a motivator as health. Sibling deaths were common for the women interviewed and appear to have been accepted philosophically - I have no evidence to suggest that mothers were aware that infant and child deaths might be preventable, although without interviewing the mothers themselves this conclusion can only be speculative.

Swearing and cheek were particularly frowned upon. Mrs. Jones remembered that

It used to be a terrible thing to swear in those days. You were a rotter if you swore [and] women didn't say things like *that*. (38)

Some parents like Mrs. Kitchin's and Mrs. Crowe's used corporal punishments to prevent swearing and 'back chat'. Mrs. Kitchin's father would take his army belt to her if he heard her swearing and Mrs. Crowe's mother used the back of her hand,

She used to have a very thick lovely wedding ring and if I used to back chat she used to flick me and she was cack-handed, and she used to flick me with her wedding ring, nearly knock you out and then give me one straight across

the head and you couldn't really cheek them so I suppose they were strict to a point. (39)

Most of the parents of respondents used less physical means of enforcing such rules. Mrs. Matthews remembers the look her mother would give her if she behaved badly and Mrs. Walters was stopped her pocket money for misdemeanours, although she remembers the occasional slap,

They stopped your pocket money. "You won't get your penny"...I might have had a slap but I didn't get a really good smack that I would remember. (40)

I have no evidence of children defying their parents although as we shall see in the next chapter, one respondent resisted her father's strictures in adolescence. Parental authority appears to have been unquestioningly accepted by most children. The authoritarian relationship between parents and children undoubtedly mitigated against demonstrative affection, physical comforting or emotional support. None of my respondents could remember being cuddled or comforted by their parents,

I can't remember ever sitting down or being cuddly to my Dad. I've got the feeling I had that.....rejection.....no, what's the word.....I was unhappy. (41)

and Mrs. Crowe commented that whilst she believed herself to be very close to her father she 'never answered him back not until he died, I daren't'. (42) Whilst this general lack of physical and emotional expression of affection did not mean that parents did not love their children, it reinforced that reserve and self-discipline so important for 'respectable'

status in adult life as we shall see in later chapters. The women I interviewed, I suspect, survived the myriad hardships of their childhoods by developing a tough emotional self-reliance which allowed them to accept, and later emulate, the forms of affection practised by their parents.

Sobriety was also an important issue for these families.

Children had plenty of opportunity to perceive for themselves the consequences of drunkenness on family life. Most respondents could remember families where one or other or both parents drank,

I can remember one particular family...he used to go every Sunday afternoon to the Fox Inn. Sunday dinner time then and stop there while throwing out time, as they called it, and he used to come out and then he used to get home, and if you went there about half past three on a Sunday afternoon there would be pots, pans, everything being thrown out of his front door, that was regular, that was their pattern of life. (43)

and Mrs. Harris's early life was dominated by her father's drinking,

My father was a man who liked his drink. He called it Cobbler's Monday, they did on top of the pits in those days, nobody worked on a Monday and they called it Cobbler's Monday and of course when it got to Monday and he still went out and when Tuesday morning came to go to work "Oh I can't go, I'm not very well" and it went on like that until there was no money coming in and he lost his jobs...If he had gone out on a Sunday dinnertime he would go to bed on a Sunday afternoon and you couldn't move, you wouldn't dare speak for fear you woke him up else when he came down he would be in a very, very bad temper. (44)

Those who experienced drunkenness in their early family life were anxious to escape it in adulthood. Mrs. Fellows, whose father drank quite excessively, said

I think, myself, you were either frightened by it or you carry it on...I was frightened of it I was. I had seen that much of it.(45)

The majority of respondents' parents, however, did not drink to excess. Fathers might have the occasional drink on a Saturday night and, although after the First World War, breweries strove to attract women and families, the belief remained that the pub was a strictly male preserve.(46) Mrs. Walters' comments were typical of many,

Saturday night he [father] used to go out for a drink.

Did your mother go with him?

No, not very often. She'd go now and then, a special occasion but otherwise she wouldn't go. She didn't think it was nice for women to go anyway.(47)

Nevertheless, whether there was drunkenness in the family or not, girls quickly perceived the link between sobriety and 'respectability'. 'Rough' families drank and quarrelled in the street, their children were grimy and ill-clad and, most importantly, they were rigorously censored by more self-respecting members of the community.(48) Sobriety became for these women a highly-valued attribute in choice of husband and, as we shall see, was to play a large part in that home-centredness which characterised so many marriages.

Formal education and outside agencies

Although formal schooling appeared to have made little impact on these women's lives (almost without exception their answers

to questions about school are short and uninterested) the education they received undoubtedly reinforced the sexual division of labour learned in the home. Despite the introduction of psychological theories of childhood, a growing belief in the benefits of education and a widening of the curriculum, many educationalists continued to see their role as preparing children and particularly girls for a specific role in society.

As we have seen in chapter three fears of race degeneracy, a falling birthrate and middle-class anxieties about the servant problem as new employment opportunities threatened to attract girls away from domestic service, led to recommendations that increased facilities should be made available for girls to acquire domestic training in a way that presented it as both worthwhile and attractive. (49) The Board of Education had complied with these recommendations and before the First World War a complex system of domestic training and inspection was set up in elementary schools with particular emphasis on the housewifely skills required by the wives of working men. After the war elementary schools continued to provide highly-organised facilities for girls to learn domestic skills: many schools had separate premises furnished as a home where girls were taken to learn cookery, laundrywork and cleaning,

Special accommodation designed to give more meaning to the Housecraft (sic) of a school is now provided in many areas. A suite of small rooms consisting of bedroom, sitting-room, bathroom and perhaps a small kitchen is sometimes provided in addition to the Housecraft rooms, in order to familiarise the girls with the common problems of a small house. In

some cases a house on a separate site is taken, and this provides for the additional and more intensive study of home management with a smaller group of pupils than is usual in the Housecraft room. Both types of accommodation are designed to give reality to the practice and, where they are not available, it is most important to make up for their absence by eliminating as far as possible the school atmosphere, so that the girls may still associate their work with the requirements of a home. (50)

Mrs. Walters recalled with pleasure housecraft lessons in the small house set aside for the purpose near her elementary school in south west Birmingham and Mrs. Godfrey told me that

For the housewifery we used to go to a house in Umberslade Road and we went to Raddlebarn School to do the cookery and the laundry but the sewing of course we done at Tiverton Road (the base school). (51)

Considerable organisation and time must have been required to move classes in this way. The official time allotted in timetabling may thus have been greater in practice and other subjects may well have been shortened to make time.

Indeed, despite the conclusion of the Hadow Committee (1923) that there were few significant differences in the educational potential of the sexes, many educationalists continued to believe that,

The most obvious and general reason for variation in curriculum is difference of the pupils in sex. Young boys and girls can be taught together with mutual advantage but as the years pass on the gulf between boys' and girls' courses rapidly widens. It is not merely that older girls are instructed in various subjects, e.g. needlework, domestic subjects and infant care which are only rarely taken by boys...Difference of sex must also affect to some extent the treatment of many ordinary subjects in the curriculum. (52)

This Handbook goes on to pinpoint particular areas of difficulty,

the experience of teachers seems to show that in subjects such as Arithmetic and Geography a course suitable for boys often requires considerable modification if it is to serve the needs and interests of girls. (53)

It is doubtful how often such suggestions were put into practice, nor indeed how a Geography course could be modified to 'serve the interests of girls'. Nevertheless, the underlying assumption - that girls are deficient boys - would have communicated itself in various subtle ways. Girls, particularly in the latter part of their schooling, were taught in separate classes from boys, the two sexes had separate entrances with the girls entrance often marked 'Girls and Infants' and school planners were concerned to provide a quiet area in the playground for girls and small children. (54) These forms of organisation reinforced an ideology which posited women as weaker and in need of protection; at the same time however separate classes may well have provided a space for girls to develop links of solidarity with other girls to withstand the dominance of 'rough' males. It also undoubtedly contributed to the belief already forged in the family that males were different, even bizarre creatures, whose actions were unaccountable by female standards.

Such an educational ideology would also have taught girls which subjects they were expected to excel in, that is

needlework and housecraft rather than arithmetic or geography. This is evidenced in interviews where little concern was expressed at inability to achieve in academic subjects but inability to sew adequately could give rise to anxiety. Mrs. Holder remembers still the frequent rebukes she received for bad sewing and Mrs. Kitchin recalled her excellence at needlework and her dislike of other subjects.

I couldn't stand history. History, geography and spelling I hated it and I still can't spell from that day to this properly...I used to look after the teachers' underskirts you know when they used to have these little roses and little things all done by hand. All them little stitches. I used to do them all. I used to love it. (55)

The Hadow Report on the Differentia of Curricula for Boys and Girls in Secondary Schools recommended that secondary education as well as elementary education should provide opportunities for girls to learn domestic subjects. Whilst it recognised that 'for many girls much time is already taken up by household duties at home' it reiterated that,

as long as domestic subjects are left outside the general school curriculum, or are taken by only a section of the girls so long will they fail to hold an honourable place in the schoolgirl's estimation, in spite of the fact that many of the special duties of women make a strong natural appeal to girls. (56)

The Report stressed the need for special provision for girls to learn domestic subjects in order to prepare them for the part girls and women 'have to play in the home and its duties which can hardly be shirked even if its effects on their studies may be deprecated.' (57) The message was clear - better to sacrifice opportunities for girls' academic

achievement than to leave them unprepared for domesticity. In such a climate it was hardly surprising that so few respondents went on to secondary education and that all saw marriage and motherhood as their future goal. However, this determination on the part of educationalists to teach girls their natural role was to some extent wasted. None of the women interviewed felt they learned very much about domestic subjects from school. Instead they believed the home taught them all they needed to know,

It was mainly your own family and with cooking, sewing, knitting, anything like that, you watched other people, what they did and then you started on it yourself. (58)

And we didn't mind, as I say, doing the housewifery. But *why* we was taught that because most of us was really doing that sort of thing at home then. (59)

Domestic subjects were probably enjoyed precisely because they were experienced as non-academic. They provided a break from the classroom based teaching of other subjects and covered tasks that the majority of working-class girls were already well-equipped to cope with. In such subjects girls could display the skills and self-confidence not expected in the 'masculine' areas of arithmetic and geography. Thus the pride and enjoyment educators tended to stress as proof of the suitability and benefits of housecraft were more likely to emanate from a sense of superior knowledge than from being taught new skills. The Board of Education suggested that recalcitrant girls who showed little interest in domestic subjects

sometimes come from homes where they have to do so much household work with inadequate equipment and materials that the subject has lost its freshness and interest. (60)

This was undoubtedly true but it was also likely that starching gloves and tray-cloths had little relevance, however attractively presented, to girls used to scrubbing boards and minding small children.

Great stress was laid on health education and hygiene in school curricula of this period and girls were encouraged to regard standards of personal and environmental cleanliness as their particular duty. The Board of Education Handbook of Suggestions on Health Education (1933) encouraged teachers to emphasise the 'evils of uncleanliness' in teaching this subject and to stress the importance of individual efforts in combating the effects of dirt and germs. As we have seen in the previous chapter official ideology saw the fight against disease and dirt as an individual one - educating working-class women was a major strategy in the fight against the ill-health and malnutrition so prevalent in urban working-class areas. The Handbook exhorted teachers to lay particular emphasis on

...the unpleasantness and risk to other people of uncleanliness; fleas and lice flourish in dirty surroundings; refuse left lying about forms a breeding place for flies, and these carry germ-laden dirt which they deposit on food and particularly in milk;...polluted water is a source of disease [and] dirty houses retain infection. (67)

As all the women I interviewed conflated cleanliness with morality and being a 'good' wife and mother, it would appear that this lesson, at least, was well learned. Given the generally high standards of cleanliness maintained by their mothers and the lessons of 'respectability' taught in the home it is hardly surprising that excessive zeal was expended in scrubbing and polishing once more adequate housing made this possible. As is so often the case those in least need of the lesson were those most likely to become over-concerned about it. Those for whom cleanliness was impossible, given defective housing, large families and an inadequate income, had no choice but to ignore the message. Surrounded on all sides by an ethos of 'cleanliness is next to godliness', self-respecting working-class girls were socialised to believe that a woman's place was in the home and that her function there was to wage an unceasing battle against dirt and germs in the service of her family.

Despite the burden of housework expected of these girls in childhood, only one recalls being kept off school to look after her mother when she was ill. The majority felt that their mothers were adamant that they should not miss out on schooling. Mrs. Smith used to have to help her mother with the washing-up when she came home from school for lunch but her mother 'wouldn't allow you to be off school' (62) It may be that mothers were keen for their children to receive, at least, elementary education. Equally, it may well be that

insisting on children's attendance at school, whether or not the parents were concerned about education, was one of those subtle distinctions between 'respectable' and 'rough' families. I heard numerous accounts of how poorer children were kept at home because they had no shoes to wear and it may well be that parents were anxious to avoid any suggestion that this was the case for their children. Mrs. Kitchin recalls how she was treated at school when she received charity clothes from the Birmingham Daily Mail Charity fund,

You were given Daily Mail clothes, a big D.M on the side of your boots and your dresses were like prison dresses...Used to get some very nasty ones and all, when you had the Daily Mail clothes they used to chase after you, you know, and used to hurt you. (63)

Thus, cleanliness, punctuality and regular attendance were all expected of these girls in childhood both by the family and by the school. Sunday Schools also played a part in reinforcing these messages: all respondents attended Sunday School whether or not they now attend church and whether or not their parents attended church. Many remember with pleasure the outings provided by Sunday School - few remember the teaching there. Nevertheless, there was a strong expectation that all children should attend: Mrs. Walters remembers the anger of her parents when they discovered that she had been playing truant. Whatever the parental motivation, a desire to have their children taught religion or just the opportunity for a few hours peace on a Sunday afternoon, Sunday School was an important part of the child's week. I suspect that parents'

concern for their children to attend was based on a belief that Sunday School would reinforce and teach the rules and discipline expected at home rather than a desire for them to acquire a particular faith. Mrs. Kitchin attended a Salvation Army Sunday School even though her mother was Church of England and Mrs. Jones observed that,

It was Methodist we went to Sunday School to but I don't think....as long as there was a Sunday School near you you just went to the nearest one...I think they [parents] had, you know, they all had this thought about it even if they didn't go to church. They had the thoughts and they wanted us to be schooled that way... It didn't really make any difference what type of Sunday School it was. (64)

Mrs. Jones, who has no particular religious faith, followed her mother's example when she became a parent, 'I sent my two to Sunday School. Sort of you did things that your parents did, you followed on' (65) This kind of ethical Christianity reinforced the lessons learned at home and school - sobriety, cleanliness and service to others were the moral yardsticks of these girls' lives.

Conclusion

Thus, the experiences of childhood, focused to a great extent on the family, determined the limits of future action for these girls. By the time they left school at fourteen my respondents had acquired a vast body of knowledge about their female identity and the roles and behaviour expected of them. They might determine to live a life freer of drudgery and poverty than their mothers but, socialised to believe that a

woman's primary role was wife and mother, such a goal would remain fixed within the parameters of marriage and motherhood. Most girls could expect little financial independence even on leaving school. Jobs for working-class girls were mainly low paid, semi-skilled work and wages were expected to contribute to the household economy. Marriage, with its promise of independence and control over their own household, was an apparently attractive alternative to parental authority and dominance, particularly in these years as higher incomes and improved housing made escape from drudgery and poverty a viable possibility. In the next chapter we shall see how women spent the years between leaving school and marriage and how they made prudential (or not) choices of husbands to achieve their goals.

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21. Interview Mrs. Dickens.
22. Interview Mrs. Godfrey.
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24. Interview Mrs. Hutchings.
25. Interview Mrs. Jones.
26. Interview Mrs. Porter.
27. Willmott P. Growing Up in a London Village p.75
28. Interview Mrs. Porter.
29. Interview Mrs. Dickens.
30. Interview Mrs. Jones.
31. Interview Mrs. Harris.
32. Interview Mrs. Kitchin.
33. Interview Mrs. Harris.
34. Ibid.
35. Interview Mrs. Fellows.
36. Interview Mrs. Crowe.
37. Interview Mrs. Kitchin.
38. Interview Mrs. Jones.

39. Interview Mrs. Crowe.
40. Interview Mrs. Walters.
41. Interview Mrs. Butcher.
42. Interview Mrs. Crowe.
43. Interview Mrs. Fellows.
44. Interview Mrs. Harris.
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The children usually play in the courtyards or streets.

nd 65
 74
 115
 age 1

Birmingham's Central Wards

Back-to-back houses are the most typical feature of Birmingham's Central Wards. The houses often consist of three rooms, one above the other. The living rooms open directly on to the street or court (for typical plans see page 34). These views show (1) a typical street, (2) a living room opening on to the court, (3) the court itself. Such houses now let at an inclusive rental of about 8s. per week (see page 58).



Source: When We Build Again (1941)

CHAPTER 5

YOUTH AND COURTSHIP

As I have shown in chapter three a discernible pattern of young adulthood had become established for working-class girls by the inter-war years. Girls left school at fourteen and entered the world of paid employment until marriage, whereupon their future was the home and family. The years between leaving school and marriage were seen by educationalists and employers as a transition period leading into a woman's natural role as wife and mother. Her paid employment was seen as temporary until this role could be fulfilled; indeed the disciplines and experiences of work were often cited as indirect education for wife and motherhood. (1) In this chapter I want to examine how women themselves perceived this period - was it a time of independence and personal growth (the cluster of ideas suggested by today's understanding of the term adolescence) or was it a period of continuing dependence? It is also important to examine here the question of girls' emerging sexuality for this, as I discuss in chapter eight, may well have had a bearing on later attitudes to marital sexuality and family limitation. Moreover, as I shall argue, romance and passion were not the primary criteria in their choice of husband and this was to have implications for the way in which marriage was perceived by these women. One of the overriding motivations of my respondents was a call to

'respectability' - not necessarily the 'respectability' of their 'betters' but a class specific ethos imposed from within rather than from above and relying on rules and conventions which did not necessarily mirror those of external agencies or middle-class observers.

John Gillis has suggested that the first half of this century saw a re-emerging ritualisation of courtship, ritualisation specific to a fully industrialised and urbanised society. Economic and social relations under such a system did not (and do not) necessarily harmonise with conceptions of conjugal and romantic love. For those on the margins of such a society, where the tensions would be most felt, ritual could alleviate and interpret inexpressible anxieties as Gillis recognises would be

most pervasive amongst the young and especially women, who as marginal groups, have a perpetual need to interpret and express symbolically, what they cannot control directly. (2)

It is possible to see the experiences of my respondents in this way. Courtship and the years of adolescence were subject to their own rules and patterns: patterns which enacted the highly segregated nature of the world of work and family along age and gender lines. Young people both male and female (but especially female) were subject to adult authority in the home, at work and at school. Equally the home, work and school were organised along highly sex-segregated lines by which the accepted functions of later life were reinforced for both sexes. The years between leaving school and getting

married were characterised by sex- segregated activities. Girls worked and played together as did boys; in the home girls continued to undertake prescribed domestic tasks whilst boys were encouraged to consolidate their earning power prior to 'settling down'. The appropriate gender functions of these years reinforced the earlier lessons of school and home, creating a situation in which gender relationships were exclusive (that is women related to women and men to men) rather than mutually embracing. In such a situation romantic ideals of conjugal intimacy would be likely to be either irrelevant or unattainable. One of the purposes of this chapter is to examine this tension and to seek the basis upon which my respondents built their marriages.

Early Adolescence

It has been suggested by Carl Chinn that sex-segregated games and activities were more evident amongst the more affluent sectors of the working-class in the locality he studied.(3) This is borne out amongst my respondents and continued into adolescence with certain organised activities such as the Girl Guides recruiting a number of the women interviewed. It is also evident in informal organisation of leisure time. Prior to courting and in the early years after leaving school girls went out together in groups or twosomes, whilst boys appeared to have done the same,

We used to go all over the place - dancing and we used to go to the Theatre Royal. We used to go to the Gaumont and the

Futurist (in Birmingham City Centre) on the tram. Six or seven of us used to go mostly - we always used to go out together. (4)

Mrs. Stewart recalled how she and her girl-friends were able to see three different films on a Saturday after work by using the excellent tram service over the City and Mrs. Godfrey remembers how,

We'd go into Selly Oak Park when the summer come. We'd all meet up round there or we'd go to the pictures (5)

Type of employment undoubtedly determined the kind of social life teenage girls might enjoy. Mrs. Holder and Mrs. Arthurs, both of whom entered domestic service, had a far more restricted adolescence than the women who worked in factories and offices. Mrs. Arthurs who worked as a residential housemaid had only one evening a week off and alternate Sundays, and like Mrs. Holder, she would spend this visiting her family in rural Staffordshire. Neither remembers going out with girl-friends and Mrs. Arthurs met her husband when she was only sixteen. Mrs. Holder said she had few friends and much of the little spare time she had was spent either with her family or at church functions. She reports that she got on well with the other staff 'but never went out with them or mixed'. (6) By contrast those women who worked in factories such as Cadburys, Rowntrees or Typhoo Tea, and even those, like Mrs. Jones, who worked in small offices, had a wide circle of girl-friends and a varied social life. Most of my respondents were teenagers in the early twenties and benefited

from the loosening of restraints consequent upon the First World War . Clerical and factory work opened up new opportunities for girls from working-class homes who left school at fourteen and was less restrictive than domestic service with its long hours, little time off and authoritarian rules of behaviour. (7) It was also less isolating as it offered the chance to meet and mix with girls of a similar age, some of whom might remain friends for years,

I've still got lots of friends from Typhoo and this Margery Johnson she's been a really good pal to me. She knows all about me and I know all about her. (8)

Swimming, tennis, walking in the park, cycling, cinema-going and dancing, the major spare time interests of my respondents, were primarily group activities. Those, like Mrs. Holder and Mrs Arthurs above, who worked in isolation had less chance of developing peer group friendships with other girls and consequently tended to lead a more circumscribed social life. The rest of my respondents, however, enjoyed at least one of the above activities during their early adolescence and very often combined a mixture of two or three. I want to examine these activities and the pleasures they afforded in the context of continuing parental control and authority.

Municipal parks offered tennis courts at cheap rates and municipal swimming baths both indoor and outdoor were popular for the same reason. Healthy outdoor exercise was considered particularly important for young girls at this time:

compulsory timetabling of P.E. and games had dispelled the notion that adolescent girls needed protection from fatiguing exercise and girls' school stories, read avidly by working-class girls, offered images of healthy, tennis-playing, athletic young girls whose lives revolved around 'winning the match'. (9) Working-class girls' enjoyment of tennis and swimming may well have been sparked by this reading, the general ethos of outdoor healthiness and the growing availability of such facilities in urban areas. Whatever the reasons the municipal park was a significant place for young people and at evenings and weekends it was frequented by groups of boys and girls, engaged in sport or just walking or, as they grew older, in 'flirting' and 'larking about'.

Paternalistic firms like Cadburys and Rowntrees also provided facilities for young people. Cadburys had its own lido at Rowheath Park for the use of employees and Mrs. Porter recalls the other facilities offered,

I mean they had such a lot of activities for you. I mean there was swimming, there was tennis, such a lot you know, that I don't see how you couldn't like it... And we used to go swimming, and there was tennis, there was netball, there was all sports. All the grounds, the girls' grounds and at dinner-time, you could go and sit out there... (10)

A number of respondents told with evident pleasure of trips to the seaside organised by the firms they worked for. Blackpool and Rhyl were both very popular and such outings often afforded young girls their first ever sight of the sea.

The first time I went to the seaside I was fourteen wasn't I? When I was working they had an outing to Blackpool. That was the first time. (11)

I'd been to Blackpool two or three times. With work we went to Rhyl. We had an outing every year when I was at Typhoo. (12)

Another popular activity was cycling; bicycles could be hired by the day for a few pence and a number of my respondents enjoyed cycling in the surrounding countryside either on hired or their own bikes. Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Walters remember cycling to visit Mrs. Walter's relatives in Wales for the weekend when they were fifteen and Mrs. Crowe was given a new bike as a reward for looking after her sick mother. Yet another woman saved for five years to buy her first bicycle. It cost her seven pounds and, despite handing the large part of her wages to her mother, she augmented her pocket money by doing odd jobs for people round and about. For this woman cycling offered escape from the burden of domestic tasks and a dominating elder sister. She joined the Clarion Cycling Club and it

made my life...We'd pack up on a Sunday and we could call anywhere at these cafes and they'd give you as much tea as you wanted to drink for fourpence...I loved that cycling and I loved Sunday...I didn't want to be bothered with men or anybody. I was that happy in there. (13)

Cycling was not the only way of getting out into the countryside. The church might offer rambles and trips out as well as socials and dances. Mrs. Butcher's Bible Class offered holiday rambles as well as bible study.

...with Bible class we used to go rambles...We used to be at home for Good Friday and of course it was church Good Friday. Saturday and Monday we'd ramble ramble off - up to the Lickeys. (14)

Guiding was closely associated with the church and provided opportunities for camping and outdoor activities. Only five of my respondents belonged to the Girl Guides but remembered with pleasure camping holidays and weekends. All except one had given up guiding by the time they met their future husbands but it undoubtedly contributed to the widening of geographical horizons characteristic of this period. It also, of course, reinforced the messages about appropriate feminine behaviour, extolling the virtues of self-sacrifice and service to others, and propounding the doctrine of separate spheres. The very name suggested the role expected of girls and women, as opposed to 'Scout' with its associations of pioneering and adventure. (15)

However by far the most popular activities were dancing and cinema-going. All my respondents reported engaging in either one or the other and often both. Dances could range from the local church-organised social to the, considerably more expensive, functions at the large dance-halls which burgeoned after the First World War. Mrs. Crowe attended church dances on Sunday nights from the age of twelve. She loved dancing and later paid 6d. (2½p) for dancing lessons on Saturday afternoons where she learnt to waltz, foxtrot and country

dance. Mrs. Pearce remembers the dances at her local church hall. On Monday nights there would be a dance for local people which cost 3d. and on Saturday nights a 'dressed-up do' for 1/- (5p) at which boys were encouraged to buy refreshments for the girls. Later she would go once a month to the 'big dance' at the Town Hall which cost 2/6d. (12½p) with her girl friends. (16) The cinema was even more popular: the general feeling amongst my respondents was that attendance once or twice a week was quite normal with some going more often still.

You'd go to a different cinema each night except Sunday, within a short range. They'd change the programme half way through the week so that you could see two pictures a week. It was like a club in some cases. It was 6d. downstairs or 9d. or 1/- or if you were very rich 1/6d. If you were courting you went in the 1/6d. (17)

Although numbers going to the cinema regularly increased with the growth of the cinema industry over the inter-war period, the trend was established during the First World War. (18) Mrs. Brown, born in 1895, told me that she and her sister used to go to the cinema on their evenings out during the war. Later, when they were a bit older, they started to go to dances as well. My youngest respondent, born in 1922, reported the same pattern of activities for the late thirties. Social activities and the freedom to engage in them changed little before the Second World War. All my respondents except those in domestic service were able to spend their leisure time at the cinema, a dance or engaged in the other activities

mentioned; all recalled spending a large part of this leisure time with girl friends, and all were subject to strict curfews and continuing parental control. As one respondent said,

We could go miles and miles and nobody'd harm you. As long as you was in by nine o'clock you could go where you liked.

Parental control and authority

The greater geographical and physical freedom discussed above has to be seen in the context of continuing parental control and authority. Such control was manifested in strict coming-home times and financial obligations, as well as the appropriate behaviour expected of 'respectable' girls. Mrs. Butcher's experience was typical;

...had to be in by nine thirty. And when I got in I always had to go to the off licence with a quart bottle for father's beer. So of course he used to wait on the corner cos nine thirty was dead on. I'd got to be in ...I went to the Theatre Royal, I had to walk home. I remember getting into trouble because it was ten o'clock when I got in. (20)

Coming home times were set when girls started work and could remain the same right up until marriage. Even when courting in their late teens and early twenties girls were still expected to be in between nine and ten o'clock. A strictly enforced curfew would seem to have been one of the hallmarks of a girl's 'respectability' and boyfriends, if reliable would ensure that these curfews were adhered to. Decent girls didn't stay out late and however unfair my respondents may have felt home-coming times to be on occasion,

That's why I never got a young man there [at dances], if you were late you couldn't go out next time, (21)

I heard of only one respondent who actually disobeyed these rules. Mrs. Harris loved dancing but the ten o'clock curfew curtailed her pleasure as she got older. With the connivance of her mother she would wait in bed until her father was asleep, then creep out in her finery to attend the later part of a dance. She was an exception and her story when related to other respondents was greeted with amazement, tinged with admiration, for her temerity. More typical was Mrs. Butcher's account above - breaking the rules was by accident rather than intent.

Girls, whatever their occupation, were still under the authority of their parents and particularly their mothers. Few of my respondents felt they were granted any extra privileges on starting work and believed that they were still treated as children. However, Mrs. Butcher's parents changed her coming-home time from seven thirty to nine thirty when she began to earn and Mrs. Jones reported how bringing in a wage enabled her to assert herself,

I remember it changed me in one way because I was never called by my name and when I started work I thought "soppy calling me that name because I'm not going to answer", because I was always called Girlie right up till I started work and then I said I'm not going to let anyone call *me* that so I put my foot...I said "Anyone doesn't call me by my right name I'm not answering" and I wouldn't, I wouldn't answer! and I wouldn't answer anyone who didn't call me Muriel! (22)

Like Mrs. Jones, Kathleen Dayus was also aware of the, albeit limited, power that earning could bring to family relationships,

Mum was not so strict with me now I was contributing to the household. I placed my wages beneath the faded, bobbled mantel fringe every Friday night and I was free to go out to the pictures with the girls I worked with. (23)

It has been suggested to me that later coming home times and greater physical freedom may have been the tacit reward granted by parents in return for the extra income coming into the home. For, without exception, all the women interviewed were expected to hand their wages over wholesale to their mother who would then give them a small amount of pocket money for leisure activities. Mothers continued to buy their daughters' clothes often until they were out of their teens, when girls would be expected to clothe themselves out of their pocket money. (24) The amount of pocket money varied from family to family but did allow a small (often very small) surplus for entertainment. Obviously the amount allowed was dependent upon the whole family budget rather than the individual earnings of each girl. It could be determined by position in family - the youngest might be expected to be allowed more as there would be more wage earners in the family if older siblings were still living at home. Appendix six shows figures for those respondents who were able to remember them but it is difficult to draw firm conclusions as to the effect of position in the family. The two drawing the

smallest amount of pocket money both came from large families but one was the youngest and the other the eldest. Both were from the poorest families in my sample but so was Mrs. Godfrey who was allowed one shilling out of her ten shillings wages. Pocket money it would appear was very much an individual parental decision and could be based on personal whim as well as financial necessity. It may also have reflected the mother's concern to control her daughter's activities - those on the smallest amounts also had the strictest parents, measured according to home coming times and behaviour allowed.

One penny would buy a portion of chips, sixpence (5p) would pay for dancing lessons, a night at the cinema (cheapest seats) or a visit to see the pierrots or a variety show at the city theatres. Tram fares were cheap at a penny or twopence and a bike could be hired for a shilling an hour. Mrs. Porter's husband told me how it was possible to have a good night out for two and sixpence (12½p.) - a penny on the tram, sixpence for cinema seats, fourpence for a small box of Black Magic chocolates and a shilling for twenty cigarettes. The Clarion Club subscription was one shilling, it was twopence to attend a social and a pair of stockings cost threepence. Most girls augmented their official pocket money by odd jobs, errands for neighbours and the odd penny given by older siblings or even a generous father,

I gave all my wages and I was given two and sixpence. So occasionally when father had been very generous when he'd had a drink he'd give me twopence or threepence. (25)

Mrs. Crowe, who much later owned her own hairdressers, helped out Friday nights at a local hairdressers from the age of twelve and earned herself two and sixpence. Mrs. Harris would wallpaper the neighbours' rooms for two shillings: she started this sideline before leaving school but continued after she went to work at Rowntrees. She had also been trimming neighbours' hats since she was ten and cleaning for an elderly man on Friday nights for sixpence as well as continuing with the domestic tasks still expected of her. She was undoubtedly an exceptionally determined woman as her resistance to parental rules (see above) testifies. The point is however that a large proportion of my respondents augmented their pocket money by such casual earnings and this enabled them to enjoy evenings at the cinema and at dances, and, in Mrs. Harris's case, to circumvent the constraints of meagre pocket money.

All my respondents continued to carry a heavy burden of domestic tasks after starting work. 'You couldn't go out until you'd finished your chores' was a common theme. As I showed in the last chapter such chores could range from washing-up and dusting to heavy work such as dollying, mangling and scrubbing floors,

I used to come home at night and she'd [mother] have the bedrooms ready and we'd have to clean those. At the time we was so poor it was only boards, no lino. We used to have to scrub them. (26)

Still had to iron and bake and do things like that...wash up and ...you still had your chores to do. [Mother would say]

"I'm going to see your granny now and I'm leaving so-and-so [younger siblings] with you". (27)

Such tasks could be made harder by a dominating elder sister as well as the domestic expectations of the mother,

She was bossy you see, she'd pick all the best jobs cos I was four years younger, she got the cream and I was left to do all the rough jobs. (28)

Leisure could also be curtailed by timetabling of these chores. Mrs. Brown reported she and her sister 'had separate nights - nights to stop in and nights to go out' (29). Her mother was ill and all the domestic work fell to her and her sister who shared it out in this way.

Hours of work were long for adolescent girls in all occupations. In 1926 the Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories stated that 'There has been no change in the general basic week, which remains at not more than forty-eight hours' and right through the inter-war years a factory operative could expect to work from eight in the morning to five thirty in the evening plus Saturday mornings. (30) The hours of domestic servants and shopworkers frequently exceeded this with a twelve and more hour day being not uncommon. (31) Given long hours, girl's continued participation in domestic chores and rigidly-enforced home coming times it is surprising that so many of my respondents enjoyed the activities they said they did. I suspect that cinema-going, dancing, cycling and just 'promenading' in the park were remembered so vividly precisely because they were such shortlived pleasures. They

represented brief moments of independence and even escape from the tyranny of routine work, the control of parents and the hard grind of domestic drudgery. The greater part of their daily lives continued to be taken up with paid work, casual jobs and housework, despite the physical freedom allowed in their few hours spare time.

Nevertheless, this limited autonomy was viewed with increasing anxiety by middle-class educators and youth leaders concerned about how this time was spent. Dyhouse has shown how organisations like the Guides and the Girls Friendly Society developed in the pre-First World War period to meet this concern. (32) Guiding, girl's clubs and church groups all vied to attract the working-class girl and to control and channel her spare time into acceptable pursuits.

A girl is a bundle of energy...if their energies are not directed along right channels they will drift into wrong ones. They have so much vitality, such vast capability of interesting themselves in anything that may be brought to their notice that it behoves us to see that only the best is given to them to feed upon...it is the woman in the home that counts most and therefore the Guides are the ones that we must take the greatest care of and see that they grow up into the sort of older girl, woman and home-maker, wife and mother that we want for our country. (32)

By the mid-thirties there was a panoply of organisations determined to wean girls from the 'disturbing' influences of the cinema and dance-hall; not only Girl Guides and clubs but also the more educationally-oriented provision of day continuation schools, evening classes and, for the unemployed, Junior Instruction Centres. Only a minority of my respondents

took up these opportunities - five belonged to the Guides, one went to evening classes and two, compelled by their employment at Cadburys, attended day continuation classes. These girls, continued to enjoy the cinema and dancing, and all, except one, gave up guiding on meeting their future husbands. From the evidence of my respondents and the anxiety of observers it can be concluded that from the First World War onwards the cinema and the dance became the most popular meeting places for young people at prices their limited incomes could afford.

Parents, however, do not appear to have shared the anxieties of educators and middle-class observers. Dancing and the cinema appear to have been accepted as legitimate and safe activities, as long as the early curfew was adhered to. As a number of my respondents pointed out this early curfew meant that they could only go to the early sitting at the cinema which finished about nine o'clock. Equally, fathers or elder brothers would fetch girls home from dances, thus effectively preventing any more intimate contact than could be engaged in on the very public floor of the crowded dance. Moreover the evidence of my respondents suggests that the 'excitement' and 'over-stimulation' feared by observers was non-existent.

Girls, like Mrs. Pearce and Mrs. Harris, often preferred to dance with a proficient girlfriend rather than a clumsy boy: dancing for these women was a serious pastime and meeting the opposite sex could be a secondary motive for going. Mrs. Harris, Mrs. Pearce and Mrs. Crowe, all dance enthusiasts, met

their future husbands through dancing but, at least in the re-telling, were more concerned with finding skilled dance partners, male or female, than with finding a boyfriend.

Boyfriends and Courtship

As appendix seven shows the average age of marriage amongst my respondents was twenty-four, whilst the average age at which they started courting was eighteen. (34) However, as the appendix shows, seventy-five per cent of a sample of eleven, who could remember the age at which they met their future husbands, had met them by the age of twenty. Courting could last as long as nine years with an average of about five to six years. The major reason for this was financial: 'respectable' couples were anxious to consolidate their earnings and to have a small surplus to set up home with. Financial security and reliability were very important considerations in choosing a husband as was moral stability and high standards. Mrs. Walker, who met her husband later than most, recognised this when she said,

I'd come to the conclusion, the way that I was taught and the way I was brought up, that there wasn't going to be anybody that I could accept. (35)

Romantic love was not necessarily lacking in the courtships of my respondents but there is an overall sense in the interviews as a whole that choice of husband was a serious business

requiring prudential thought and a degree of calculation, as the quotes below reveal;

Well I went with another young man first - couldn't rely on him and this one [future husband] was nice, this one, and he lived on Leeman Road ...and his mother said he could have any house there was, there was that many empty. (36)

Well I definitely did [look for a sober, reliable husband] because I'd seen that much drunkenness. (37)

Prudential selection of a partner was one way for working-class women to achieve 'respectability', to avoid the poverty many of them had lived through as children and to potentially have a less careworn existence than their mothers. It was not always easy in interview to elicit explicit criteria in partner choice probably because for these women such criteria were (and are) deeply internalised and tacitly assumed within their social group. However, I would maintain that three attributes seem to have been of particular importance. Firstly a 'good' husband would be reliable with money, he would hold a steady job with a regular income. Secondly and related to this, he would neither drink nor gamble to excess and thirdly he would be sexually faithful and possibly 'undemanding'. Sobriety and the ability to handle money were indisputably the dominant criteria and whilst I have no evidence that particular occupations were preferred in this respect, there is evidence that women chose men known to them previously, either because they lived in the locality or because they had known them at school or because they were known through parents.

As I have shown in the previous section the most frequented places for young people were the cinema and the dance. Yet only one of my respondents actually met her future husband at the cinema and he was known to her through the local network of young people. Four couples met at a dance: for three of these it was a small local social with parents involved and the remaining one came to believe that she had chosen unwisely. Mrs. Pearce who met her husband at a local dance believed that couples met through friends because most dances were 'only a small place, everybody sort of met everybody else'. (38) The majority of my respondents reported that their future husbands were already known to them either through girlfriends, the local network of young people or through their parents. As a result they were usually in a good position to assess the reliability and worth of a potential boyfriend before any commitment was made. Given the sexual ignorance of most girls (which I shall discuss in greater detail below) this method also spelt safety. Mrs. Mack went out with a soldier from the nearby barracks before she met her husband but the experience frightened her by, I suspect, its sexual implications which she was unprepared for,

I once went with a soldier and I was stood in Heslington Lane ...and then I heard him coming down to...thing...and I thought...ooh...that finishes us...with soldiers and that.
(39)

She eventually married a man who lived in the same street and whom she had known throughout her childhood.

The Monkey Run, common to most towns, was another popular place for striking up friendships. (40) Groups of boys and girls would parade up and down a certain street, viewing each other. If there was an interest, after a while, the boy would make some flirtatious remark or strike up a conversation and then the girl and boy would walk up 'the Run' together. At the end of the evening he might ask her to go out with him one evening, either for a walk or to the pictures. This ritual could go on for a considerable time before a date was requested;

We used to talk to four brothers. We didn't want 'em, we just used to talk to them. And we'd see them everytime we went to town. (41)

Municipal parks could fulfil the same function with groups of boys and girls congregating there to 'lark about', engage in repartee and generally inspect each other. Mrs. Butcher met her husband this way and still remembers in considerable detail their first meeting;

We all went to Swanhurst Park [group of girls she worked with]...And as we was going round the pool what attracted me was this gorgeous black dog. And he was waiting to go in and fetch a stick out of the water...and I saw this row of chaps sitting on a bench and I said "If you touch that dog again and I'll get the lead and wrap it round your necks the lot of you". Of course the others said "Cheeky thing, its nothing to do with you". I said "I make it my business" and walked on and the next thing we knew they was following us and he caught me up on the corner and I said "I wonder if he's coming to tell me off" and I stood me ground and I was working myself up to give him what for when he said "Can I take you out tonight"! (42)

However, random meetings like this were rare. It was more usual for young people to meet each other through mutual friends or through their parents. Mrs. Matthews, Mrs. Hutchings and Mrs. Walker met their husbands-to-be through their families at church or local functions. Mrs. Porter knew of her husband through girlfriends before going out with him; Mrs. Jones had gone round in a group with her husband (whom she'd known at school) for a number of years before she started going out with him as a couple; and Mrs. Mack, as we have seen, had lived as a neighbour to her husband throughout her childhood.

All my respondents were adamant that 'you didn't have boyfriends, you went round in a group' until courting became serious and often even then. Mrs. Hutchings recalled meeting boys at the evening classes she attended for bookkeeping and going out with them in a group, perhaps to the cinema, where 'you paid for yourself'. (43) According to Mrs. Pearce the pattern was to go to a dance with girlfriends and to be walked home afterwards by a boy, usually in a mixed group. It is difficult to know whether this emphasis on group activities is a retrospective reaction to what they all perceive as today's low standards of sexual morality, but in view of the frequency

with which I was told about going about in a group I am sure that, certainly in the early years of these long courtships, it was the accepted norm. There is some evidence that the girls were able to control budding relationships by 'playing hard to get' but this could equally suggest a disinterest in such relationships and a desire to enjoy the limited autonomy offered by dancing, cycling or cinema-going. Mrs. Pearce believed that when she was young 'fellows were dead keen' and this was reinforced by the casual attitude evidenced by Mrs. Stewart and Mrs. Clarke;

I said I'm going to the dance. I don't care a damn what you do and I went to the dance and he came to the dance after he'd been to the pantomime but I wouldn't have him then. (44) (she later married him).

Mrs. Clarke, whose great love was the Cycling Club, could only be courted by joining it;

And then when I did meet my husband I says "Well I'm not seeing you on Sunday...I'm going out" [cycling]). The poor devil had to go and buy a new bike to come and catch me. (45)

Once the relationship was established as serious a couple might leave the group to enjoy outings to the cinema or walks as a twosome and at this stage the potential husband might be taken home to visit the girl's parents if he did not already know them;

The first night that they [parents] invited you in father sat at the corner of the table with his shirt sleeves rolled up. We sat on the couch. (46)

Implicit in such a scene was an assertion of the parent/child relationship of authority and deference which was maintained for both sexes up until marriage and often afterwards and Mr. Butcher still remembers his apprehension on meeting his future parents in law.

All the women remembered their fear of parental admonishment and, as stated above, rarely resisted or disobeyed their parents' rules. Boyfriends appeared to have also accepted parental curfews and were as anxious as the women to ensure that home-coming times were adhered to. This was undoubtedly seen as a mark of the man's respect and thus reliability by both parents and daughters: if he was serious it was important for him to please the girl's parents and in particular her mother. Two women whose marriages had been unhappy had been warned against their future husbands by their mothers;

Me Mum *begged* of me not to get married to him. (47)

They didn't want me to marry him. They said it was absolutely foolish...because marrying a lad that went dancing was no good. (48)

Mothers were undoubted arbiters in what constituted a steady boyfriend and those who failed to heed their warnings could endanger the mother/daughter relationship which was a source of help and support for so many later;

When I started having his children she was disgusted...and when I had me second child she never came near me. (49)

Whilst mothers were concerned that their daughters made a sensible choice they might also encourage them to enjoy themselves within the specified limits. Mrs. Smith's mother went to considerable lengths to ensure her daughter had attractive dresses to go dancing in and Mrs. Harris's mother connived to keep her daughter's nocturnal dancing secret from her father. I suspect that mothers felt considerable ambivalence about their daughters' activities: pragmatism suggested that a girl's best long-term interests would be served by a prudential and sensible marriage, whilst their own experience of domestic drudgery, frequent pregnancies and the struggle against poverty engendered a desire for their daughters to enjoy this brief period of their lives before marriage claimed them.

However, prudence, pleasure and romance were not necessarily mutually exclusive. Mrs. Butcher's 'feet didn't touch the ground' when her husband asked her out and Mrs. Walker can still remember her feelings on first meeting her husband-to-be;

Immediately I shook hands with him I thought "this is it!". Something just hit me. And I looked at him and thought "Well he isn't a bit like I've always thought about". (50)

Accounts like this present an amalgam of sensible realism and romantic ideals. Most of the women interviewed enjoyed love stories and romantic films;

Oh I loved books. Oh yes. Mind you it was love stories. Nothing historical. Or anything like that. It was love stories, thats all...as I say novels by Ethel M. Dell. (51)

A man's love when presented by Ethel M. Dell, a popular romantic fiction writer of the period, offered not only economic security and social normality but the promise of emotional fulfilment;

All that he knew was the ecstasy of perfect communion and utter peace with the storm and stress all left behind and the safe haven reached at last. (52)

Yet few appear to have believed that reality held such promises and preferred to settle for down-to-earth affection and respect.

The emphasis in interviews on prudential marriage has to be seen in the wider context of mass unemployment, job insecurity and very little welfare provision. Many of my respondents had watched their mothers struggle with large families and insubstantial incomes and, not surprisingly, were anxious to prevent a recurrence of this in their own futures. Despite soaring unemployment rates, a husband, with an equal commitment to 'respectability' and material security, in a steady job, now had the means to consolidate such status and to ensure a higher standard of living for his family. In such a context security and stability would be given priority over romantic love in partner choice, although the latter might not necessarily be missing. Love for these women meant a mixture of very real affection and prudential foresight on the part of both partners. The following quotes from respondents

illustrate the pragmatic, down-to-earth manner in which courtship was viewed;

You go to the pictures and you meet 'em and that's it. (53)

Neither me nor my sister would ever get married in the war [First World War]. Didn't want to be widows. (54)

We just sort of plodded along. We knew we couldn't afford to get married or anything. (55)

I was with a friend, we'd been to the pictures and Ted was coming down with a friend...and we knew him and we stopped talking to him and Ted was there. And he's been there ever since. (56)

Even Mrs. Butcher whose 'feet didn't touch the ground' courted for six years, saving hard for her future home. Romance was necessarily tempered by financial necessity and cautious planning and whirlwind romances were viewed with disapproval. Mrs. Harris's marriage to a man she had known for three weeks resulted in estrangement from her mother and later regret, 'I was thick. I must have been thick! (57)

All my respondents disapproved of what they saw as today's hasty liaisons and marriages, believing that a couple should wait until they were 'on their feet'. Courtship for them was a period of deferred gratification (both materially and sexually), values normally associated with the middle-class but here adapted for their own particular situation. 'Respectability' for these women meant saving and waiting - in particular waiting for a home of one's own;

Everybody wanted their own home. I wouldn't have got married without my own home. (58)

A home might not necessarily mean buying a house but it undoubtedly meant having adequate income to provide a modicum of comfort, to buy second-hand furniture and to acquire a bottom drawer,

An old Sunday School teacher of mine was selling up and going abroad...we went up to the house to see if there was anything we might be interested in...we saw this beautiful brocade 7 piece suite. We thought it was beautiful - coloured green with pale pink and green, like little forget-me-nots, all over it. It was lovely! Do you know we hadn't got the three pounds to pay it between us! So my sister-in-law lent it to us and we paid it back bit by bit. And I went into clubs and I bought a lot of things out of this club that I wanted for me home. I used to store them. I've still got the chest now. (59)

Mrs. Arthur's account whilst more detailed than most, is not exceptional. Furniture was often bought second-hand like this or handed down through the family. Clubs which charged a few pence a week enabled women to buy towels, sheets and other household items for when they set up home. A number of women showed me furniture that they had bought like this and which they still had. Girls were encouraged to build up a bottom drawer and although I have no direct evidence I suspect that mothers probably allowed their daughters a little more pocket money once they became engaged or serious in order to do this.

A common pattern of courtship emerged from the material.

Despite the widening of horizons afforded by the cinema, the works outing and the tram, the majority of women met their future husbands through friends, their parents or the local network of young people. Only one respondent met her husband

at work which is hardly surprising given the sex-segregated nature of women's paid employment at this time. Work provided girlfriends rather than boyfriends. Group activities predominated until the couple became serious when outings to the cinema or walks in the park or countryside became twosomes. Prudence and careful planning were hallmarks of these relationships with romance or passion playing, if not a negligible, certainly a subsidiary role. Many women had seen or experienced the consequences of improvidence and poverty;

It was really hard. I wouldn't have liked to think that any of mine had to go through that. Mind you we was happy. (60)

Pre-marital Sex

Despite the greater freedom and opportunities for meeting boys, girls remained ignorant about menstruation, reproduction and sex;

...even when I had my first period I wondered what the heck had happened. No, no. I went in crying. I remember that it was all sort of kept quiet in them days. And as I say you just learned as you go along. (61)

We didn't think of boys at all - we didn't know anything, did we? We didn't know anything at all... we were really ignorant. (62)

None of my respondents recalled being given any information about reproduction or menstruation and the general view seemed to be that 'you just learned as you go along'. Mrs. Brown's mother told her daughter that there was

No need to tell girls anything, they'll get to know all they want here. [Rowntrees factory] (63)

Mrs. Kitchin's parents refused to let her attend 'sex lessons' at school believing that 'you'll learn enough as you get older' (64). Mothers did not see it as their task to inform their daughters about periods and pregnancy, yet all the women I have talked to were adamant that had they got pregnant their parent's wrath would have been the worst thing they had to face;

We daren't go home and say...well...you'd got into trouble. I think I'd have to a'drowned meself if I'd gotten...Oh dear...never mind we got through. (65)

This taboo on sexual subjects has to be seen in the context of a continuing belief in the chastity of women, reinforced by a parallel belief that the way to achieve this was to avoid confronting young girls with overt knowledge;

Safety lies....in retarding consciousness and diverting attention from the subject by filling the leisure time with pleasurable occupations and hobbies such as are supplied by sports and...Girl Guides, gardening and the like. (66)

There were also, of course, pragmatic considerations for mothers with daughters. The most accessible contraceptive for working-class couples was the sheath which gave control of pregnancy to the man rather than the woman. In these circumstances it undoubtedly seemed safer to rely on ignorance and dire warnings such as 'there are men about who mustn't be allowed to touch you' (67). Girls who wrote to Mrs. Jim, Home Chat's Agony Aunt, requesting information were likely to receive a brisk reply;

I'm sorry I cannot answer so intimate a question through these columns and I'm amazed at your ignorance about the facts of life. Ask an older friend to tell you. (68)

The assumption was that girls would learn about sex and pregnancy informally from older girls and married women as and when they needed to know. Undoubtedly the sex-segregated structure of factory and office work encouraged confidences but as Mrs. Godfrey suggests such information was likely to be communicated in ways which added to its obfuscation;

...it was only when you started work that you started to know things...And of course you'd got your men and women there and as I say you went along, you just..pause..you couldn't pinpoint anything. (69)

Neither, as we have seen, were magazines very helpful and love stories often aimed to titillate rather than inform,

His kisses thrilled her through and through. On her lips, her neck and her cheeks she felt his burning lips and closing her eyes she lay unresisting in his arms. (70)

Confronted with such a barrage of bewildering and contradictory quasi-information, many girls, like Eileen Elias, must have concluded that 'all in all it seemed a great deal safer to keep away from boy-meets-girl problems although we followed them avidly on the silent screen' (71). The vague linkings perceived and half-understood between sex, pregnancy, phrases like 'damaged goods' and the threat of societal and parental wrath, probably acted in conjunction with girls' own ignorance to prevent anything other than the kind of flirting and 'larking about' described below;

...we all had a swim. One of t'lads..what did he do, he buried somebody else's bra. We had a bit of a laugh like,

but apart from that they never did anything cheeky or...You know, well, I mean it weren't a bit like that.(72)

The fear of pre-marital sex thus instilled almost certainly resulted in unease and a measure of antipathy towards physical contacts. Mrs. Jones remembers her (justifiably) acute embarrassment when the older men at work harrassed her;

I remember once I went up to make this tea and I suppose he'd be a boy about my own age or a bit older. He turned me round and pinched me and ...ooh...I was that embarrassed and all these men were just killing themselves laughing...and I very often thought after I wish I could have that time again and ...ooh...I wouldn't tell my parents.(73)

and Mrs. Butcher recalls her coldness to her future husband;

I was very, very frightened. Oh it was a long time before I kissed Jack. I wonder that he didn't throw me on one side! I was a coldfish.(74)

Mrs. Fellows felt that pre-marital sex 'was going on in the higher circles and it wasn't sort of published'.(75) She believed that it might be acceptable for the upper classes but was not the sort of behaviour expected of 'respectable' working people.

It is of course impossible to know how much or how little pre-marital sex actually took place. The official illegitimacy figures for 1911, 1921 and 1931 are 8.1, 6.3 and 5.6 births per thousand women respectively.(76) These figures are lower than in previous years and only rise again during the Second World War. Reasons for the low rates may have little to do with the amount of sexual activity - the increasing availability of male contraception may have resulted in fewer extra-marital pregnancies and, of course, illegitimacy rates

only record those whose intercourse results in a live birth. (77) Nevertheless the figures do bear out the memories of my respondents, few of whom could remember anyone having a baby outside marriage;

There was just one, I think, but I don't know what she was but I mean, you know, people spoke "Oh she's had to get married or she's had a baby" but I don't think there was that many really. (78)

My own impression (and impression it can only ever be) from the evidence is that very little pre-marital sex took place. Many girls, as I have indicated, were frightened both by the possibility of pregnancy, which was seen as the inevitable punishment for 'doing wrong' and by their own ignorance, 'in those days there was no sex. You just daren't, it was fear'. (79) Mrs. Fellows felt there was more to it than just fear;

It was very rare. Now I'm not going to say that there wasn't but I didn't know of it. I think in the upper-classes there was goings-on. But the working-class no, and if somebody had to get married it was thought terrible...it was the talk of Poppleton Road. (80)

For Mrs. Fellows chastity was part of a class-specific morality which clearly delineated between right and wrong. Pre-marital sex was wrong and put participants outside the bounds of 'respectability';

There's a very thin line between doing what's right and doing what's wrong when you're courting but I took the view that I wouldn't bring that on my mother and I never did...and I'm proud of it today, I'm proud of it. (81)

She also felt that maintaining this moral stance was the task of the woman: she was sure that her husband would have liked a

sexual relationship before they were married. However, Mrs. Hutchings, who went on holiday with her husband before they were married, offered an alternative view;

This generation think sex has been invented for them but to be quite honest there was quite a lot of it around in the nineteen twenties but it was very much more discreet and it was a very private thing - you didn't make it so public. (82)

However, on the whole, I would speculate that few women engaged in sexual activity before marriage and that for those who did it went hand in hand with engagement or a serious commitment to marriage. Unmarried pregnancy was not just a social fall but a financial disaster, bringing an extra mouth to be fed by the girl's family if marriage was not forthcoming. Mrs. Smith's mother looked after her illegitimate grandchild while Mrs. Smith worked and daughter and baby lived with her for a short while.

Conclusion

Adolescent girls had a wider range of entertainment open to them than their mothers - the cinema and dancing predominated as sources of leisure but cycling, walking and 'promenading' in the park were also popular. Although the variety of pastimes available grew over the period in question, all respondents, except those in isolated occupations, evinced a common pattern of time spent with girlfriends in the early years after leaving school. However, despite greater physical

mobility beyond the immediate neighbourhood, the women interviewed all remained under the strict authority of parents who controlled pocket money and set rigidly-adhered to coming home times. Within this framework girls were trained for a purely domestic role - their value to the family was as much in terms of their unpaid domestic labour as their earning power. Independence or autonomy was rarely a reality for these adolescents: the little spare time allowed to them offered a brief respite from domestic tasks and long hours at work. The demands of the family in terms of income contribution and domestic labour ensured a continuing adherence to the ethos of collective family responsibility engendered in childhood. Moreover, freedom of action was further constrained by circumscribed behaviour which signified 'respectability'. 'Good' girls helped their mothers without complaint, dressed neatly and cleanly and obeyed without question their parents' rules on pocket money and coming home times.

Courtship, and later marriage, took place within a framework of cultural and social values. Firstly, the whole issue of 'respectability' which shaped the partner choices made. Girls met and married boys from the local neighbourhood, known to them, their parents or friends. No one reported courting out of their class or district. The majority of respondents were looking for someone in regular work and with the same 'respectable' values as themselves. Secondly, and closely

allied to the first point, was the predominance of prudential courtships, based on a future commitment to marriage when finance allowed it, and involving a sense in which pragmatic considerations rather than romantic love determined partner choice. Romance, though pleasurable, was not expected; reliability and a degree of financial security were. Thirdly, prudence extended as far as I can guess to sexual relationships - the majority of respondents must have entered marriage with very little knowledge of its physical aspects and a possible disinterest fostered by lack of information and a fear both of pregnancy and intercourse itself. Thus a picture emerges of a set of girls inhibited and conforming to a set of rigid rules of 'respectability', entering marriage after long courtships in which affection rather than passion was the norm. Undoubtedly this would determine the ways in which they were to respond as wives and mothers

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3. Chinn, C. The Anatomy of a Working-Class Neighbourhood, West Sparkbrook 1871-1914 p.229.
4. Interview Mrs. Porter.
5. Interview Mrs. Godfrey.
6. Interview Mrs. Holder.
7. See Taylor P. 'Daughters and Mothers - Maids and Mistresses' pp.121-129
8. Interview Mrs. Butcher.
9. See Report of the Consultative Committee of the Board of Education. The Differentia of Curricula for Boys and Girls in Secondary Schools; Jenkinson A. J. What Do Boys and Girls Read Methuen, London, 1940; Tinkler P. 'Learning for Leisure: Feminine Ideology in Girls' Magazines 1920-1950' in Hunt F. ed. Lessons for Life, The Schooling of Girls and Women 1850-1950 Blackwell, Oxford, 1987; Cadogan M. and Craig P. You're a Brick Angel!
10. Interview Mrs. Porter.
11. Interview Mrs. Godfrey.
12. Interview Mrs. Butcher.
13. Transcript No. 27, York Oral History Project. The Clarion Cycling Club was an offshoot of Socialist and Fabian Groups and named after the socialist newspaper, The Clarion. It was a specifically northern club offering social activities as well as cycling expeditions.
14. Interview Mrs. Butcher.
15. Baden-Powell, the founder of the Boy Scouts movement, felt that Scout was a misleading and inappropriate term for the sister organisation - hence Guides. See Dyhouse C. Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England p.110.
16. Interview Mrs. Pearce.
17. Interview Mr. Porter.
18. See for example Rowntree B.S. Poverty and Progress pp.412-413; Richards J. 'The cinema and cinema-going in Birmingham in the 1930s' pp.34-35.
19. Interview Mrs. Kitchin.
20. Interview Mrs. Butcher.
21. Interview Mrs. Brown.
22. Interview Mrs. Jones.
23. Dayus K. Where there's life p.124.
24. It was difficult to pin respondents down to an age but I suspect it may have been as late as twenty. Mrs. Hutchings said she was twenty when she started buying her own clothes and P. Jephcott's Girls Growing Up Faber and Faber, London, 1943, p.37 says
It is important to remember that few adolescent wage earners have control over their full wage; neither of

course do they buy their own clothes, and this custom often persists until the girl is twenty or older.

25. Interview Mrs. Butcher.
 26. Interview Mrs. Godfrey.
 27. Interview Mrs. Harris.
 28. Transcript No.27, York Oral History Project.
 29. Interview Mrs. Brown.
 30. Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories (1926) cited in Brittain V. Women's Work in Modern England Douglas, London, 1928, p.6.
 31. See Anthony S. Women's Place in Industry and Home pp.30-34 where a 50-54 hour week is cited as not uncommon. Also Brittain V. op.cit. pp. 30-31. Evidence for such long hours can also be found in the following interviews - Mrs. Kitchin (kitchen assistant - hotel), Mrs. Holder (nursemaid), Mrs. Giles (shopworker) Transcript No.35 York Oral History Project.
 32. Dyhouse C. Girls Growing Up in late Victorian and Edwardian England pp.104-114.
 33. Quoted from the letters of Olave Baden-Powell in Wade, E. K. Olave Baden-Powell, The Authorised Biography of the World Chief Guide Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1971, pp.72-73.
 34. This is in line with national figures for the period where the mean age of first marriage was calculated as follows:-

1911-15	25.75
1921-5	25.57
1936-40	25.38
- Source: Wrigley, E. A. Population and History p.229.
35. Interview Mrs. Walker.
 36. Interview Mrs. Brown.
 37. Interview Mrs. Fellows.
 38. Interview Mrs. Pearce.
 39. Interview Mrs. Mack.
 40. See also Thompson D. 'Courtship and Marriage in Preston Between the Wars' Oral History Vol.3 No. 2. 1975; Roberts E. M. A Woman's Place p.71 for descriptions of the Monkey Run.
 41. Interview Mrs. Brown.
 42. Interview Mrs. Butcher.
 43. Interview Mrs. Hutchings.
 44. Interview Mrs. Stewart; Interview Mrs. Pearce.
 45. Transcript No.27 York Oral History Project.
 46. Interview Mrs. Butcher.
 47. Interview Mrs. Smith.
 48. Interview Mrs. Harris.
 49. Ibid.
 50. Interview Mrs. Butcher; Interview Mrs. Walker.
 51. Interview Mrs. Godfrey.
 52. Dell, E. M. Storm Drift Hutchinson, London, 1930, p.376. Ethel M. Dell (1881-1939) was a prolific writer of romantic fiction in the twenties and thirties. Between 1912 and her death in 1939 she produced thirty-four novels all

containing the standard requirements of pulp fiction - romance, drama and exoticism. She was an extremely popular writer and her first novel The Way of an Eagle (1912) was reprinted twenty-seven times in the following three years.

53. Interview Mrs. Wilkes.
54. Interview Mrs. Brown.
55. Interview Mrs. Arthurs.
56. Interview Mrs. Porter.
57. Interview Mrs. Harris.
58. Interview Mrs. Pearce.
59. Interview Mrs. Arthurs.
60. Ibid.
61. Interview Mrs. Godfrey.
62. Interview Mrs. Jones.
63. Interview Mrs. Brown.
64. Interview Mrs. Kitchin. I suspect that 'sex lessons' here mean Physical Hygiene which was part of the elementary school curriculum in this period and dealt for the most part with elementary biology rather than any explicit knowledge of human reproduction.
65. Transcript No. 27 York Oral History Project.
66. Wray W. J. & Ferguson R. W. (eds.) A Day Continuation School at Work Longmans, London, 1926, p.38.
67. Elias E. Straw Hats and Serge Bloomers Allen Lane, London, 1979, p.87. See also McCrindle J. & Rowbotham S. Dutiful Daughters p.119, interview with Maggie Fuller.
68. Home Chat 15 March 1930 cited in White C. Women's Magazines p.111.
69. Interview Mrs. Godfrey.
70. Red Star Weekly 21 September 1929. Red Star Weekly was an example of the fiction weeklies which proliferated in the twenties and thirties. These magazines were intended primarily to entertain and provided escapist fiction targeted at a working-class readership. White says of such magazines, Their chief ingredients were romance, glamour, sensation, mystery and revenge, showing the deep need of hard-worked poorly-paid girls and women to escape from their drab surroundings into a colourful, action-packed dream-world, where love and riches were for once within reach.
White C. Women's Magazines p.98. and Hoggart R. The Uses of Literacy pp.96-102 has discussed such magazines in terms of the moral framework shared by both writer and reader.
71. Elias E. p.95.
72. Transcript No.27 York Oral History Project.
73. Interview Mrs. Jones.
74. Interview Mrs. Butcher.
75. Interview Mrs. Fellows.
76. Lewis J. Women In England p.5.; Brookes B. Abortion in England p.116 has the annual illegitimacy rate as 4% for the inter-war years.
77. See Peel J. 'The Manufacture and Retailing of Contraceptives', Population Studies No.17 1963; Brookes B.

op.cit. p.30 and 32 discusses the contraceptive methods available to women who wished to avoid an extra-marital pregnancy.

78. Interview Mrs. Godfrey.
79. Interview Mrs. Pearce.
80. Interview Mrs. Fellows.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid.
83. Interview Mrs. Hutchings.

Semi-detached parlour houses (B3) on Tang Hall Estate c. mid 20's.

Fifth Avenue, Heworth, York.



Mrs. Hutchings lived in one like this .

Semi-detached parlour houses (B3) on Tang Hall Estate c. mid 20's.

Fifth Avenue, Heworth, York.



Mrs. Hukchings lived in one like this.

CHAPTER 6

HOUSING

In the last chapter I argued that the women in my sample adopted certain criteria in their choice of husbands: criteria which would ensure their social and economic status as 'respectable'. Here I intend to expand this argument by examining the ways in which new housing offered opportunities for consolidating this status whilst at the same time retaining characteristics and patterns learned from childhood experiences of family life. Most studies of suburbanisation and housing estates have focused on the large municipal developments of the post-war era or, where concerned with private developments, have emphasised the economics of speculative building, expanding building societies and/or the symbolic nature of the rural myth as a significant feature of inter-war suburbanisation. (1) Given these emphases it is not surprising that findings have tended to stress isolation, the upheaval and disruption of established working-class communities, and the loss of supportive and necessary kinship networks. Whilst I would not deny that on many of the largest developments such uprooting caused an observable transition from an older form of family life to a form characterised by emotional self-sufficiency, small two generation units and less frequent contact with wider kin, I would want to suggest that social and geographical upheaval was not necessarily the only or even the most typical form of suburbanisation. (2) For the women I interviewed the move to improved housing was accomplished

gradually and typically involved only a few miles. Those who moved from the central areas of Birmingham moved six miles at the most and in York because of its smaller size the distance could be considerably less. Again, Mrs. Holder and Mrs. Arthurs, whose families remained in rural Staffordshire, had made a more dramatic transition when they entered domestic service in Birmingham as young girls.

The women continued for the most part to maintain a complex bond with their mothers, living near, visiting regularly and involving interdependent exchanges of resources, support and service. Even those whose relations with their mother were hostile were not geographically separated and continued to be closely involved in various ways with their family of origin. They also experienced considerable involvement with other women, and neighbourly contact and support was both expected and given, albeit as I shall show in chapter eight within a shifting framework of convention. Equally, whilst not necessarily lacking affection, their relationships with husbands were primarily pragmatic, meeting their need for financial and social stability and based on accepted expectations of married life;

What did you look for in a husband?

A good deal of stability, at any rate ... a decent lad, who you didn't expect to take advantage of you, who was easy on the drink and that sort of thing. He would be of a good stable character ... not fly-by-nights. You had good lasting relationships which barely touched on sex because you knew very well that one day things would come right and you'd marry and settle down and that was it. And have children. And of course you knew very well that once you were married,

that period, there was no work for women. You left the office, that was it. Nobody forced you but it was the understood thing. (3)

I have found no evidence to suggest that husbands were the sole focus of emotional fulfilment, although their support and companionship was highly valued as a partner in the whole enterprise of establishing and maintaining a home. As Mrs. Arthurs told her husband when they married 'We can't live on this [42s.6d], you can't live on love alone' (4) and this was echoed by Mrs. Hutchings,

We couldn't get married very early because it just wasn't ...you just didn't in the twenties, you see the mid twenties were a very bad time although my husband was never out of work. You had to save so hard to get your home together and there was this trend...to move from the background and life, not that it wasn't a good one, to something just that little bit better - it meant saving. (5)

Marriage meant home-building and childcare. The house, its cleaning and maintenance, was seen as their major task by all the women once married. Maintaining a home meant cooking, sewing and general care of its members but it also meant maintaining high standards of cleanliness both internally and externally. It was

for this reason that most women felt they could not combine paid work and domestic duties - standards of housecare would suffer - although a sizeable number undertook part-time work to supplement the husband's income. The role of housewife was very important to these women and will be considered in detail in the next chapter. Better housing meant that such a role could bring satisfaction and a sense of achievement as cleanliness and comfort were more assured. The lessons learned from mothers could be put into practice with a considerable degree of success. High standards of housewifery were also a sign of 'respectability' and distinguished these families from those whose perceived inability to control dirt and germs marked them as 'rough'.

In summary then the house and housework was the practical framework of women's lives once married. Being a 'good housewife' was felt to be vitally important and this was reinforced by the increasing number of women's magazines aimed at precisely this stratum of women. (6). 'Good motherhood', as I shall show in chapter eight, was not yet the prime concern of these women. I would agree with Elizabeth Roberts that,

Woman's dual role as family financial manager and moral guide cannot be underestimated. She acted within tight financial and social constraints. However good her managerial abilities, she was necessarily restricted by the family's income; she was further restricted in her choice of action by the mores of her family, her kinship group, and her neighbourhood. She was, of course, limited by her actual physical environment, her home; finally, she would generally be hampered by frequent and prolonged childbearing. (7)

What effect did improved housing and less frequent childbearing have on this 'dual role'? It is the purpose of this and the next chapter to illuminate the former; the latter will be considered in chapter eight.

The inter-war years saw an unprecedented expansion of house-building both for rent and for purchase. State responsibility for the provision of working-class housing was finally established by the Addison(1919), Chamberlain(1923), and Wheatley(1924) Housing Acts and a series of subsidies were given to local authorities and to private enterprise to encourage the building of homes for both lower-middle and working-class families. 'Homes fit for Heroes' was a major element of the wider programme of social reconstruction embarked upon at the end of the war and if the reality never quite matched the promise, nevertheless the building programmes of the twenties and thirties made considerable inroads into the housing shortage revealed in 1918. A primary cause of this shortage was that whilst family size was declining, the numbers of household units were rising as more and more couples married and set up their own homes. (8)

3,998,000 houses were built between 1919 and 1939; 1,112,000 of these were built by local authorities for rent and 2,886,000 by private enterprise. (9) Speculative building between the wars catered in the main for the bottom end of the market, for those with an annual income of about £200-£600 who could afford a small semi-detached, costing between £300 and £800 outside London.

Every major city saw an expansion of small semis and villas round

its perimeter or along its arterial roads. The growth and development of London's suburbs was the most dramatic and has been the most documented with builders offering escape from congested central areas to areas like Edgware where 'provision has been made...which at least will convert pleasant, undulating fields into happy homes' (10) or manipulating desires for social status,

Novean Homes are offered to families of good breeding who wish to acquire a house to be proud of at a cost of less than £1 a week. (11)

Nevertheless, Birmingham's south-west suburbs could offer similar charms. The following detached residences were offered for sale at £775 and advertised as 'a house that will mellow with years. A house that will blend more and more with the true setting of Park Land surroundings'. (12)

The dream of owning or renting through a council tenancy, a modest, adequately designed home away from the dirt and squalor of city centres was in these years becoming a very real possibility not just for the growing band of white collar workers but increasingly for those in skilled and even semi-skilled work. Appendix one shows the occupations of my respondents' husbands and all lived in one form or another of the new inter-war housing. As Burnett has observed 'the home continued to be, as it had in the past, the most important mark of social differentiation and the most significant symbol of social status'. (13) For the 'respectable' working-class it was

increasingly important to live away from the central areas which were so often perceived as 'rough' and whilst there were differences in social gradation between owning one's house and renting a council house there can be little doubt that these better-designed homes represented not only material improvement but also a public statement of status.

Inter-war housing in Birmingham and York

As I discussed in chapter two both cities witnessed considerable population growth between the wars closely associated with the shifting geographical location of industry in Britain as a whole, as the 'old staples' of coal-mining, ship-building heavy engineering and textiles gave way to light engineering, food processing and the manufacture of consumer durables. (14) Both cities were well placed to take advantage of these changes. Birmingham's economic growth was helped by its diversity of industry and, in particular for the area my respondents came from, the expansion of car and cycle manufacture: York's two major industries, the Railway Company and Rowntrees Chocolate and Cocoa Manufacture benefited from industry's shift to the service sector and home consumption. (15) Both cities saw extensive house-building programmes during the twenties and thirties in both the public and private sectors. Both cities had a tradition of housing reform closely linked with the two Quaker chocolate manufacturers: the late nineteenth century had seen the development of model villages built on Garden City principles at

New Earswick in York and Bournville in Birmingham which were to influence housing design for the next two decades. As a result both City Councils were more than averagely committed to a programme of housing reform. When, in 1921, the government, less concerned than it had been about potential social unrest from returning servicemen, directed local authorities to curtail their building programmes and, in a period of retrenchment, to cut back on standards of design, York City Council resisted such moves in contrast to the London County Council who were happy to meet the government's reduced standards of quantity and quality. (16)

Birmingham with its long record of civic involvement was also anxious to be seen to be giving a lead on housing reform and one Sunday in 1931 was designated 'House Improvement Sunday' when local clergy preached on the issues of working-class housing and slum clearance. Such initiatives received considerable coverage in the local press and an influential body of opinion continued throughout the period to pressure the City Council to maintain a good record on housing. (17)

In 1921 1,396 new houses were erected within Birmingham's city boundaries: by 1938 this figure had reached 10,807. Of the 10,807 houses built in 1938, 7,804 were private dwellings for sale or rent and 3,003 were municipal houses. By 1939 59,426 private houses and 51,128 corporation houses had been built, the majority of which were between three and six miles from the city centre. (18) The largest municipal estates were built at Kingstanding and Quinton but smaller developments were erected

around the whole three to six mile perimeter of the city at Northfield, Kings Heath, Acocks Green, Yardley and Stechford. Private development was similarly placed often straggling the main arterial roads out of the city - the ubiquitous ribbon development deplored by J. B. Priestley in his English Journey(1934),

...all if offered me, mile after mile was a parade of mean dinginess ... the whole array of shops with their nasty bits of meat, their cough mixtures, their Racing Specials, their sticky cheap furniture, their shoddy clothes, their fly-blown pastry, their coupons and sales and lies and dreariness and ugliness. (19)

By 1946 Northfield, which in 1918 had still been a small dormitory village to the south west of the city, had a total of 13,760 private and municipal houses.

A similar expansion can be seen in York though on a smaller scale. In 1921, 393 new houses were built; in 1939 the figure was 549. Between 1920 and 1939 4,330 private semis had been erected and about 4,400 council houses. (20) Like Birmingham most of this new building was outside the city centre close to undeveloped countryside. The largest council estate was Tang Hall, started in 1919 and situated close to the small village of Heworth; this was followed by Burton Stone Lane at Clifton where the first tenancies were established in 1931. Private enterprise building took place around Heworth, Acomb and South Bank, all between two and four miles from the City Centre.

My respondents were drawn from the south west suburbs of Birmingham, that is Allens Cross Farm municipal estate in Northfield, Kings Norton and Rubery, and from Tang Hall/Heworth and Clifton in York. There are a number of similarities between these areas, although the relative size of the two cities as a whole make it difficult to draw significant conclusions. Both Allens Cross Farm and Tang Hall were built very close to existing villages - Northfield and Heworth - and both council estates rub shoulders with private building of the period. Shops and local amenities were shared by all the inhabitants of an area, although towards the end of the period Allens Cross Farm obtained its own Anglican Church. Nevertheless during the early years of these estates, new arrivals shared facilities with both established residents and the inhabitants of private enterprise building. Both Birmingham and York respondents spoke of how they used to 'go up the village' for shopping. In both cases this meant the parade of shops around the old centre of the area. The estate at Clifton, York was (and is) slightly different. Built later than Tang Hall and Allens Cross Farm its purpose was to rehouse slum dwellers rather than to provide housing for working-class families. I shall examine this distinction in greater detail below but for now it is worth noting that Clifton council housing was (and is) seen as 'rougher', although those who lived there in the early days did not necessarily perceive themselves as such. For this reason it makes a useful contrast to the other two areas. The point I wish to make here is that, although large municipal estates such as Becontree did exist, a considerable

amount of local authority building was on a much smaller scale and built alongside and around existing and new private developments.

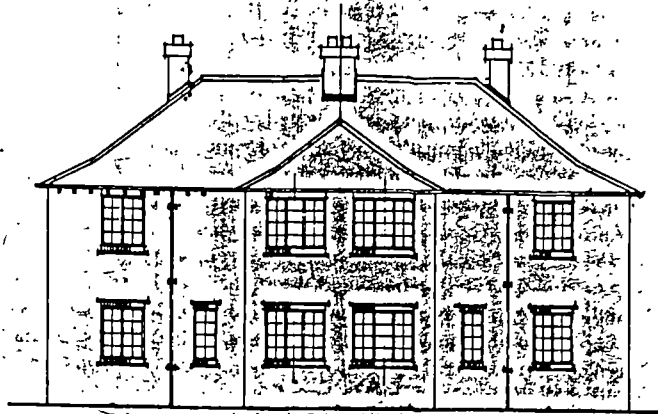
Local Authority Housing

Twelve of my respondents occupied one of the new council houses, five in Birmingham and seven in York. (21) Of the five in Birmingham, four lived on the Allens Cross Farm estate in Northfield and one in Selly Oak. Of the seven in York, two lived on Tang Hall and five on Burton Stone Lane, Clifton. Another respondent lived in private, local-authority subsidised housing on Tang Hall. Here, I want to examine the type of housing offered, whom it was offered to and how it differed from respondents' previous housing.

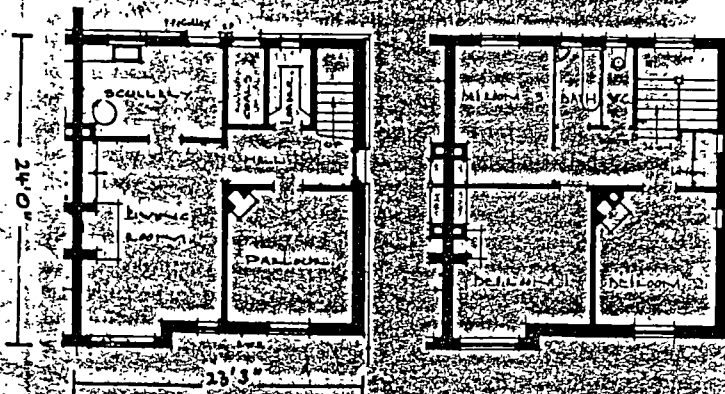
The most striking characteristic of inter-war council housing was its uniformity across the country: Becontree, Birmingham, York, Leicester - the houses are fairly indistinguishable.

State responsibility for working-class housing established a set of national standards for what was deemed adequate housing. The Tudor-Walters Report of 1918, heavily influenced by Ebenezer Howard's Garden City movement, recommended certain criteria which all local authorities should adhere to. (22) The Report stressed the need for houses with parlours, large living rooms (sometimes called kitchens, particularly in

Early council houses on Tang Hall. later ones were smaller, often without parlours.



FRONT ELEVATION



GROUND FLOOR

FIRST FLOOR

Figure 35. Tang Hall estate, York: elevation and plans of parlour houses built in 1923 under the Housing Act of 1890.

From Swenarton M. Homes fit for Heroes p.185

the north), separate sculleries and separate bathrooms. Minimum sizes were laid down for the various rooms,

Living room	180 sq.ft.	Bedroom 1	150/60 sq.ft.
Parlour	120 sq.ft.	Bedroom 2	100/20 sq.ft.
Scullery	80 sq.ft.	Bedroom 3	65 sq.ft.
Larder	24 sq.ft.		

and certain standards were recommended. (23) For example toilets should not be 'altogether out of doors or too exposed to frost' and a 'parlour should be provided whenever possible' (24).

The Addison Act (1919) recommendations on housing density, however, made the most visible difference. Instead of the twenty to thirty houses per acre allowed previously, builders were now constrained to twelve to the acre. This allowed for side passages, gardens, frontages and the horizontal rather than tunnel-back design of all houses built after 1919. The effect was to ensure more light, space and ventilation and many local authorities were imaginative in their interpretation of the Act. Houses were built either in terraces of four to six with access between the middle two to the back or, more rarely, in pairs. Pairs were usually placed on the boundary roads of estates or on corners to give the estate a more attractive external appearance. Tree-planting, wide road verges and cul-de-sacs instead of the traditional gridiron street plan made many of the new estates a pleasanter environment than the tunnel-backs and back-to-backs of central areas. Exigencies of economy over the inter-war period,

however, meant that the recommendations of the Tudor-Walters Report were frequently eroded so that by 1936, the minimum floor area for a parlour-type house could be reduced to 860 sq.ft. and 620 sq.ft. for a non-parlour type. (25) Equally, layout and design could fall far short of the Garden City ideals which had informed the building of the earlier homes as the recession bit deep. The early section of Tang Hall started in 1919 provided a number of well-designed houses, generously proportioned in a pleasant environment. The later sections of the estate and Burton Stone Lane, begun later, suffer from a surfeit of long parallel roads, few parlour type houses and a generally unimaginative layout. Rowntree, whilst recognising the superiority of such houses to those they replaced in the central areas, condemned many as 'second class';

Some of the streets are pleasing in appearance but everywhere one is conscious of a lack of real genius. The same plans are used over and over again. Sometimes where an attempt has been made to introduce variety the designs definitely drop into a lower grade. A few are quite frankly ugly...Too frequently roads have been laid out in the old-fashioned gridiron pattern - long and uninteresting parallel roads, intersected at intervals by cross-roads which give frontage to no houses. (26)

Local authority provision of working-class housing up to the mid-thirties was not primarily concerned with slum clearance. Its aim was to provide homes for working-class people at rents they could afford, to alleviate the housing shortage revealed at the end of the First World War and in particular for returning servicemen - the much vaunted 'Homes for Heroes'. (27) The house building programmes of the later thirties were more directed at

the poorer sections of the working-class as the extent and nature of inadequate housing became an issue on the social agenda. This was to have ramifications for the way in which estates came to be perceived. Burnett has observed that the first council houses of the twenties and early thirties

went largely to a limited range of income groups - small clerks and tradesmen, artisans and the better-off semi-skilled workers with average-sized families and safe jobs. (28)

Rowntree estimated that of the 3,297 council houses built by 1936, less than 1,000 were occupied by those dispossessed by slum clearance and of the 3,034 families in his survey renting such houses, only 970 (32%) had incomes below his poverty line. (29) Indeed, approximately one-third (1015) fell into Rowntree's Class E of whom he says,

Most families in Class E can afford to go away for a week's holiday in summer and even if the income does not run to a motor-cycle, which it often does, at any rate few of those in the class need go without bicycles. (30)

Bowley calculated the average full-time male working-class wage to be approximately 56s.6d. per week at this time and many skilled men earned above this. (31) Council house rents in Birmingham and York ranged from about 8s. a week to 18s. a week and Mrs. Arthurs recalls that in the mid-thirties the rent for a parlour type house was 14s. 9d. and for a non-parlour 9s. 4d. on Allens Cross Farm. Most importantly for council house allocation

was a regular secure job - a secure job meant reliability with rent and this was all-important at a time of economic recession and high unemployment. None of my respondents in council housing remember their husbands being unemployed. As Mrs. Hutchings commented on their move to Tang Hall, 'the people all round here I'm sure were in jobs' (32) and it was suggested to me that many of the earliest tenants on Allens Cross Farm were local authority workers at the nearby Frankley Waterworks. (33)

Council house lists appear to have operated on a 'first come, first served' basis rather than according to need although Rowntree suggests that those with incomes of more than five or six pounds, or without children, were not usually considered.

As applications come in they are filed away until houses become available. As soon as this occurs the list is examined and houses are let to suitable tenants in the order in which they have applied. As a rule families whose total income amounts to more than £5 or £6 and those without children, are passed over. (34)

Both Birmingham and York City Councils were concerned to exclude from tenancies those whom they felt could pay more.

Rent collectors were instructed to report on any case where a tenant was thought to be able to pay a rent above that which he was paying. (35)

However, as I shall argue below, there were other criteria concerned with the selection of 'good' tenants which ensured that, in the main, the early council tenancies went to those perceived as 'respectable'.

There were less official means of acquiring a council tenancy: Mrs. Arthurs misled housing officials, saying that they needed extra space because her mother was coming to live with them. She believes it was this that got them their house and no check appears to have been made. By the mid to late thirties, however, slum clearance programmes were making it increasingly necessary to rehouse larger numbers from the poorer sections of the working-class. In York many of these were re-housed on Burton Stone Lane. Built after Tang Hall, the first tenancies were established in 1929 (The first tenancies on Tang Hall were 1921) and more houses were let throughout the thirties. (36) There was (and is) an accepted belief amongst working-class people that Burton Stone Lane was 'rougher' than Tang Hall and that problem families were (and are) housed there.

Well...if you said you lived there [Burton Stone Lane] people thought...well...it wasn't very nice, you know, rough. (37)

and

[About Tang Hall] This was a better-class area, considered a better-class area ... and the people all round here I'm sure were in jobs. (38)

It was noticeable in interview that those respondents who lived on Burton Stone Lane were less concerned with the house as status symbol, though, it should be noted, no less concerned with 'respectability'. Although standards of housework for these women were as high as others there is a general shabbiness about their homes today and a lack of the material possessions found in other homes. The ability to construct the home as a concrete

symbol of achieved status is, of course, dependent upon a certain level of income: those who do not possess this, however, do not necessarily see themselves as less 'respectable'.

'Respectability' was demonstratable through the possessions within the home but it was also stated by adherence to ideals of cleanliness, sobriety and thrift when, and probably particularly when, there was less affluence.

Equally illuminating and possibly connected is the fact that far fewer houses with parlours were built on Burton Stone Lane than on Tang Hall or Allens Cross Farm. Indeed the majority of houses on Burton Stone Lane were A3s, that is three-bedroomed non-parlour houses. These houses, built to a national standard, were considerably smaller than B3s (parlour-type with three bedrooms). They consisted of a main living room off the front door, a small scullery, downstairs bathroom and outside toilet and three bedrooms (see attached plans) and were let at a lower rental. (39) As economies in the housing programme were called for less parlour houses were built anywhere although Birmingham City Council in 1921 believed that the non-parlour 'type of house is not favoured by the working-classes'. (40) By 1935 the Council was reporting that out of 11,224 applicants 7,495 had stated a preference for a non-parlour type. (41) The oral evidence suggests that non-parlour houses were sometimes favoured simply because they were cheaper. Mrs. Arthurs wanted a non-parlour type house but in the event got a parlour house. As a result

they found themselves pushed financially: however she enjoyed having a parlour as she felt

It is nicer to have another room if you want to invite people into when you are not always just so. (42)

but would have been willing to forgo this in order to save money.

Well, we didn't want a parlour type, we only wanted a non-parlour because it was less rent... We had to turn it down but he [housing official] got us another one and we had to turn that down because it was a parlour type, so when they offered us another one we daren't because they said if we didn't take this one we'll never get one, so this was it. (43)

Although the parlour had long been perceived by middle-class commentators and observers as a symbol of working-class 'respectability' it was not necessarily perceived as all-important by working-class families whose choices were dictated as much by practical economy and availability. Nevertheless, middle-class observers appear to have made and possibly reinforced the link between type of housing and 'respectability'. Witness these two accounts by one of Rowntree's survey investigators,

Description of a Council parlour house occupied by a careful and house-proud tenant. Rent 10s.6d.

The front door opens into a small lobby about 4 ft. by 6 ft. wide with a door opening into the parlour. From the parlour a door leads to the living-room or kitchen ... The parlour (12 ft. by 10 ft. 6 in.) has a bow window and is nicely furnished. It contains a brown leather-covered settee and two easy chairs to match, a table, a bookcase, an occasional table in the window and on the floor there is an almost new carpet with oilcloth surround. The family lives in the kitchen, and as the w.c. is upstairs it can only be reached by passing through the parlour. The kitchen (12 ft. by 10 ft. 6 in.) is furnished as a dining-room with an oak sideboard, an oak dining-table, two easy chairs and a number of small chairs, a sewing machine and a wireless set... On the wall are a clock and a few framed photographs and coloured prints...

and,

*Description of a Council non-parlour house occupied
by a tenant who is poor and has a large family. Rent 8s.11d.*

The front door opens into a small lobby about 4 ft. by 6 ft., the floor of which is covered with a worn piece of oilcloth, partly covered by a torn piece of rush matting... A door in the lobby leads into the living room (13 ft. 6 in. by about 12 ft.). Clothes lines on which clothes are being aired are stretched across the room; they appear to be a permanent feature. The furniture consists of a painted deal side-board, a deal table covered with brightly coloured American cloth, a horse-hair sofa, much worn, and two easy chairs to match, a few kitchen chairs, a small chest of drawers with a wireless set on the top, a large-size perambulator, and bundles of clothes and oddments in every conceivable spot... The floor is covered with some worn oilcloth, on the top of which are a number of small rugs and pieces of worn carpet... (44)

I examine the question of housework and 'respectability' in the next chapter but the point to note is the subtle distinctions made between council tenancies based upon type of house and effective household management within it - the major role of the working-class woman.

Respondents' remembered responses to their new housing were, generally, favourable;

My, I loved it, because we had no electric light in that house [back-to-back in Leeman Road] and no bathroom. We thought it was lovely. (45)

We thought it was a palace. (46)

and

And we were semi-detached so we were lucky we had a garden all the way round and also at that time when we went to live there, there was nothing to break our view, we had a marvellous view of the Yorkshire Wolds and beyond the garden we had an allotment, and then it was cornfields...Oh it was fabulous really, there was no traffic dashing up and down, the children could play around us from one tree to another. (47)

Some were, however, less enthusiastic. Mrs. Wilkes recalled how cold it was after the closely packed houses of the central areas, 'like Siberia, they used to say you'd to put your coat on when you came in not when you went out' (48). Even Mrs. Arthurs who thought her new home 'a palace' was less than euphoric about the scullery as time went by,

Don't know why they built houses with little kitchens like this. (49)

The Tudor-Walters Report had recommended that the minimum desirable size for a scullery should be 80 sq.ft. and that,

There should be ample space for a sink, with adjacent draining-board, table or wide shelf; plate racks; a copper (if there is no separate wash-house) complete with steam outlet hood and ventilator; a simple grate or slow combustion stove for drying clothes; gas cooker if possible; an additional cooking range if possible, [presumably in the living room] a bread-baking oven in certain districts; space for wash tubs, mangle or wringer; ample cupboards and shelves. (50)

Most sculleries and kitchens, as Mrs. Arthurs recognised, rarely came up to this standard. Building economies meant curtailment of floor space - despite the 80 sq.ft. recommended many sculleries were only 75 sq.ft. or less which was no larger than the sculleries of many older terraced villas, though undeniably larger than the space offered in the congested back-to-backs. Those who had come from back-to-back housing could remember the communal washhouses and the fight to dry washing in sooty courts and yards. For many a cramped scullery was perhaps a small price to pay for clean air, a garden to dry clothes in, and piped water.

After indoor bathrooms, toilets and electricity, it was the environment which delighted many women,

I did live in Leeman Road but there was nothing there just streets. We used to go to school [at Tang Hall] and see lots of hawthorn budding and coming out as we were going to school... and I thought it was lovely. (51)

and for Mrs. Arthurs, brought up in rural Staffordshire, it was less the country air than the cleanliness of the place which impressed her. Their previous rooms had been 'dirty' and she was willing to pay the extra rent to acquire somewhere 'cleaner'. Council housing was planned to take advantage of space and light; it offered a pleasanter and easier environment in which a woman might fulfil her domestic role. Most respondents felt the council house to be a vast improvement on their childhood living conditions when they had watched their mothers struggle with dirt, outside toilets, lack of coalsheds, sunlight and hot water. All houses, both council and private, built from the mid twenties onwards were wired for electricity and in York it was common to be able to rent an electric cooker along with the council house. Mrs. Wilkes who complained of ill-fitting doors, cold, and lack of amenities was untypical. Yet her observations have more than an element of truth in them. Lower density rates probably did make the houses colder and harder to heat. Sculleries were small particularly for manipulating the family wash in the large coppers which were still used. Living room/kitchens contained either a full cooking-range with grate or a fire and back-boiler with a cooker in the scullery. In either case this often meant

that baking and clothes-drying took place in the living-room, despite the hope of planners that

cooking and washing up should be eliminated from the living room and delegated to the scullery. (52)

For those in non-parlour houses the living-room was the focus for most family activities from listening to the wireless to drying washing and eating meals. Equally, those with parlours did not use them for every day living, keeping them for the occasional visitor and important family events such as Christmas, weddings, christenings and funerals. Women denied themselves the use of this extra space believing that external show was more important than private comfort,

In the next chapter I shall examine housework in more detail and in chapter eight I shall consider whether women felt isolated and removed from the community support they had grown up with in the crowded streets of the central areas. For now it is enough to note that a council house was perceived as 'something a little bit better'. Allens Cross Farm and Tang Hall built earlier in the period were perceived as 'respectable' whilst Burton Stone Lane built to rehouse those dispossessed by slum clearance was seen (and still is) as 'rougher'.

The 'Good' Tenant

Although the allocation of tenancies was determined by need and ability to pay, once a tenancy was granted various measures were

taken to ensure that tenants complied with certain expectations of behaviour. Good housekeeping, a well-tended garden and sobriety were the main concerns of municipal landlords. In York a Welfare Officer visited all homes ostensibly to check on the welfare of tenants but also to assess the standard of care given to home and garden. Indeed, there is evidence that such assessment was made prior to granting a tenancy. The Housing Committee minutes for 1922 and 1931 state the council's policy,

With regard to the priority of letting houses Rents and Tenants Sub-Committee recommended that the tenant is in a position to pay rent, that the tenant is likely to be suitable from a point of view of looking after and keeping in good and clean condition the house, that priority be given, subject to the above conditions, to applicants living in unhealthy conditions.

A further report was considered with regard to a number of applicants who would appear unsuitable as municipal tenants. It was recommended that the Estates Manager should interview these people at home to encourage the applicants to improve their conditions with a view to a possibility of assisting such cases at a later date if improvement was then noticeable. (53)

Cookery demonstrations using electricity were offered by the Electricity Department in one of the council houses on Tang Hall and one woman remembered attending these with her mother in Acomb. (54) Uncleanliness, along with arrears of rent and unauthorised letting were grounds for eviction as was neglect of gardens. (55)

Well-kept gardens were particularly favoured by Birmingham City Council to the extent that the Council ran a Municipal Estates Gardens competition during the thirties which was well-publicised

by the local press where the message that good gardening made 'respectable' citizens was hammered home,

The Lord Mayor who presented the prizes said the two most beautiful things in the world were music and flowers. Many of the municipal gardens in Birmingham were "colossal" - the tenants producing wonderful results in small room to the delight of themselves and the pleasure of their neighbours ...But there were a considerable number who did not take a pride in their gardens. A tenant who allowed weeds to grow rampant was a nuisance to the whole neighbourhood. There were thousands of people who wanted houses and would be only too glad to look after a garden. (56)

Funds to encourage gardening on municipal estates were often donated by local benefactors such as the Cadburys and Rowntrees; free gardening calendars were given to all Birmingham council tenants and York Council encouraged residents' gardening associations. Gardening was seen as a means of keeping men out of the pub and in the home: the corollary of encouraging gardening was a continued resistance to providing public houses on municipal estates. (57)

The distinctions fostered by local authority ideals of the 'good' tenant were at times heartily endorsed by tenants themselves both male and female. A letter to the Birmingham Post in 1931 gave rise to a spate of sympathetic feeling about 'bad' neighbours. For example one writer vitriolically stated 'one has only to look at some of the gardens (at the back) and the windows (at the front) to imagine what the inside must be like' and goes on to ask why 'decent-class persons should have to live in close proximity to that class of person who can only be described as coarse and uncouth.' (58) Mrs. Arthurs told me in similar vein



29



30



31

Gardens on Municipal Estates

Municipal houses have front gardens and back gardens and are laid out at two houses to the acre. Our search showed that in the morning 43.5 per cent. of gardens were well kept; 43 per cent. were in fair condition and only 13.5 per cent. were badly cared for. (29) and (30) show typical gardens—a portion of the back garden usefully employed for vegetable tables; (31) shows what an ambitious tenant can achieve.

Source: When We Build Again (1941)

how she felt the neighbourhood had 'gone down' as people were less concerned with keeping their gardens tidy and their windows clean. The price of a council house tenancy could be adherence to a set of 'respectable' conventions and petty restrictions by council landlords. York Council for example insisted that its tenants should cut their hedges twice a year and at no time allow them to grow above five foot. (59) Thus, even the extent of allowable privacy was determined by officialdom! Whilst few of my respondents showed the extreme feelings of the letter-writer cited above, nevertheless they recognised the subtle gradations built around such criteria and fulfilled to their own and other's satisfaction the accepted role of 'good' tenant as I shall show in the next chapter.

Private Housing

Nine of the women interviewed lived in private housing; six in Birmingham, two in York and one in Scarborough (60). Of these six were buying their houses on instalment systems (analogous to rent) and three were privately renting. It has to be remembered that, despite the growth in home-ownership at this time, the majority of working-class and lower middle-class families continued to rent. Bournville Village Trust estimated that less than 25% of homes in Birmingham before the Second World War were owner-occupied and that even in the developing outer-ring suburbs like Northfield and Kings Norton private houses for rent were still plentiful. (61) Of the 670 families earning not more than

£250 per annum surveyed by Rowntree, who occupied post-war semi-detached houses, 118 had bought them, 388 were purchasing by mortgages or other loan schemes and 164 were renting. (62) The occupations of 200 of these householders are listed and it is significant that 70% are in skilled or blue collar work. (63) This is borne out in my sample where the majority of husbands were skilled men, small shopkeepers or, in one case, a male nurse. Only one husband's occupation was unambiguously white-collar - Mr. Matthews who was a local authority weights and measures inspector. A skilled man in regular work could earn between four and five pounds a week and sometimes more whilst a number of white-collar workers, particularly clerks and shop assistants might earn less. The bottom end of the private housing market was increasingly open to the higher echelons of the working-class and owner-occupied property rubbed shoulders with rented houses at this level. Burnett estimates that a minimum weekly wage of four pounds allowed repayments of 15s. a week on a small house enabling higher paid manual workers as well as low paid white collar workers to buy a small semi-detached on instalment. (64) Most building societies required a deposit of 25% up to 1930 but thereafter easier credit could reduce the amount to 10 or even 5% (65) York Council allowed a £50 subsidy on some houses built at Tang Hall, allowing Mrs. Hutchings to buy her semi for £550 rather than £600. Neither were building society mortgages the only means of purchase: Mrs. Hutchings' father-in-law loaned the difference between deposit and purchase price and the Hutchings paid him back in instalments. Mrs.

Walters' mother bought their three bedroomed semi as a result of money inherited when her parents died. However, as in the case of council housing, the main criterion was a regular, secure income. Mortgage repayments on a semi-detached costing between £400 and £600 could be between 15s. and 17s. per week, the rent for a similar house would be approximately 15s. to 16s. per week. (66) Thus a regular, stable income at the higher end of working-class earnings was essential and again none of my respondents' husbands in this category experienced unemployment.

What then were these modest low-priced houses like? Similar to council housing, a fairly uniform national style was adopted based on 'The Universal Plan', as it was known to architects and builders. (67) Although, like council house plans, the design was horizontal to maximise light and ventilation and although this followed the designs of the Garden City movement and the Tudor-Walters Report, speculative builders aiming for economy and profit did not always adopt the low density standards, neither did they always adhere to the recommendations on room sizes and building standards. As a result there were many attacks on jerry building and sub-standard specifications: many of these low-priced small semis were undoubtedly inferior in design and building standards to the more stringently built and designed council houses. Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Walters, Mrs. Pearce, Mrs. Holder and Mrs. Stewart all occupied houses which followed the Universal Plan. Mrs. Hutchings' house was slightly different, built as it was, as part of the Tang Hall development but it had

the same number of rooms which were slightly bigger than the average semi. Mrs. Matthews' small detached was a larger version of the plan with a bigger hall and larger rooms but it followed the same basic layout of front room, back dining room, small kitchen, three bedrooms (one small) and upstairs bathroom and toilet. Like local authority housing all semis were wired for electricity but unlike council houses, the large living room/kitchen range was replaced by a smaller coal fire with back boiler for heating water. (68)

Thus I would suggest that there were affinities between those who occupied private housing at the bottom end of the market and those in council housing, particularly those in parlour-type council houses. Income, occupation and style of living accommodation were broadly similar and this is reflected in my interviews where the routines and patterns of family life show degrees of difference rather than marked discontinuities between those in private and those in public housing. Mrs. Walker, the only respondent to own a washing machine, occupied a non-parlour type council house on Tang Hall. Mrs. Matthews, the most unambiguously lower middle-class of my respondents, continued to wash using a copper and wringer. As far as maintaining the fabric of the house went, these women undertook a similarly arduous work load, unalleviated by domestic help or very much labour-saving equipment. Nevertheless, there were subtle social gradations between

those in private housing and those in council housing.

Undoubtedly the women in small semis believed themselves to be in some sense superior, although I would contend there was a measure of ambivalence about this.

Social status and housing

'Our parents lived in rented houses, I never lived in a rented house'. (69) Home-ownership was an undeniable sign of upward mobility. More than anything else it demonstrated those attributes most considered 'respectable' - financial stability, self-reliance, thrift and personal effort. Yet although home ownership might go hand in hand with certain middle-class values such as self-improvement, education and deferred gratification, it did not necessarily imply assimilation into the lower reaches of the middle-class. The women I interviewed in private housing retained a strong sense of their working-class background whilst claiming a certain social superiority on the basis of their housing.

...there was a great class divide, but I never had an inferiority complex about it, it was something that was there...This was our station in life more or less ...There was a great deal of encouragement to get on, to be better, have a better life than they [parents] had and they wanted us to do well for ourselves, but by hard work and initiative and try to do things, not too clever...(70)

and Mrs. Porter, whose mother had owned a boarding-house in the North and employed a maid-of-all-work, graphically recounted the subtle distinctions which became apparent to her on the family's move to Birmingham.

After we came to Birmingham our position changed dramatically. In fact it was from one extreme to another because to come down to..after what we'd been brought up to. I'm not belittling my uncle but to come back, the first Sunday I was here, and when dinner-time came and they put newspaper on the table I thought it was dreadful...It was so different because my uncle had got nine children and I suppose they just hadn't got the money...I didn't realise that people lived the way they did...I mean I had friends at school whose fathers hadn't worked for years...She [mother] never said you can't play with them because they're poor. You see we were brought up in the Labour [sic] tradition...and I think you always sort of cling to that. But my mother never sort of turned her nose up at people who were poorer than herself. (71)

These distinctions and the ambivalence surrounding them found a very concrete form when Mrs. Matthews fostered a child from a nearby Children's Home who was unable to attend the local school,

...the whole idea of having a foster child out of a home is to make her one of the family and she had to go right across to Frankley Beeches [the school serving Allens Cross council estate] knowing nobody and all our children with all their friends just across here. Well, of course, the result was,..it was very, very bad because, without being snobby, the estate [Allens Cross] ... when it was first built, it brought all the people and I don't know where from, but just as good as anybody else, but the children seemed to be poorer...You couldn't get her to sound her aitches...and of course going out to Frankley Beeches didn't help at all. (72)

Thus 'respectability' might be achieved by home ownership but it did not mean an automatic acceptance of middle-class status and a rejection of working-class values per se. It undoubtedly entailed a greater commitment to privacy, self-improvement and self-sufficiency as I shall show below but there remained a strong awareness of the injustice and

limitations of poverty. Mrs. Pearce recalled a minor incident imprinted on her mind as a child, when a small shopkeeper refused to open his shop during the First World War,

There was nearly a riot then because he had shut the shop up with the food in and gone home with his own share...I mean it was food, and those women's kids were hungry and he decided to open the shop *tomorrow* and we wanted our tea *tonight!* (73)

She later married a small shopkeeper herself and they bought their own house but she still recalls the injustice of this incident. Perhaps Mrs. Jones' comments below capture the sense of discomfort these subtle gradations engendered. As a child in the thirties she lived in a small semi-detached from the front room of which her mother carried on a small confectionery business,

...when I was a girl, they seemed to have a lot of private houses and they put them next to council houses and I think the people in the council houses...resented it because they knew we'd got our own house. I don't know, they seemed to think we looked down on them but we didn't. I think they thought they were the underdogs because they were in the council houses but I don't know 'cos we were all the same, went to the same school. (74)

Conclusion

Housing was undoubtedly a sign of social status and a means to an improved quality of life and the two were inextricably linked. Thus, moving to the pleasanter environment offered by the suburbs was not simply a case of acquiring better living conditions, it was also a measure of a family's capacity 'to

do well for ourselves', as Mrs. Hutchings put it. Official policies, manifested in conditions of council tenancies, government subsidies to builders of working-class housing, and cheap mortgages, reinforced the connection between 'decent' families and improved housing. The reward for hard work, restraint and thrift could be a small but better designed home away from the soot and grime of urban centres. Such homes offered housewives the opportunity to display 'superior' housekeeping skills in the maintenance of comfort and cleanliness; skills which, as we shall see in the next chapter, could enhance the family's status as 'respectable'. Slum clearance programmes from the mid-thirties onwards brought a greater mix of tenants onto council estates. However, the granting of original tenancies to those perceived as steady, 'respectable' workers set the tone for the whole period and resulted in the kind of social snobbery evidenced by the letter-writer quoted above. A 'nice' home was a sign of 'respectability' to be maintained and protected at all costs: the burden of such maintenance fell almost wholly on the wife in the family.

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25. Ibid. p.99
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30. Rowntree B. S. Poverty and Progress p.123.
31. Bowley A. L. Wages and Income in the United Kingdom since 1870 Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1937, p.51.
32. Interview Mrs. Hutchings.
33. Personal communication with Rev. E. Foskett, Allens Cross Farm Anglican Church.
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35. York City Council, Minutes of the Housing Committee, 20 June 1933.
36. York City Council, Minutes of the Housing Committee; Swenarton M. Homes fit for Heroes pp.178-186; Personal communication from Roy Wallington, Housing Community Liaison Officer, York City Council, 16 May 1988.
37. Informal interview Mrs. Linfoot, York resident since 1920s.
38. Interview Mrs. Hutchings.
39. Council House Rents in Birmingham and York in 1930s
- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| A3 Non-parlour with three bedrooms | |
| Birmingham | 8s.2d - 12s.9d. |
| York | 8s. 11½d. |
| B3 Parlour with three bedrooms | |
| Birmingham | 12s. - 18s.6d. |
| York | 10s.2d. |
- Sources: Proceedings of Birmingham City Council 1930-1938.

Minutes of York City Council Housing Committee
1930-1938.

E. D. Simon How to Abolish the Slums Longmans, London,
1929.

B. S. Rowntree Poverty and Progress.

Interview material.

40. Proceedings of Birmingham City Council, Report of the Housing and Estates Committee, 5 July 1921.
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42. Interview Mrs. Arthurs.
43. Ibid.
44. Rowntree B. S. Poverty and Progress pp.236-237.
45. Interview Mrs. Dickens.
46. Interview Mrs. Arthurs.
47. Interview Mrs. Walker.
48. Interview Mrs. Wilkes.
49. Interview Mrs. Arthurs. It would seem as if York City Council came to concur with this view, 'It was decided that the Committee should visit small scullery type of houses with a view to fitting a plug to enable coppers to be moved when not in use.' York City Council, Minutes of the Housing Committee, 18 December 1934.
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53. York City Council, Minutes of the Housing Committee, 17 February 1931 and 18 December 1922.
54. York City Council, Minutes of the Housing Committee, 16 December 1929; Description of life on early York council estate written for the Housing Liaison Officer, 1988.
55. 'It was decided that notices to quit should be served in the under-mentioned cases where no improvement had been shown in the cultivation of the gardens.' York City Council, Minutes of the Housing Committee, 27 November 1934.
56. Birmingham Post, 8 November 1930. The same report also stated that classes in horticulture and gardening were to be started on various municipal estates. The Minutes of the Housing and Estates Committee of Birmingham City Council for the 7 February 1922 reported that a charity called the Birmingham Common Good Trust had voted a sum of £1000 to encourage gardening on municipal estates.
57. Resistance to the provision of a public house is evident in the minutes of both City Councils. It may be that this was particular to Birmingham and York where the temperance principles of the Cadburys and Rowntrees influenced housing reform.
58. A letter to the Birmingham Post, 20 July 1931 stated 'The Estates Committee make many and strict enquiries into all our circumstances before enrolling us on the register, and their visitors can adequately sum up the type of folks with whom they deal. Surely it should not be impossible, therefore, for people who have some regard for the decencies of life to be granted the privilege of living beside one another, and not, as so often

happens, be thrust among persons of vastly different manners and tastes.' The letter quoted in the text was in reply to this, dated 23 July 1931. There were numerous other examples of this kind of snobbery in the spate of correspondence which followed.

59. York City Council, Minutes of the Housing Committee, 16 September 1930.
60. Rationale for numbers is given in Chapter 2 where my sample is discussed in more detail.
61. Bournville Village Trust, When We Build Again p.54.
62. Rowntree B. S. Poverty and Progress p.229.
63. Ibid. p.229.
64. Burnett J. A Social History of Housing p.253.
65. Ibid. p.253
66. Mortgage instalments/Rent in Birmingham and York

Birmingham Outer Ring	4/5 roomed house	12-19s
		p.w.
York	costing	16s.11d
		(mortgage)
	between £400 and	15s. 0d.
		(rented)
	£700	
67. Bournville Village Trust When We Build Again p.38.
68. By 1936 65% of homes were wired for electricity; P.E.P. Report on the supply of electricity to Great Britain: a survey of present day problems of the industry with proposals for re-organisation of electricity distribution London, 1936, p.77.
69. Interview Mrs. Pearce.
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72. Interview Mrs. Matthews.
73. Interview Mrs. Pearce.
74. Interview Mrs. Jones.



Birmingham's Outer Ring

Allen's Cross Estate at Northfield is typical of the earlier large municipal estates. There is little variation in design, but the layout provides variety and retains many of the natural features. It contains over 2,000 houses let at weekly rentals of 10s., 11s. 2d. and 16s. 6d., and is about six miles from the centre of the city, which can be reached in about three-quarters of an hour by bus to the Bristol Road and thence by tram. (10) Shows a typical road; and (11) an approach to the shopping centre.



CHAPTER 7

HOUSEWORK AND RESOURCES

Housework and managing the family's resources remained the priority task of working-class women despite greater affluence and more comfortable, better-designed housing. Childcare, although important, had not yet become the most important aspect of work in the home and, a point which I shall take up later, there appear to have been few conflicts between the needs of children and mothers' standards of cleanliness. (1)

These standards were exceptionally high and involved a continuous round of arduous tasks to maintain the external show expected of a 'respectable' housewife. Freedom from the soot and dirt of central areas, piped hot water and newly built houses do not appear to have lessened the amount of time spent on household tasks. Indeed the evidence suggests that women, rather than using time saved by labour-saving amenities for outside work, leisure activities or other ventures, increased or expanded domestic tasks to fill the time. (2)

Electricity was an undoubted boon, providing as it did twenty-four hour lighting and the possibility of an easier means of heating in the form of electric fires. Caroline Davidson has suggested that electric lighting made new routines possible, for example the main meal of the day could now be cooked and eaten in the evening rather than at midday, and sewing, knitting, and even housework could be done in the evenings. (3)

However, from respondents' accounts of childhood it would seem that such tasks had always been undertaken in the evening if necessary, particularly where women worked. Electric lighting must have made such work easier although Davidson notes that standards of lighting even after the introduction of electricity remained low. Bulbs of 75 watt or less were used in nearly all sculleries and one-third of sculleries used 25 watt bulbs so that demanding and arduous work could be made harder by being done at times in semi-darkness.(4) Working-class women acquired few of the new household appliances targeted at the housewife in the 30s. There were two reasons for this; prohibitive cost which made the purchase of such appliances only possible by hire purchase or credit, a means of purchase which was still considered 'unrespectable', and a reluctance to recognise the potential benefits of electricity. None of the women interviewed had an electric fire before the Second World War, preferring the coal fire or range which had throughout childhood been the symbol of home,

I can remember at Christmas we used to sit round the fire - there were six of us with father and mother - and we used to take it in turns to read a chapter of Charles Dickens, Christmas Carol. You see there was no television, no radio or anything and in between times I would sit at the end of the fireplace painting and drawing.(5)

Many women owned an electric iron but few owned large appliances. Only one woman acquired a washing machine before 1939,

I had acquired a Hoover, the first Hoover washing machine that came out, it was one that you turned a little wringer with rubber rollers, we thought it was marvellous, it *agitated*. I had that, that was the first one I had.(6)

but no one had a fridge.

The management of the family's resources, both material and other, had for long been the responsibility of the working-class wife. (7) The move to improved housing did not change this; women continued to manage the family budget and to supplement the husband's income with part-time or work from home where and when necessary. Shopping, cooking, sewing and knitting were as much about eking out the family's resources as about putting on an external show for neighbourly judgement -indeed the two were closely associated. Careful management of available resources was an undeniable sign of 'respectability' and decline into a less affluent position was frequently seen as the woman's fault. Mrs. Porter spoke condemningly of her mother whose profligacy she blamed for the family's problems after her stepfather left,

Well, she wasted her money, I'm afraid. She was a good time person. So she ended up with practically nothing, didn't she...She was a good cook when she wanted to be. (8)

What emerges from the oral evidence is a continuing pattern of housework and resource management passed down from one generation to another nearly always through the mother/daughter relationship: a pattern which was class-specific, and adapted, rather than rejected, when the women moved to a 'better' area or more adequate housing. Only one of the women interviewed adopted the more middle-class pattern

of housekeeping money when she married; she was amongst the youngest of the respondents and did not marry until 1941.

He [husband] used to rule the roost where money was concerned he used to look after all the money and my mother used to do it in my family and she could never understand why my husband did it. But I said "No" so I used to leave it with my husband and he used to give me ample, too much really for the groceries alone and then he used to pay every other bill himself. (9)

This woman's reasons for changing the pattern seem to have been based on a reluctance to shoulder the heavy responsibilities that went with managing the family budget - ' you see I was a different nature to her [mother] and I was the type that I knew that if I had money in my hand it would go'. (10)

Cleaning and Washing

It might be supposed that better-designed housing, a cleaner environment, piped hot water and electricity would have lessened the burden of cleaning and washing. This does not appear to have been the case; all the women I interviewed recalled spending considerable amounts of time and energy on household tasks such as cleaning and washing and Roberts concluded that this was the case for the women she interviewed in Lancashire,

It is difficult to trace in the oral evidence any expansion of their horizons as a result of the lessening of their workload between the wars...There was a noticeable increase in the time devoted to knitting, embroidery, crotcheting and sewing. (11)

and whilst I agree, I would go further and say that there was also a considerable increase in the amount of time spent on cosmetic rather than functional cleaning tasks amongst the women I interviewed. By which I mean that washing windows, polishing furniture, cleaning floors and scrubbing external sills and paths were done more often than was necessary for just cleanliness and removal of dirt. Out of fourteen women who filled in a questionnaire on housework, thirteen dusted their furniture everyday, eleven polished their furniture once a week and eight washed kitchen and bathroom floors everyday (of the six who did not, one washed floors twice a week and four once a week). Cleaning was very important to all the women I interviewed; it was felt to be the most rigorous criterion of a 'good housewife' probably because it was the most visible of a woman's tasks and because it was easily measurable by accepted standards, particularly when it involved the outside of the house as window cleaning and step whitening did. Baking, home cooking and washing were also of course closely associated with the role of 'good housewife' but were less on show than the fabric of the house which could determine a woman's status by as little as the condition of her windows,

Window curtaining with us had high significance; the full drape, if possible in lace, being a necessity for any family with pretensions to class. No one scorned the clean modest half curtain, but a newspaper across the panes showed all too clearly that still another household had been forced to hoist the grey flag of poverty. (12)

None of this was of course new: the previous generation of working-class women - my respondents' mothers - had struggled to maintain a high standard of outward show in the older communities of terraced housing. Indeed the continuity of tasks expected of a 'good housewife' is well-illustrated by Roberts' description which, although concerned with a different locality and older housing, almost exactly matches many of the descriptions of housework given by my respondents.

The woman's first preoccupation tended to be with outward show - windows shone, framed by immaculate starched white curtains; front doorsteps were unblemished with human footprints...The interiors gleamed and sparkled in the fire and gas light. (13)

Mrs. Matthews described the hard work involved in the weekly routine of dusting, scrubbing and polishing. Her account is typical of the workload undertaken by respondents and for this reason it is quoted in full.

Just red [quarry] tiles in the kitchen and hall...
I used to get down and scrub them.

The other floors would be all wood, would they?

Oh, yes they were all wood, stained with Darklene, horrid stuff that chipped off, but you would go round and polish it...on your hands and knees, you would go round and do it.

And would you polish all the furniture as well?

Yes, just with tins of polish, no spray.

And the same for the floors in the bedrooms?

Yes. You had plenty to do...The bedroom, I had only got rugs at the side of the bed and every day you had to do the bedroom floors, and the dust that gets under a bed in one day, believe me. It's off blankets I suppose, I don't know. I would take the mop up and go all under the beds because we had only got mats, you could not buy carpets...we didn't have a sweeper, just a dustpan and brush. It makes a lot of mess, you have got to wait for

the dust to settle. You could not just do a room and dust and besides in those days you religiously went round the picture rail every time.

Every time? Every week?

At least once a week. I didn't have regular days but if I was doing the room I swept the walls, all round picture rails. (14)

In older housing constant vigilance was required to combat the dirt that quickly gathered with overcrowding and a sooty environment. Yet these functional standards were carried on into the new housing of the suburban estates where cleaner air and more space perhaps made them less necessary. Mrs. Hutchings described the Thursday routine in the cul-de-sac of private housing where she lived,

Thursday was the day I abhorred absolutely. That was the day you did outside and you cleaned your windows every week outside, downstairs for me - a lot of them cleaned them up but I never was clever or brave enough to clean them upstairs - and we swilled every Thursday all round our houses and out into the street, scrubbing all the paths. (15)

Cleaning the upstairs windows outside could be a hazardous enterprise as Mrs. Hutchings suggests. Mrs. Dickens recounted how it was done,

They used to sit outside you know, upstairs, they used to pull the window down and push it up and get through and sit outside on the window sill (16)

Mrs. Dickens recalled the same pride in external appearance amongst the council tenants on Tang Hall.

...everybody took a pride in their gardens and their windows, everybody took a pride in their houses. They were so pleased to get a better house. (17)

and she went on to tell me how when she was first married she 'used to do the step and window sills every day' just like her mother had done. (18) Casual neighbourly visiting was frowned upon on both council and private developments and as a result the external appearance of the house became of increasing importance as a measure of 'good housewifery'. It was the outward and visible sign that standards were being maintained and many women complained to me how these standards had fallen in recent years on their estates - gardens and external cleanliness were felt to be neglected and this they perceived as 'lowering the tone' of the neighbourhood.

However, it does need to be remembered that despite the cleaner environment of the new estates a considerable amount of dirt and smoke remained. The continuing dependence on coal fires and the lack of clean air zones meant that dust and dirt were ever-present.

A great deal of housework could be attributed to coal fires both inside and out from the smoke from surrounding property. Clean air zones have made a tremendous difference. (19)

Respondents may have answered the call to 'respectability' through, what might seem to us, excessive cleanliness but the dirt and germs they were fighting were real enough and many had early memories of sibling deaths and infectious diseases. Bedbug infestation was another major problem faced by those in older housing, a problem which self-respecting women were

often unwilling to admit to but which was widespread not only in slum housing but also in older terraced housing.

Although I have no evidence that bedbugs were a problem for the women interviewed, I would imagine that many women, starting married life, remembered their mothers' battles with pests and insects, and the minutes of York Housing Committee record a number of instances of council houses being fumigated as a result of fleas and vermin. (20) The following quote from a woman in central Lancaster illustrates the tenacity of these pests,

There were bugs on Bulk [in the area], every house nearly had bugs in. My mother tried her best...my mother spoiled beds without end, because she used to take them down and get them down and get these bugs out. They got into the woodwork. (21)

and the housing visitors' reports of slum housing in York in the thirties reveal that the majority of houses visited were verminous - in some cases live bugs were seen on the walls and furniture. (22) In the event it was the advent of DDT and insecticides after the Second World War which finally rid homes of bedbugs and other pests but in the twenties and thirties it was still believed that constant scrubbing and scouring was the best preventative. (23) A cleaner, pleasanter environment gave women the opportunity to exercise their housewifely skills to the full and allowed them to be seen to be successfully combatting the family disease, ill-health and pest infestations which had plagued their mothers.

Washing was the other major household task and before the advent of washing machines involved early rising to ensure the necessary supply of hot water and strenuous physical effort lifting the clothes in and out of the heavy copper, pummelling them with the posser and heaving them through the mangle. Mass Observation surveyed the washing habits of a sample of sixty families in Bolton with incomes of up to £7 per week. These interviews suggest that whiteness conflated with cleanliness and removal of germs was the aim of most women's washing methods. (24) The following description taken from the report reveals the arduous and lengthy process involved in the weekly family wash,

[She] puts her whites in the tub, covers with water then puts Rinso [soap powder] on, then posses them. Meanwhile the coal boiler is getting ready. In this she puts Acdo tablets and shredded olive oil soap. While the water is getting hot the clothes in the tub are soaking, she starts scrubbing and rubbing them; then boils for 20 minutes - just depends how dirty they are. When they are out, uses up the water for the coloured things (sic). (25)

The whole exercise could of course take a lot longer if there was bedding or curtains to be washed. Many respondents washed curtains very regularly and white nets, in particular, needed washing frequently. There was also the whole business of blueing and starching to be done and all my respondents used blue to whiten the wash and starch to finish off cotton articles and sheets. Blueing required rinsing in water containing a dolly bag and starching was done by rinsing washed clothes in a solution of cold water and starch. All

this meant a vast amount of lifting and manoeuvring of wet and heavy material; as Mrs. Matthews said 'sheets, you would have to squeeze them out before you could put them through the mangle'. (26) Mrs. Hutchings' description of washing day is typical of the accounts given.

Monday was washing day and that was getting up a little bit earlier, filling the copper, lighting it and all the rest of it, and I had a mangle, the old wooden mangle which came down as a table, a nice kitchen table, and we did all the boiling, and blueing and starching and then got it dry best we could and then there was the ironing to do, so it was often evening by you were ironing, particularly in the winter months and that was the day you really gave your kitchen a good do as well. (27)

Gas coppers and solid fuel hot water systems undoubtedly alleviated some of the drudgery of washday but much remained. The loss of communal wash houses which had characterised much of the housing of central urban areas and the removal of the task to the privacy of the home meant a loss of contact with other women, although the provision of gardens made drying easier and informal contact possible whilst hanging out the wash. The majority of my respondents washed on a Monday and recalled talking to neighbours over the garden fence. A line full of white washing was yet another sign of 'good housewifery' and extended boiling and blueing was the accepted way to achieve this. Despite the claims of the newly developed washing powders such as Persil that soaking and a two minute boil would ensure adequate whiteness, women preferred to stick to their established ways, learned from their mothers - 'one

must not wash as they advise on the packing of Persil, you must do it in your own way'. (28)

Monday was the generally favoured day for washing: women who came from back-to-back and terraced housing in central areas remember Monday being preferred because it was the one day the coalmen did not go through the streets and the washing was therefore likely to remain freer of soot and smuts. Another reason given was the rest from cooking on Mondays as the remains of Sunday's meat could be eaten cold thus allowing the whole day needed for washing. My respondents appear to have continued to wash on Mondays as much from a sense of tradition as for practical reasons but it is noticeable that those who worked part-time tended to be more flexible. Mrs. Arthurs washed on her free day and Mrs. Wilkes fitted it in when she could.

Ironing was another lengthy chore. Respondents recalled that everything was ironed partly for aesthetic reasons but as much to help dry and air the clothes. One of Mass Observation's interviewees believed that ironing helped to kill germs and this may have been another reason for ironing. (29) Of the fourteen respondents who completed the housework questionnaire, eight had an electric iron and six continued to use flat irons heated on the fire or a gas ring. However, possession of an electric iron does not appear to have cut down the time spent on ironing. Twelve women estimated that

they spent half a day on ironing and only two said it took them less than two hours (both these had electric irons). Electric irons appear to have been one of the few electric household appliances possessed by respondents and although they may not have saved time they must certainly have saved physical energy.

Washing and cleaning, along with cooking and baking, were the daily tasks of all respondents whether they worked outside the home or not. Many had a weekly routine for getting through these tasks in an efficient and orderly way.

So you would turn out each room once a week?

That's right. Bedroom day. Certain days for certain jobs. Monday of course was washing day, Tuesday was bedroom day, Wednesday was bathroom and staircase. Thursday probably shopping, Friday, baking. (30)

Monday was washing day...Tuesday was bathroom day... Wednesday we did downstairs, cleaning and doing the windows as well inside...Thursday...was the day you did outside... and then Fridays was baking. (31)

I used to wash on a Monday - I can't remember what I used to do on a Tuesday - Wednesday I did the bedrooms, Thursday I baked, Friday I cleaned through and Saturday I did nothing but shopping. (32)

Mrs. Walker remembers that her mother had a similar weekly routine and believed that she followed her mother's pattern,

Well I can remember my mother with six of us, she would wash on a Tuesday, Monday was her day when she went to the Mother's Union...so she washed on Tuesday and she ironed the following morning.

Did you do the same, did you have a special day when you washed?

Yes I'm afraid I did, I had a day for everything. (33)

Thus, despite better housing conditions, smaller families and the increased availability of labour-saving devices, the women interviewed continued to take on a heavy burden of domestic work, maintaining the family's 'respectable' status through an external show of sparkling homes and well-laundered clothes which in turn demonstrated stability and freedom from the ill-health which dogged so many poorer families of the period. (34) Much of this show, however, depended upon the level of income available to the family and the way in which it was managed and augmented.

Family Income

Although the husband's wage was the major source of income for working-class families a number of variables could determine how affluent a family might be in real terms. Piecework rates, short-time working and unemployment could all affect the level of a family's income. The number of dependent children and the number bringing home a wage were also powerful factors in determining a family's level of income. (35) The average working-class wage after the First World War was estimated at about £2 which was below the poverty line arrived at by Rowntree but above that of Bowley and Hogg. (36) As discussed above respondents were married to men in secure long-term employment with an average to above

average weekly income. Indeed, some, by the standards of the day, were relatively affluent: Mrs. Hutchings' husband worked as a wage-earning grocer in her father's shop, and Mr. Pearce was also a small shopkeeper. Mr. Matthews was a local authority weights and measures inspector and Mr. Butcher was a caretaker/maintenance man at a local authority Children's Home.

Most of the women, then, were managing regular and above-average earnings. Nevertheless, eight of the women were involved in some form of fairly regular part-time paid work and another three undertook casual, seasonal or home work at some time. Neither is there necessarily any correlation between this and lower husbands' wages. Mrs. Matthews worked every Friday morning in her father's shop as a cashier for 2s.6d. in order to pay for the gas cooker they'd bought on credit. It was 2s.7½d. a week and this left her 1½d. to find. Mrs. Pearce took in boarders in her three bedroomed semi and Mrs. Jones' mother ran a small confectionery shop from the front room of hers. Mrs. Arthurs did cleaning all her married life, taking her small daughter with her: she did it in order to help pay the rent on their parlour-type council house. (Her husband earned 42s.6d. and the rent was 14s.9d.)

Opportunities for married women's work were limited in both York and Birmingham: Rowntrees and Cadburys, the major employers of women in the areas inhabited by my respondents

were reluctant to employ married women except as seasonal workers at Christmas and Easter. (37)

...they didn't have any married women. Only twice a year That was just before Easter for the rush and just before Christmas. They'd employ married women if you'd worked there before...temporary if you wanted to go. (38)

The Austin Motor Company at Longbridge in Birmingham might have been expected to employ large numbers of women workers - however the numbers were fairly small and most of these were single women. (39) Much of the paid work available in both areas was part-time and casual as the above examples illustrate, and continued the pattern of respondents' mothers. Paid work was undertaken in the main to augment the husband's wage and/or to pay for things in the home. (40) The majority of respondents recalled that it was unusual for married women to undertake full-time paid work but recognised the network of hidden work that supplemented official income.

I think the main occupation was washing and cleaning for other people as I remember. Going out for odd hours and afternoons when the children were at school... (41)

It is difficult always to be sure from women's accounts when exactly they were engaged in paid work. The war and the post war expansion of part-time opportunities meant that many respondents engaged in part-time work after the period of this study. Careful questioning often elicited that women who said they had worked when the children were small had in fact not done so until the later war years or after. Nevertheless cleaning, taking in washing, small shopkeeping and seasonal

factory work were the main ways in which these women augmented the family income before the Second World War. They were, of course, the generation who benefited most from the expansion of part-time work after the war and the majority worked part-time in shops and factories in the nineteen fifties. Their work experiences illustrate perfectly the fluidity and discontinuity of women's paid employment and goes some way to explaining the lack of significance it held for most of them in contrast to their role as housewife which was continuous and enduring. Paid work for these women was not hedged around with moral imperatives - for them women did not work after marriage unless they had to for financial reasons. There was enough work to do in the home without taking on the double burden of housework and paid work. If, as in Mrs. Arthurs' case, extra money was needed, part-time or some form of hidden work was found to supplement the family's resources. Work for most of them was not in itself intrinsically interesting or fulfilling, it was a means to an end and they were happy to move in and out as need dictated. I found only one case of husbandly opposition to a wife working: Mr. Brown was unhappy with his wife working seasonally at Rowntrees because he disliked minding the children in her absence. All this suggests that whilst the husband's ability to provide a family wage was important as evidence of the family's 'respectability', secondary earnings by the wife were for the most part acceptable and at times welcomed as long as such

work did not conflict with her domestic role which was the significant one for both her and her husband.

However, family income even for these families was subject to careful management and the eking out of resources by a variety of means. All the women interviewed were responsible for family budgeting with the husband handing over the large part of his wage packet and retaining or receiving a small amount of pocket money.

When you were married can you remember who used to manage the money?

Oh me, by his consent, his words were "you have to spend it, you know better what to do with it than I do". If you was a person that proved unreliable and not worthy of handling money it would be withdrawn, but he trusted me and I was capable and we never had any trouble. (42)

I have always managed it [money] really...I paid the bills, mortgage and those kind of things...I mean even now he [husband] knows where the purse is, he can help himself if he wants it. (43)

Although the women managed every day expenditure themselves, paying the rent or mortgage, buying food and being responsible for the family's clothing, larger financial decisions for example about housing or furniture were generally made jointly. Mr. and Mrs. Arthurs made a joint decision to rent the more expensive parlour-type council house although they would originally have preferred a non-parlour house because it was cheaper. This decision resulted in Mrs. Arthurs working part-time to pay the extra rent; interestingly she appears to have made the decision to work and then informed her husband. She told him, 'we can't live on this...I had to go to get the

money'. (44) Likewise Mr. and Mrs. Butcher decided together, against the advice of relatives, that it would be financially viable to accept the tenancy offered on Allens Cross. As Mrs. Pearce said,

For furniture and anything like that we made joint decisions, shopped together for things, anything for the house. Big things for the house. (45)

However, Mrs. Walker's comments above are significant. Family budgeting could be a privilege granted by the husband and subject to removal if it was not undertaken efficiently. I suspect in reality that this was unlikely but the fact that many women believed this suggests the limited power that household management conferred. Effective management of the family's resources was dependent on the male breadwinner's wages which constituted the major income. Whilst women might *manage* the family's finances, the ultimate *control* of income remained with the husband. It would thus be misleading to see women's role as financial manager as conferring anything other than limited power, they remained financially dependent upon their husbands and, at least in theory, remained answerable to him. (46) Furthermore, financial management was undertaken on the basis of collective family needs rather than specific individual wants. The women's task was to ascertain and attempt to meet the needs of the family as a whole rather than those of any individual within it. Roberts noted this feature of urban working-class life in the older communities of Lancashire and the oral evidence I have suggests that this

collective ethos prevailed alongside the suburbanisation of working-class families in the twenties and thirties. (47) As noted above women who worked did so for the advantage of the whole family rather than for individual fulfilment or material advantage. How then did the women interviewed use the resources available to them to maintain the accepted standards required of the 'respectable' family?

Shopping, food and cooking

One of the most obvious signs of 'respectable' status was to have a well-fed and apparently healthy family. It was particularly important that the husband should be seen to be 'looked after' because upon his health depended his potential for providing a regular income and because keeping him happy would reduce the likelihood of conflict within the home - a belief epitomised in the well-worn cliché, 'the way to a man's heart is through his stomach'. (48)

I've always looked after him. I've always tried my best to look after him. Well, he wouldn't look as well as he is today if I hadn't looked after him, would he? (49)

Despite the relative affluence of these families, making ends meet and careful budgeting was still essential if this aim was to be met. Even with weekly earnings of £5, well above the average earnings of the period, and attained by only perhaps one or two families interviewed, mortgage repayments of 15s to 20s per week, rates and life insurance could mean that the amount left for food needed to be eked out carefully. (50) A

survey conducted by Sir John Boyd Orr in 1934/35 into the nutritional habits of Britain estimated that 20s. per head per week was the minimum required to achieve an adequate diet. (51) For a family of two adults and two children this meant £4 per week was needed for food alone, an amount well above the means of even the most skilled men. Rowntree and Orr were both agreed that even relatively affluent working-class families suffered some deficiencies of diet, notably a lack of protective foods containing essential vitamins, minerals and protein - foods such as eggs, cheese and fruit. (52) However, the oral evidence suggests that the women saw a healthy diet as something quite different both from economic necessity and because of their husband's lifestyles.

All my respondents believed in the efficacy of a filling, 'nourishing' meal to prevent illness and to provide energy: they speak disparagingly of today's eating habits, looking back nostalgically to the days of stew and dumplings and, as their own survival testifies, propounding the virtues of such a diet. Meat, vegetables and plenty of carbohydrates was the 'best' diet for a man whose work required considerable expenditure of physical energy and in this they were probably right!

Actually we seemed to get through more food then, people seemed to have bigger meals...stews and dumplings and a lot of fruit pies and things like that...a pudding every day, steamed pudding. (53)

Also, of course, carbohydrate foods such as bread, potatoes, cakes and pastries were cheaper to provide than eggs, cheese and fruit. A pound of potatoes cost between ½d and 1d., 3lbs of flour cost approximately 4½d., bread about 3d. a loaf and margarine for cooking might cost around 4d. a pound. (54) On the other hand a dozen eggs could cost 1s.6d., cheese might be upwards of 6d a pound (often considerably more) and fruit, despite its availability all year round because of new refrigeration techniques, was relatively expensive. (55) Four oranges might cost 4d. but they did not go as far in quantity or in terms of filling-up as the cakes which could be made with 3lbs of flour. Indeed baking day was one of the most important chores carried out by my respondents. Large quantities of pies, cakes, fruit breads and other pastries were made to last the week. Some women continued to bake their own bread despite the availability of fresh baked bread in the shops and all the women interviewed baked cakes and pastries in preference to buying from a shop, although they might supplement their home-baked supply with bought cakes.

Mr. Gray, he used to come on a motorbike and sidecar with bread and cakes, but my mother used to bake her own bread, but we used to sometimes buy cakes... (56)

and Mrs. Porter's description of her mother's baking day illustrates the hard work which was involved in providing this supply.

When we used to come home...the place smelt of baking bread and occasionally she used to have a big earthenware bowl always a big one, and I always remember her putting the flour in and kneading it and getting it out on the table and kneading it and rising and baking them...And I used to love Fridays because, you know, we always used to

have hot crusty bread when we got home. And she used to make meat pies and fruit pies and cakes. I should imagine she must have baked all day. She used to bake everything and I think I follow her because I very, very seldom buy cake. I do buy bread now but I used to make my own. (57)

and

Yes, cooking was a big thing. You loved cooking, well I still do, ...and of course you made all your own mincemeat and your own puddings and cakes, you made everything in those days ...you would make fruit loaves and tarts and fruit pies. (58)

Recipes for pies and cakes were collected from magazines like Woman's Weekly and Home Chat: Mrs. Pearce kept an attache case full of such recipes and like Mrs. Walker would swap favourites with friends and neighbours. Mrs. Hutchings, on the other hand, felt that baking 'constituted a challenge, your pastries and cakes must be lighter than those of your neighbours and favourite recipes were jealously guarded secrets' (59). A plentiful supply of home-baked cakes, pastries and bread was undoubtedly seen as a sign of a 'good' housewife - being seen to be a good cook was as important as maintaining cleanliness.

Again there was nothing new in this Mothers and grandmothers had eked out meagre resources by ingenious cooking methods; what does appear to be new is the emphasis on baking to provide 'filler' foods and it may well be this that Mrs. Jones had in mind when she articulated the differences between her mother's and her grandmother's cooking,

She was a marvellous cook, my grandmother was and she could make things out of anything. She was an old-fashioned cook, a brisket-type and they used to like lites and liver and they used to make really good meals out of things like that. My mother was a good cook as well but I think it was because you got into a more modern stage... You had different things, you had a different type of meal. When we used to go to my grandmother's she'd always got a big saucepan with all sorts of things going on it and it was very tasty. And she used to get herbs and things like that... [Mother] used to cook basic things. She used to get a joint and the vegetables. She used to do a lot of sweets, she used to do a lot of cakes. Very good pastry-maker and she used to do some very nice cakes. (60)

Meat (chops or a joint on Sundays) vegetables, potatoes and gravy seems to have been the standard hot meal, although some women like Mrs. Walker continued to make the kind of stews described above,

We used, in those days you could get rabbits, and we were very fond of rabbits, we used to stuff two and roast them, they were lovely, and sometimes you used ... to get a sheep's head, 6d... soak it in salt and water overnight and wash it and trim it and then put it in a big pan with plenty of vegetables, everything you could think of and well, it used to be lovely and I often used to put half a cowheel in for extra nourishment. (61)

The twenties and thirties saw a massive expansion in the availability of convenience foods. Tinned vegetables and fruit, tinned corned beef and salmon, jellies, custard and blancmange powders, quick porridge oats and powdered hot drinks such as Ovaltine and Horlicks were all hotly promoted by advertisers eager to exploit the potential consumer power of the lower middle and upper working-class housewife with, at least in theory, more housekeeping money than her predecessor. (62) The women interviewed appear to have

resisted these blandishments. Although tinned and convenience foods were bought occasionally, most women firmly believed that buying tinned food was a sign of laziness when fresh produce was readily available from the garden, the greengrocer or the butcher. It was also of course, as many recognised, more expensive and few could afford to use such foods regularly; tinned salmon or corned beef might be bought for a special tea as might tinned fruit but for the most part women continued to produce economical, nourishing and filling meals by using potatoes, cheap cuts of meat, vegetables and gravy. After all a home-made meat pie with plenty of potatoes and vegetables would serve a far greater number of people with larger portions than a tin of salmon, corned beef or baked beans.

There was nothing ready-made. I can remember the first tinned stuff coming in and it was tinned peas. Before that there was no tinned stuff of any kind and you did fresh vegetables every day...[got] from the ...greengrocers...so you wouldn't use tinned peas. (63)

and

There would have been some tinned vegetables about then?

Oh there was yes. I think she [mother] used to sell them [in the shop she ran]. But we always had them either from my grandfather who grew them or she used to buy them or my father used to grow them. We *always* had fresh vegetables and all the meat was fresh of course. (64)

Out of the fourteen women who completed a questionnaire eight grew their own vegetables and seven of these also did all their own baking. The acquisition of a garden was a valuable asset and although vegetable growing was generally seen as the

husband's province (whilst wives tended flower beds) gardening was a shared interest which helped the family and enhanced the external appearance of the home. For Mr. Arthurs, who, according to his wife, never went to the pub, his garden was (and is) his pride and joy. When younger he belonged to an Allotment Club and grew all the family's vegetables. Mrs. Jones remembers her future father-in-law's involvement with his garden,

He used to have his dinner and then he'd go into the garden - he'd grow a tremendous amount of stuff in his garden. He used to keep the family with the stuff he grew in his garden and he'd got a greenhouse and he grew all tomatoes. (65)

and Mrs. Dickens recalls the fertility of the soil at Tang Hall,

We grew some good stuff - it was virgin land you see... lots of potatoes with there being a lot of us, cabbages, sprouts and ...salad stuff. (66)

All the areas where my respondents lived were fairly well supplied with shops. Allens Cross Farm was only a short walk from the centre of Northfield village, Rubery had its own parade of shops as did Burton Stone Lane. Tang Hall residents in its very early days had to go about a mile to the nearest shops on the Hull Road but local shops were soon established,

The closest shops were on Hull Road...there were little corner shops there, they were the closest...the first shop that went up was Hodgson's the paper shop at the top of Melrosegate...they sold bread as well as papers. (67)

One of the frequent complaints levelled at inter-war housing estates, both council and private, has been the lack of shopping facilities provided. (68) This was mainly because

town planning in the sense of providing amenities was frequently divorced administratively from house building and a time lag would occur between the building of new houses and the provision of shops and other amenities, a time lag which could be exacerbated by economic recession or alternative priorities. (69) However few of my respondents complained about lack of shopping facilities and it is difficult to be certain whether this is the rosy glow of memory or just not true for them. Equally, by the thirties, the period most talked about, local shops had been established. Respondents used a variety of shopping means: Mrs. Arthurs shopped daily at the local shops and once a week 'up the village', Mrs. Pearce, Mrs. Walker, Mrs. Stewart and Mrs. Hutchings recall having their groceries delivered,

Well at that time it was very convenient, I used to write an order out. I used to take it down to the Co-op just over the bridge and it was delivered at 4 o'clock on Friday afternoon. (70)

It has been suggested that lack of local shopping facilities resulted in extra expense and a ready 'catch' for high pressure salesmen eager to inveigle women into barely understood hire purchase agreements. (71) I shall examine the issue of hire purchase below but as regards extra expense it is worth noting that many women purchased on a delivery service from their local Co-op thereby accruing small savings towards larger items of expenditure such as shoes and clothing. In York in 1900 there were twenty-one Co-op

branches and by 1939 this had risen to thirty-nine and the dividend on purchases in 1936 was 1s.6d. in the pound. (72)

This was no mean advantage for women eking out their housekeeping money and, added to the convenience of having shopping delivered, was an undoubtedly rational and effective way of shopping. The impression given by some of the accounts cited above is that working-class women were easily duped or forced by circumstances into paying over the top for goods and services. This is certainly not the sense I get from women's own accounts. Canny and shrewd where money was concerned they would shop around, haggle with the shopkeeper or refuse bad quality goods.

She [mother] stood no nonsense off anyone...she'd go up to a shop and she'd say "I want a pound of tomatoes" and as soon as they gave them to her she'd open the bag and look at every one and she'd take one out and say "I'm not having that one! You can give me another one for that it isn't any good"...She used to go round to different butchers and try them and she'd come across one that she thought was good. I mean she used to look in the window and she could tell what was inside. (73)

Roundsmen were common and almost anything could be got from the daily or weekly carts,

We did do our shopping. But that was an entirely different way of life you see, the grocer delivered, the butcher delivered, the milkman delivered, he came twice a day did the milkman...we had a jug and he doled out half a pint, a pint whatever you needed ...and a man came round with bread and cakes ...and we had the greengrocer came with a lorry cart twice a week and the fish man used to come round infrequently but he did come. (74)

and Mrs. Dickens even remembers that 'a lad used to come round for shoe repairs' (75) Whether or not women paid over the top

for such services is difficult to ascertain; I suspect not, given their generally shrewd attitude to money and determination to practice thrift in so many areas where they could make ends meet. A number of women mention patronising the city centre food markets where, late on a Saturday, meat would be sold off and a good joint for Sunday could be obtained cheaply. Mrs. Pearce frequented the fish market in Scarborough for the same reason. There is no concrete evidence that women paid more than they needed for food and plenty, as I have shown, which suggests a vigilant and canny eye for good value. This is equally evident in their management of resources to provide clothing and other items for the family.

Clothing

Clothes for children and adults were not cheap in the twenties and thirties. Mass production of cheap, plentiful clothes was still in its infancy and although chainstores like Marks and Spencer and C & A sold a range of adult clothing prices were frequently beyond the reach of those interviewed. A ladies coat or suit might cost between 29s.11d and 89s.11d and a man's suit from Lewis's could cost 59s.6d. (76) Mrs. Dickens recalled buying a dress from Marks and Spencer for 4s.11d which was relatively cheap but such an item was seen as a luxury for thrifty housewives. A cheap man's suit could cost 50s. from the '50s. tailor' and a boy's suit (children at this time generally wore scaled down versions of adults'

clothes) cost 12s.6d in 1924. (77) Ready-made clothes then were rarely bought and when purchased lasted a long time and most women sewed and knitted for their children. Children wore hand-downs from brothers and sisters or clothes made from other garments. Mrs. Walters' mother acquired cast-offs from the children her sister was nanny to,

I used to get their cast-offs sometimes and my mum used to unpick everything and then just make it up again. (78)

Even Mrs. Matthews, the most affluent of my respondents, knitted and made clothes over for the whole family. She recalled the use she made of a mass of red and grey wool she acquired,

In the end, we ended up with red and grey stripes...we both had red and grey, well, all three of us - jumpers...and I used to make myself waistcoats...I used to join the wool and then it got to more stripes...the times you unpicked and did things up again! (79)

Mrs. Pearce knitted socks as well as jumpers for her two boys and Mrs. Walker knitted jumpers, socks, jackets and even swimming trunks for her children.

All the women questioned said that they enjoyed sewing and knitting; it was something they did for relaxation in the evenings or occasionally in the afternoon. Yet it was also recognised as essential for making ends meet,

It was a necessity, my dear. I mean I'd got to have the things and it was so much cheaper to buy wool and different things. It was a necessity. (80)

Sewing machines were common and enabled women who had previously been dressmakers as well as those with some sewing skill to make many of the family's clothes,

My mother was apprenticed to dressmaking and she used to make all my clothes...She was marvellous at doing things with her hands though with dressmaking. (81)

More than any other article of clothing shoes marked the 'respectable' from the poor and many respondents remember children who could not attend school because they had no shoes. (82) Shoes were an expensive item which would be passed down from one child to the next and constantly repaired. Mr. Arthurs showed me the shoe last on which he used to repair the family's shoes with a piece of leather obtained for 6d. Thrifty housewives who had accrued some savings with their Co-op dividend used this money to buy the children's shoes. A well-clothed family like a well-fed family was an undeniable sign of a 'good' housewife and mother. As Mrs. Dickens said

She was a right good mother...we never wanted for any food and clothes, we used to always be clean and tidy.

Maintaining these standards was not always easy particularly for those on lower incomes. Nevertheless the strategies discussed above applied to all the women interviewed - making do, making something out of nothing and watching the pennies was as much a way of life for the more affluent like Mrs. Matthews and Mrs. Hutchings, as for the poorer Mrs. Wilkes or Mrs. Walters. Differences in consumption were those of degree and the cost of maintaining one's own house could leave little residual income for the luxuries of chain store clothes. The following description by Mrs. Matthews illustrates this point well.

We used to have things like bottles of sauce, and things like that which we never had on our own. We kept them in the house and they came out when friends came, bottles of Daddies sauce or something like that - only when visitors came. We had to be ever so careful because we were paying for this house, all the house. (84)

Credit and Hire Purchase

'Respectable' values condemned borrowing or owing money, believing in the maxim of being able 'to pay your way'.

Although it is difficult to ascertain how much credit or hire purchase was taken up by my respondents due to a certain reluctance to discuss this, there is some evidence that hire purchase or buying on credit from mail order clubs was becoming a more accepted, if not comfortable, practice. Advertisers, anxious to sell the growing variety of household appliances, offered tempting deals in the columns of women's magazines. The Eureka vacuum cleaner could be purchased for £1 down 'with the balance in easy payments' (85) and by 1939 it was possible to buy a Hoover vacuum for just 10s. down (86) However, few of my respondents were able to avail themselves of these offers: Mrs. Matthews bought a gas cooker on hire purchase but was not comfortable doing so,

...we had a gas stove, that was the only thing we couldn't pay for, 2s.7½d. a week...It was awful going in to debt. I could have got a cheaper gas stove but I looked all round and this was the one that I liked best and mother always used to say "don't spoil the ship for a haphorth of tar, go without something and wait until you can afford it." (87)

Mrs. Arthurs also used credit to buy furniture for her new home. She joined a mail order club run by a neighbour and was able to buy a bed, dressing table and small chest for so much a week. Throughout her marriage she worked doing part-time

cleaning and, although she maintains this was to help pay the rent on their council house, it must also have been to meet the payments on the furniture she bought. Like Mrs. Butcher she had managed to save some money prior to marriage and this also helped towards the cost of setting up home. In contrast, Mrs. Kitchin had no savings at marriage and was adamant that they never had anything 'on the knock'. Like many respondents furniture was acquired from relatives or other second-hand sources.

For those living in council houses certain amenities and appliances could be paid for on the weekly rent thus making it possible for many families, who could ill afford to buy such things, to possess an electric cooker or tiled fireplace. Residents on Tang Hall were able to change the large range in the living-room for 'an ordinary tiled fireplace with a raised hearth and an all-night fire' by adding the cost to their weekly rent and a number took advantage of this scheme in order to modernise the living room. Council houses in York were also fitted with electric cookers and a tariff of between 1s.3d and 2s.6d. per week exacted for this and for all electricity used. (88) It was also possible to have a shed added to the outside of the house for 6d. a week and again this seems to have been a popular way of improving the house.

However, although these various means of credit and instalment paying for large items were becoming more acceptable, credit or 'the strap' at the local shop was not.

There were some people who used to have what they called the strap. You know they say "we'll pay you on Friday".

Anyway if they went longer than a fortnight she'd [mother] be round there - "Right you owe me some money". [They came from] Eachway cottages, that were council cottages. And the people that lived in there, you know, I suppose they were used to that sort of thing. They just used to come and buy things and pay for it when they got the money. ...But she wouldn't let them do it for long and if they continued with it she'd say "right, don't come in my shop again" and she'd have a row with them. (89)

None of those interviewed spoke of buying food or goods on credit from local shopkeepers and whilst this may be due to a reluctance to admit to using credit, I suspect that it was unknown amongst this group who for the most part abided by the social mores that condemned 'buying on the knock' and deplored today's acceptance of ready credit. Equally missing from accounts is any mention of the pawnshop, the last resort of impoverished working-class women in central urban areas. (90)

Suburban areas which accommodated those with regular and rising wages, with a commitment to 'respectability', do not appear to have spawned pawnshops in the way the older city areas had, despite the arrival of many poorer families in the later thirties as a result of slum clearance programmes. Pawnshops were relegated to that poverty-stricken past, which so many of these women were attempting to escape from, and new forms of credit took their place.

Conclusions

To what extent then did the daily lives of these women differ from their predecessors and to what extent were continuities maintained? Certainly their living conditions and their incomes were improved. As Pollard says,

...there was in this period an appreciable rise in the standards of comfort and welfare of working-class families, particularly those in which the wage earners were in regular employment. (91)

Both council and private houses offered a marked improvement on older housing which was frequently insanitary, overcrowded and lacking in basic amenities. Gardens, electricity and hot water systems made daily life a more comfortable experience than it had been for these women's mothers and eliminated some of the drudgery from housework and washing. All respondents when asked felt that housework was considerably easier for them than it had been for their mothers.

Yet, as I have shown, housework continued to be arduous and time-consuming - coal was still used in the majority of homes and required much heavy carrying, washing was a lengthy and physically draining process and the amount of scrubbing, cleaning and polishing may well have increased rather than decreased. The greatest single improvement for these women must have been the smaller family; with less children to feed, clothe and wash the burden of daily chores was undoubtedly alleviated, it was easier to fit in part-time work when necessary and women's general health, spared from endless pregnancies, gave them greater energy to fulfil the obligations of a 'good' housewife. They were now even able to enjoy their role and most respondents reported that they had enjoyed housework, particularly cleaning. Nevertheless the evidence does suggest that beneath the apparently harmonious exterior presented by most respondents, lay the seeds of potential conflict. Mrs. Hutchings 'abhorred' external

cleaning and she, as many others, speaks of her household duties as obligations imposed upon her from without. (92) In interview respondents frequently prefixed accounts of housework with 'You had to' or 'We used to' suggesting a collective ethos about standards which required absolute adherence to. Mrs. Matthews was apologetic about her housekeeping, feeling that in some way she failed to measure up because she was 'slow',

Well, I was so slow...it used to take me all the day...and when you are first married everything has to be dusted and be just so...I was terribly slow and I dawdled...I just dawdled away. (93) (my italics)

Women learned how to keep house from their mothers and continuity existed in patterns of housewifery passed down from mother to daughter. (94) Mrs. Walker established a weekly routine for housework in part because her mother had had one, Mrs. Dickens carried on her mother's tradition of baking, 'you follow on a bit don't you' (95) and Mrs. Jones in her turn sewed a lot because,

she[mother] had a sewing machine and she used to do all the sewing for me. And of course you just automatically took on what your parents did, you followed suit, I think. So I bought a sewing machine. (96)

For many life was now lived above subsistence level and there was extra money to purchase magazines, to enter into hire purchase agreements and for a few to spend a short holiday by the sea each year, 'from meeting my husband there was never a year we didn't have a holiday'. (97)

and

We were never affluent, we never had a lot...but we used to have good holidays, we always had holidays even when the children were little we always had a week's holiday. (98)

A substantial proportion of respondents had a radio by the end of the period, most had electric irons and none reported a husband on long-term strike or unemployed. Yet, all continued to budget tightly and to use many of the strategies adopted by their mothers. 'Tipping up' the husband's wage continued in all households and food resources were carefully utilised to provide an adequate diet for all the family although I have no evidence of women going short on food to provide for their menfolk. Thrifty management of resources was not however merely a legacy from the past, it was necessary if standards of 'respectability' were to be maintained. Those standards changed little over this period - dislike of credit and ideals of self-sufficiency and self-improvement were now very real possibilities for a larger proportion of working-class families than before and it is hardly surprising that self-respecting women devoted so much of their energy to ensuring their maintenance and, as I shall show, reproduction in the next generation.

REFERENCES

1. See also Jamieson L. 'The development of "the modern family": the case of urban Scotland in the early twentieth century' Chapter 5, where she also argues the same point.
2. See Cowan R. S. 'A case study of technological and social change: the washing machine and the working wife' in Hartmann M. and Banner L. W. Class Consciousness Raised Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1974, p 247
Having assumed in accordance with conventional wisdom that the washing machine freed women from an onerous chore, no-one has bothered to ask whether the chore itself may not have been changed profoundly by the machine.
3. Davidson C. A Woman's Work is Never Done: A History of Housework in the British Isles 1650-1950 Chatto & Windus, London, 1982, p.38.
4. Ibid. p.114.
5. Interview Mrs. Walker. Although 65% of homes were wired for electricity, (see note 68 for Chapter 6), coal, coke and anthracite continued to account for 75% of fuels used for domestic consumption. 86% of homes had an electric iron by 1948 but only 2% had a refrigerator and 4% a washing machine. Edwards E. E. Report on Electricity in Working-Class Homes, Electrical Association for Women, London, 1935.
6. Ibid. Mrs. Walker.
7. See Chinn C. They Worked All Their Lives; Roberts, E. A Woman's Place; Roberts R. The Classic Slum; Ross E. 'Labour and Love' in Lewis J. (ed.) Labour and Love.
8. Interview Mrs. Porter.
9. Interview Mrs. Jones.
10. Ibid.
11. Roberts E. p.203; Gittins D. Fair Sex p.42, pp 46-47 and Chapter 5 argues that the inter-war period saw an elaboration of rather than a lessening of domestic tasks.
12. Roberts R. The Classic Slum p.33.
13. Roberts E. A Woman's Place p.135.
14. Interview Mrs. Matthews.
15. Interview Mrs. Hutchings.
16. Interview Mrs. Dickens.
17. Ibid. I found no evidence of step-cleaning in Birmingham although sills and paths were cleaned. I would speculate that step-cleaning was a task peculiar to the north.
18. Interview Mrs. Dickens.
19. Letter received from Mrs. Hutchings, December, 1987.
20. York City Council, Minutes of the Housing Committee, 10 April 1935 reported that four houses on Tang Hall 'were said to be in a verminous condition' and were to be fumigated. Respondents also told me that when families were moved out of slum property to council houses their furniture and bedding was first fumigated by the council.
21. Cited in Roberts E. A Woman's Place p.134.

22. City of York House Inspection Records for Slum Clearance have numerous entries which read 'This house is fairly clean but infested with bugs'. In 1934 one entry from the housing inspector read 'I found one live bug on the wall when inspecting.'
23. Branson N. and Heinemann M. Britain in the Nineteen Thirties p.183.
24. Mass Observation Washing Habits survey 1939. Box 5, File G. Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex.
25. Ibid.
26. Interview Mrs. Matthews.
27. Interview Mrs. Hutchings.
28. Mass Observation Washing Habits survey Box 5, File G.
29. Ibid.
30. Interview Mrs. Pearce.
31. Interview Mrs. Hutchings.
32. Interview Mrs. Walker.
33. Ibid.
34. See for example the accounts in Spring Rice M. Working Class Wives and Pilgrim Trust Men Without Work.
35. Discussions of working-class wage patterns and women's management of income can be found in Roberts E. A Woman's Place pp.135-148.
36. Rowntree B. S. Poverty and Progress pp.28-29; Bowley A.L. and Hogg M.H. Has Poverty Diminished King, London, 1925, p.37; Roberts E. op.cit. p.135 makes the same point. See also chapter 6, note 29 on working-class wage rates.
37. All respondents questioned told me about the seasonal work offered to married women by both Rowntrees and Cadburys. One woman who worked for Rowntrees before her marriage and returned full-time after the Second World War believes that she missed out on her full pension entitlement as a result of this discontinuity of employment. I expected her to feel angry or resentful but despite my questioning she was adamant that 'it was just one of those things, you accepted it'.
38. Interview Mrs. Porter.
39. See Tupling R. E. The Story of Rednal Birmingham Public Libraries, 1983 and Austin Motor Company Longbridge Today, 1938 which cites 200 girls employed in the sewing room and others employed as typists, nurses and in the upholstery cutting-out section, most of whom were single. Mrs. Jones who worked in a laundry does not recall any married women employees although she remembers an unmarried supervisor whose personal life was, to the young female employees, surrounded in mystery.
40. Mrs. Jones' mother seems to have been an exception. She appears to have been an acute business women in her own right owning by her death a number of houses. Her husband was a male nurse at the local psychiatric hospital.
41. Interview Mrs. Walker.
42. Ibid.
43. Interview Mrs. Pearce.
44. Interview Mrs. Arthurs.
45. Interview Mrs. Pearce.

46. See article by Pahl J. 'The allocation of money and the structuring of inequality within marriage' Sociological Review Vol.31 No.2 pp.237-262 for a contemporary analysis of income allocation which makes this distinction.
47. Roberts E. A Woman's Place p.203.
48. This is discussed in relation to a wider time span in Oren L. 'The Welfare of Women in Labouring Families, England 1860-1950' in Banner and Hartmann Clio's Consciousness Raised.
49. Interview Mrs. Arthurs.
50. Rowntree B. S. Poverty and Progresspp.198-202 estimates that between 6 and 20% of income was devoted to life insurance, the largest form of working-class saving. In York in 1935 approximately 37,000 working-class people had accounts with the York County Savings Bank. See also Johnson P. Saving and Spending. The Working-class Economy in Britain 1870-1939 Chapter 7, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1985 for a discussion of working-class saving patterns between the wars.
51. Boyd J. O. Food, Health and Income. A Report on the adequacy of diet in relation to income Macmillan, London 1936; Rowntree B. S. Poverty and Progresspp.172-197.
52. Ibid.
53. Interview Mrs. Pearce.
54. Food prices have been calculated from those given in Rowntree's diets in Poverty and Progresspp.172-197 and those cited in Spring Rice M. Working Class Wives pp.171-174.
55. Branson N. and Heinemann M. Britain in the Nineteen Thirtiespp.203.
56. Interview Mrs. Dickens.
57. Interview Mrs. Porter.
58. Interview Mrs. Pearce.
59. Letter from Mrs. Hutchings. Worthy of note also in this context is the Be-Ro Book of Baking first printed in the inter-war period which contains a range of recipes for pies, cakes and pastries and which I have seen in a number of working-class homes.
60. Interview Mrs. Jones.
61. Interview Mrs. Walker.
62. Branson N. and Heinemann M. Britain in the Nineteen Thirties p.203.
63. Interview Mrs. Pearce.
64. Interview Mrs. Jones.
65. Ibid.
66. Interview Mrs. Dickens.
67. Ibid.
68. See for example Dresser M. 'Housing Policy in Bristol, 1919-30' and Finnigan R. 'Council Housing in Leeds, 1919-39' in Daunton M. J. (ed) Councillors and tenants: local authority housing in English cities, 1919-1939.
69. Ibid. In Birmingham, Estates, Housing, Health, Town Planning and Finance committees were all responsible for different and specific aspects of council estates.
70. Interview Mrs. Walker.
71. See Jeavons R. and Madge J. Housing Estate: a study of Bristol Corporation policy and practice between the wars Bristol,

- 1946, pp. 35-43 and Dresser M. 'Housing Policy in Bristol 1919-30' p.195.
72. Rowntree B. S. Poverty and Progress pp.202-203. For the place of the Co-op in working-class life see Bonner A. British Cooperation Co-operative Union, 1961; Johnson P. Saving and Spending Chapter 5; Roberts E. A Woman's Place p.164 and Roberts R. The Classic Slum p.83.
73. Interview Mrs. Jones.
74. Interview Mrs. Hutchings.
75. Interview Mrs. Dickens.
76. Advertisements in The Birmingham Post, April and May 1935.
77. Advertisement in Good Housekeeping 1924.
78. Interview Mrs. Walters.
79. Interview Mrs. Matthews.
80. Interview Mrs. Butcher.
81. Interview Mrs. Jones.
82. In the Lancashire textile towns clogs were gradually replaced by shoes and became a sign of lower working-class status. See Roberts R. The Classic Slum p.20 and p.204; Roberts E. A Woman's Place p.162.
83. Interview Mrs. Dickens.
84. Interview Mrs. Matthews.
85. Advertisement in Good Housekeeping 1927.
86. Advertisement in Good Housekeeping 1939.
87. Interview Mrs. Matthews.
88. York City Council, Minutes of the Housing Committee, 16 December 1929; Rowntree B. S. Poverty and Progress p.235 and this was also mentioned by respondents living on Tang Hall.
89. Interview Mrs. Jones.
90. Tebbutt M. Making Ends Meet. Pawnbroking and Working-Class Credit Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1983, p.169 concludes 'If the inter-war years saw the steady decline of pawnbroking, they also saw other forms of indebtedness growing in respectability among many people who would never have previously countenanced them.' See also Roberts E. A Woman's Place pp.149-50; Roberts R. The Classic Slum pp.24-26.
91. Pollard S. The Development of the British Economy 1914-1980 p.189.
92. Interview Mrs. Hutchings.
93. Interview Mrs. Matthews.
94. See Chapter 3 and 4 above for a full discussion and references on the teaching of housewifery and mothercraft in schools.
95. Interview Mrs. Dickens.
96. Interview Mrs. Jones.
97. Interview Mrs. Hutchings.
98. Interview Mrs. Walker.

CHAPTER 8

MARRIAGE AND MOTHERHOOD

My own opinion is that people wish to have a small family on account of public opinion which has now hardened into custom. It is customary - and has become so during the last twenty-five years or so - to have two children and no more if you can avoid it. A family of five or six children loses in prestige and, some think, in respectability. (1)

This comment by a Lancashire housewife in 1945 identifies the greatest difference between respondents' lives and those of their mothers. The impact of smaller families on women's daily lives cannot be overestimated. Fewer children meant less housework, fewer mouths to feed, improved health and the possibility of a not-too-distant future freed from the responsibilities of childcare. As the quotation suggests family limitation was closely linked to ideas of 'respectability'. 'Respectable' families had fewer children and aspirations to 'respectable' status could be achieved by smaller families: the causal direction flowed both ways. It is one of the purposes of this chapter to explore women's motives for limiting family size and to suggest the means available to achieve this.

However, family limitation has to be seen in the context of a wider social concern with the needs of children. As we have seen in chapter three successive governments were increasingly anxious about the health and education of the nation's children and laid the task of rearing a healthy, stable citizenry at the feet of mothers. This

manifested itself in unprecedented state intervention in the practices of mothering - health visitors, the Infant Welfare movement and school medical inspectors laid down guidelines as to what constituted 'good' mothering and, through checks and inspections, exhorted working-class mothers to improve their practices. In one way there was nothing new in this.

Working-class mothers had for long been subject to the judgement of the local community and the exhortations of philanthropic visitors. Yet, combined with house building programmes, rising wages for those in work and smaller families, the possibility of achieving ever higher standards was a very real one. 'Respectable' families had fewer children and brought them up 'properly' although not necessarily in line with middle-class ideals.

Childrearing for these women was not, however, about emotional nurture or at least not primarily. Physical care, prevention of disease, and the transmission of 'respectable' values were seen as the most significant aspects of childcare. Although children were important, mothers were not emotionally child-centred in the post-war meaning of the term: desiring the 'best' for their children meant material security in childhood and the potential to achieve this in adulthood. One of the consequences of smaller families was not inevitably greater personal intimacy between family members, and women retained, as their mothers had done, a certain emotional distance from children and husbands. As I shall argue, this reserve could

be one way of limiting families and securing that material stability which was so important. Equally, although frequent contact with mothers and friends was by no means missing, this too was characterised by the same kind of reserve. In the case of neighbourly contacts and friends there were codes of behaviour which mitigated against close involvement and fostered a belief in 'keeping yourself to yourself'. As a result I believe it is useful to approach these women's relationships through their commitment to 'respectability' for this more than anything else shaped their responses to marriage and motherhood.

Family Limitation

The phenomenon identified by the housewife cited above - the smaller size of families - was increasingly true for all strata of society except the very poorest. In the eighteen sixties the average number of children per family had been 6.16, by the nineteen thirties this figure was 2.07. Before nineteen hundred the decline in family size had been most apparent amongst the middle-classes but from the turn of the century onwards and particularly in the twenties and thirties it was clear that the working-classes were also limiting family size. (2) Appendix eight shows dramatically how this related to the women interviewed. The average number of pregnancies for these women's mothers was 4.76 compared with 2.04 for respondents. Equally revealing is the decline in

infant mortality; only one respondent experienced the death of a child whereas a number of women recalled sibling deaths.

At the outbreak of the Second World War the small family of two or, at most, three children had become the norm - a far cry from the eight or nine of many Victorian marriages. Indeed many observers of the time believed that the decline in the birth rate would have serious repercussions for population replacement if it continued at its present rate, and the inter-war years witnessed a spate of reports, articles and essays on the subject. (3) There has been considerable debate as to the cause of smaller families and whilst I do not intend to enter this debate, it is worth noting that all are agreed that some form of artificial or non-artificial birth control was being widely used by the working-classes from the nineteenth hundreds onwards and in particular after the First World War. (4) This is not to suggest that birth control in itself was new; various forms including abortion, primitive appliance methods and a range of herbal and folk remedies had been used for centuries. (5) What was new was the systematic limitation of families by nearly all groups in society and the growth of this as an issue of public interest and concern. Gittins argues against theories of diffusion believing as she says that

when the working classes did alter their patterns of family organisation and family size it was not a result of their copying the middle classes, but rather a result of their changing relations to the socio-economic system. The idea of diffusion does, however, rightly

draw attention to the importance of ideals and values as determinants of behaviour. (6)

The oral evidence I have supports this argument: the women interviewed were concerned to escape the poverty and drudgery that had dogged so many of their mothers and one way of achieving this was to have smaller families. Compulsory education had extended the length of a child's financial dependancy and state intervention, through school meals, free milk and medical inspection, had highlighted the importance of nutrition and environment in rearing a healthy child. Infant welfare clinics, elementary school classes and women's magazines were all intent on propounding the message that a healthy child was the responsibility of the mother.

A healthy, happy family requires good food, clothing, housing and time for recreation for every member of the household - mother and father too. Where income is small this is not all possible. Someone must suffer and it is usually the mother who is overworked, undernourished, worried and sleepless. The burden of producing child after child without adequate food or rest takes a terrible toll of a woman's health. She cannot possibly give proper attention to the children when she is worn out and another is on the way. Wanted children are a joy - the unwanted often suffer physically or become embittered. (7)

Such messages were reinforced by official policies which believed the way to reduce infant mortality was by educating mothers in habits of cleanliness and food provision.

...the reduction in infant mortality is no doubt due to the combined action of various factors but there can be no question that one of the weapons which has been most effective in this campaign is the education of the mother. (8)

Smaller families were not only of advantage to the individuals concerned but also a national duty. Britain's future progress

depended on a healthy race of well-reared citizens; the war had highlighted the effects of large families manifested in nutritional deficiencies and inadequate health when large numbers of army recruits were found to be unfit. As one manual of the period proclaimed 'take care of the babies and the nation will take care of itself'.(9)

The women interviewed then had all been educated for motherhood in this way by the time they married and came to start their own families in the thirties. Yet, I suspect their reasons for choosing to have smaller families centred more on the lessons they had learned from their mothers' constant childbearing and often consequent ill health. The Women's Health Enquiry of the late thirties revealed the extent of pregnancy-associated ill-health and between 1923 and 1936 the rate of maternal mortality actually rose making it second only to tuberculosis as a cause of death amongst married women.(10)

All my respondents had smaller families than their mothers although the extent to which this was deliberately planned varied as the following quotes demonstrate;

Did you ever want, would you have liked, to have had more children. Because your mother had four children or were you happy to have just two?

...I suppose it was selfish really because I know Ted [husband] didn't want a big family, he wanted us to be companions to each other and if you had a big family and all your attention is swallowed up, he would have felt cheated out of what he had looked forward to, companionship. No, we did our best to regulate to what

we thought we could afford and cope with, and it worked to a certain extent. (11)

and

They didn't take the pill, nothing like that when we were...there was nothing like that in those days for anybody.

So what would you do if you didn't want any more children?

Well, you just had to have them didn't you. Keep your fingers crossed, either that or your legs! (12)

Mrs. Walker's account is interesting because it suggests that a closer marital relationship was the reason for limiting family size as well as economics and suggests the way in which privacy and self-sufficiency were linked as 'respectable' values. The more fatalistic but no less 'respectable' Mrs. Wilkes was a Catholic, she worked full-time and brought up two children on her own whilst her husband served overseas with the army. She lived with her mother and brother and was rehoused on the Burton Stone Lane estate in 1934 as part of the slum clearance campaign.

The reasons for limiting families were complex and rarely articulated as succinctly as Mrs. Walker. I would speculate that a variety of influences came into play - economics, an increased focus on rearing healthy children which mitigated against large families, and social norms. As earlier chapters revealed, houses built in this period were designed in the main for the smaller family, the majority having two or three bedrooms and only a few being built with four bedrooms. Large

families were seen as evidence of irresponsibility, lack of planning and restraint and were often associated with 'roughness' and fecklessness. The 'respectable' family was able to 'pay its way' with clean, well-fed and well-clothed children.

I had a friend...and they had eight children and he used to drink, he was terrible. He was a labourer at the railway and they had eight children...and they had a very meagrely way with food... they used to have bread and margarine and put sugar on it for food and they had jam jars to drink out of, they had no cups. (13)

These attitudes were brought sharply into focus with the evacuation of children from urban areas in 1939; horror stories abounded as children from the poorest industrial areas, those most likely to be bombed, poured out of the towns and revealed the norms expected of 'good' mothers.

Against some of the mothers of young children, they were extraordinarily intense and bitter; it was said they were dirty, verminous, idle and extravagant; that they could not hold a needle and did not know the rudiments of cooking and housecraft, and that they had no control over their young children who were...dirty, verminous, guilty of enuresis and soiling both by day and night, ill-clad and ill-shod, that some had never had a change of underwear or any night clothes and had been used to sleep on the floor, that many suffered from scabies, impetigo and other skin diseases, that they would not eat wholesome food but clamoured for fish and chips, sweets and biscuits, that they would not go to bed at reasonable hours, and finally that some of them were destructive and defiant, foul-mouthed, liars and pilferers. (14)

The decision to limit family size was, then, a mixture of economic necessity and cultural imperatives. 'Good' mothering was perceived as impossible if there were too many children and the means to 'good' mothering was an adequate income on

which to feed and rear two or at the most three children. However, without the means to achieve smaller families these motives would have remained meaningless and unarticulated.

Birth Control and Family Planning

Gittins has argued that the decline of family size amongst the working-class was not primarily nor necessarily the result of increased knowledge of and access to reliable contraception, rather it was the result of their changing relationship to the socio-economic situation. As discussed above families limited the number of children born because they perceived distinct social and economic advantages in so doing. Increased availability of reliable contraception undoubtedly aided this but a variety of methods were adopted to limit pregnancies as the oral evidence testifies. The women interviewed were, not surprisingly, reticent on methods of birth control but certain patterns emerged. Age at marriage and the Second World War accounted in no small part for a number of the small families: for those women who married in the early thirties at approximately age twenty-four the enforced absence of husbands during the war ensured that they might be thirty-five or older by the time normal sexual relations could be resumed by which time the risk of pregnancy might have been considerably reduced. As Mrs. Wilkes said 'I was lucky, you see, with my husband being abroad.' (15) although in the event this was not always the case, 'But as soon as he came back from Egypt, then

I fell on with Pat'. (16) Mrs. Pearce who had one stepchild as a result of her second marriage before the war did not have a child of her own until after the war when she and her husband were reunited. Mrs. Matthews, married in 1933 at age twenty-four, had her two children before the war; she was thirty-seven when her husband returned in 1946 and no more children were born to them. Although this may account for the decline in continual child-bearing in a few cases, it does not, of course, explain what methods such women used to space their families before the war or how those whose husbands were not away managed birth control.

One woman would have liked a larger family and for her birth control was not the problem. Mrs. Holder who had two boys would have liked more children and reported that she and her husband 'never took precautions, it just never happened' (17) but for most of the women limiting pregnancies must have been a constant worry. Mrs. Arthurs, who would also have liked more children, suffered six miscarriages before carrying her only daughter to term. Afterwards she determined not to have any more,

And that's why I wouldn't have any more. After going through so much to have her I wouldn't put her out to be minded while having another.

Did the doctor give you any advice on contraception?

No, they didn't give you anything like that, no, no. My husband was very good, very considerate and he just saw that nothing happened. (18)

Being 'considerate' or 'careful' were, as the Royal Commission on Population recognised, euphemisms for practising coitus interruptus or in some cases using the safe period of a woman's menstrual cycle,

Before recording a negative answer the woman must be questioned as to whether her husband had been 'Careful' - the term by which coitus interruptus is frequently known - and as to whether intercourse had ever been restricted to particular periods of the menstrual cycle. (19)

It is of course possible that 'being careful' also included the use of sheaths to prevent pregnancies. During the First World War sheaths had been issued free of charge to the armed services and Peel reports that a survey in the North of England in 1912 remarked on the widespread availability of contraceptive appliances from a variety of shops including pharmacists, barbers and tobacconists. (20) Appliances were also advertised in the local as well as the national press and could be obtained by mail order from firms in Birmingham, London and Manchester as well as from shops selling a range of 'surgical' goods. The accessibility of contraceptive devices is thus well evidenced and borne out by the comment of the 1912 survey that appliances were exhibited 'in the most barefaced manner on the counters of local chemists' shops so that no-one can miss seeing them'. (21) At 4/- to 6/- a dozen for the cheaper varieties, they may not always have been within the limits of many budgets, although as the most pressing reason for practising birth control would seem to have been the long-term economic burden of large families any

prudential calculation would have suggested the reliable results were cheap at the price.

Pessaries were a form of contraception popular amongst the working-classes; containing quinine they acted as a spermicide and were perhaps more acceptable than the sheath which required an adept, willing and confident user to minimise clumsiness and ensure reliability, although the Royal Commission found the sheath to be the most popular form often in combination with pessaries. (22) A number of letters to Marie Stopes from working-class couples include references to the use of pessaries as well as the myths surrounding their use, ('the pessary directed the seed into the wrong tube.')(23) However only one respondent referred directly to these mechanical forms of contraception,

There was sheaths in those days and also there was what they called pessaries I suppose the idea was that it killed the sperm. (24)

and I have no direct evidence of any one method being favoured or indeed even used. I would suspect that birth control for the women interviewed consisted of a mixture of coitus interruptus, the safe period and appliance methods - all subsumed in the phrase 'he was careful'. Lewis-Faning's report suggested that appliance methods predominated slightly for those married after nineteen thirty but even so coitus interruptus continued to be widely and extensively used. (25)

I would further speculate that abstinence played a larger part in the limitation of pregnancies than has generally been allowed for. However, before discussing this claim further it is important to examine one method which has been the subject of considerable debate, namely abortion.

Studies of working-class women and reproduction, notably those by Gittins and Brookes, have suggested that abortion may have been far more widespread than was generally recognised and it was certainly an issue of official concern as evidenced by the Report of the Interdepartmental Committee on Abortion set up in 1939, evidence which reflects an increasing state intervention in matters which hitherto had been considered private and individual. (26) Abortion was most usually procured by the use of pills and douches - 'to bring on the period' - but Brookes cites evidence of use of instruments either individually or by another woman. These methods depended upon a widespread network of female knowledge, secret and oral, because abortion was an illegal activity although Brookes reports a variety of advertisements for abortifacients. (27) Gittins suspects widespread abortion amongst married women who worked, where greater access and availability to knowledge was possible, and cites detailed personal information given in interview from a number of women as evidence for her speculations. However, the number was relatively small (less than ten) and as she recognises there

had been a tradition of abortion in the Lancashire textile towns, from where these cited respondents came, since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Roberts found little oral testimony to suggest that abortion was either widespread or common knowledge in the Lancashire towns of her study and concluded that,

But this [use of abortion] must remain hypothetical; what little oral evidence there is would in fact suggest that abstinence or coitus interruptus continued to be practised most. (28)

Firm evidence to draw conclusions either way is not as yet available and it would be misleading to extrapolate from either local studies or national figures as to the use of abortion by the women interviewed. However, some judicious speculation is possible. The evidence cited above comes in the main from work done on criminal proceedings or those living in the close-knit communities of central urban areas. Criminal proceedings of course may only reveal the tip of the iceberg. We have no idea of the numbers who procured successful abortions but they do suggest the necessity of a collective female intimacy for the free exchange of information and products, an intimacy generated in the communities of streets of urban areas. Women living in the more privatised suburbs of new housing estates were thus far less likely to have access to such information. Equally their commitment to 'respectability', to an ordered lifestyle, and to a harmonious family life would have made them less likely

to hazard the risks of procuring abortions either by themselves or through the offices of another woman. None of the respondents voluntarily mentioned abortion and when asked the majority turned the question which could, of course, suggest an unwillingness to discuss any attempts made. I would suspect, however, that reluctance indicated the taboo nature of the topic - it was in line with all responses to contraception - and a lack of knowledge. The following exchange illustrates the difficulty in pinpointing with any specificity the means of contraception implied.

...because there was little contraception available, was there?

Well, if you knew about it...you picked it up...you just found out(29)

Mrs. Hutchings' remarks could equally well apply to abortifacients, abortion by instruments or contraceptive appliances. Mrs. Wilkes remarks on the subject have the same obliqueness and a certain suggestiveness.

Do you ever remember whether anybody ever had abortions?

Oh, I couldn't tell you about that. I never believed in anything like that. There was lots of things happened in those old days which was never talked about see.(30)

The general consensus amongst respondents was that preventing pregnancy was a continuous problem - 'It was difficult for everybody in them days'(31) and Mrs. Matthews' story of her next door neighbour's suicide attempt reveals the desperation faced by women expecting an unwanted child even amongst the more affluent working-class.

Did I tell you when Edie next door tried to commit suicide...I looked through the kitchen window and I could see her lying with her head in the gas oven...Well, the palaver...I kept pushing her chest and everything, oh this awful noise, trying to bring her round...They [the police] weren't very nice and anyway we had to go to court...and they talked to me before I went in, they said about sending her to prison.

For attempting suicide?

Yes, well she was expecting another baby, that was the thing and she had been on about not wanting this baby,... she didn't want this baby...and they wouldn't take it away that was why she was doing it...eventually they had to take her and take the baby away. (32)

Mrs. Matthews' account appears to imply that the greater crime was in not wanting another baby and is perhaps a practical manifestation of inter-war official attitudes to motherhood. The ideological cult of glorifying motherhood as women's greatest personal fulfilment as well as the highest service to her country could be at variance with the needs and experiences of women.

My own conclusions from the oral evidence (or lack of) on abortion are that, whilst facilities and products for procuring abortions were available and seen as 'bringing on the period', and whilst many women may have had a vague, unformulated knowledge of such methods, abortion was something that 'happened to someone else', an unpleasant, desperate remedy to an extreme situation rather than a generally accepted means of limiting pregnancies. In these terms it could well be the case that some respondents aborted themselves at some time during their married life by taking

pills or douching but would remain unwilling to admit this. One respondent reported nine miscarriages between her first and second child and it is tempting and plausible to suspect that some (or all) were self-induced. However, I suspect, even were this the case the numbers would be very small, certainly not large enough to suggest that abortion was an accepted means of birth control for this group of women. I would concur with Roberts (above) that coitus interruptus and infrequent intercourse were the more usual means of achieving small families for this group of women.

The frequency of intercourse is not, of course, purely a matter of limiting pregnancies although infrequency may well be directly related to the risk and fear of becoming unwillingly pregnant. It can also tell us something about the way in which women perceived their marital relationships and the extent to which they were autonomous within these relationships. Roberts points out the absence in her evidence of any mention of artificial means of contraception and the same is true for the women I interviewed with one exception(33). Where mention of contraception is made it is always in terms of the husband's 'considerateness' or 'carefulness' and as noted above this could refer to his concern to spare his wife pregnancy by practising withdrawal. It could also refer to his concern not to impose himself sexually upon his wife; Mrs. Smith continues to blame her husband's 'lustiness' and, what she perceived, as excessive

sexual demands for the continuous miscarriages she endured and the misery of her married life,

[The doctor] said I want you to keep him off you for six months while you get put right, but when I got back home, you couldn't sit in a chair at the side of the fireplace for him, he was so *lustful*, he nearly drove me round the bend. (34)

and a number of accounts suggest that one of the qualities of a good husband was that he was not too sexually demanding, 'we had good lasting relationships which barely touched on sex'. (35)

Although I did not question women directly about sexual matters nor was information forthcoming, I believe it is plausible to suggest that many of these marriages were characterised by a low level of sexual activity. As we saw in an earlier chapter women grew up with a negligible knowledge of sex and reproduction, demonstrative displays of physical affection were never an expected or usual part of family life. Parents were distant, authoritarian figures who, whilst often loving their children dearly, demonstrated this by providing food, clothing and moral example rather than by cuddling or expressions of affection. Fear of pregnancy, social disgrace and parental anger had prevented pre-marital experimentation and it would be unrealistic to imagine that once married the physical inhibitions thus engendered would magically disappear. Many women must have taken into marriage unease and fear about their bodies which would mitigate against easily attainable, comfortable sexual relations. As Mrs.

Brown said about her early married life, 'it was a bit of a shock but you had to get used to it' (36). Add to this anxiety about pregnancy within marriage and a desire for a smaller family and it becomes plausible to suggest that women's responses to sexual intercourse might range from lack of interest to actual distaste and a husband's thoughtfulness in restraining himself would engender more marital harmony than would a frequent and active sexual life.

This argument, however, depends upon the degree of autonomy available to women within the marriage relationship. How far were they able to control sexual relations and how far were husbands willing to accede to their wives' disinterest in sex. It is perhaps dangerous to extrapolate from written sources to the actual experiences of women but there was a changed attitude to sexuality within marriage amongst the reforming sexologists of the twenties and thirties. The nineteenth century belief that women's sexual appetite was far less than men's had given way via Freud and Havelock Ellis to a focus on female sensuality, a sensuality which could only be fulfilled within heterosexual marriage. (37) Marriage manuals stressed the importance of both partners achieving satisfactory sex, but equally stressed was the husband's responsibility for exercising restraint and care so as to ensure this mutual state.

It is obvious, therefore, that the preliminary lovemaking which is so essential for the woman must, in great part, be a period of restraint and control for the man...In particular must this fact be realised by the

man, and he must be prepared to meet it by subduing his own desires and inclinations to those of the woman. (38)

Popular problem manuals were also at pains to point out the need for consideration by husbands and brutal, demanding or selfish males were consistently rebuked.

If he [husband] has little idea of sex technique or thinks that by simply following his own ill-controlled instincts, and insisting upon his "rights" at all times, all will be well, he may seal his fate for ever... There are times and seasons when the woman is attracted, or indifferent, or even repelled. Here a young husband must take care to avoid any act which would lead to a habit of unhappy response being set up. (39)

Holtzman has suggested that, at least for middle-class women, a shift was taking place in which women were gaining greater sexual authority, a shift which corresponded with the new standards of restraint and consideration being urged on husbands. As a result, Holtzman argues,

The women's sexual authority rested on their right to control the frequency and timing of sexual relations with their husbands... In their use of the word "considerate" to describe their husbands, the female correspondents seemed to have been similarly implying that they, rather than their husbands, were the arbiters in matters regarding the frequency and timing of sexual relations. (40)

Although Holtzman's work concentrates on middle-class women I want to suggest that the inter-war years saw a general diffusion of the ethos of husbandly consideration and that when respondents speak of a husband 'being careful and considerate' this implies not only practising coitus interruptus but also following her lead on frequency of intercourse. If I am right this in turn suggests that women had some control over their sexual relations which could allow

for periods of abstinence or infrequent intercourse both as a means of limiting pregnancies and a means of achieving the marital relationship they found most comfortable. Husbands may have willingly acceded to such relations; 'respectable' men were kind and considerate to their wives and infrequent sex may have been a small price to pay for the benefits of a small family and a harmonious domestic life.

The paucity of evidence on this subject makes it difficult to draw general conclusions but the testimony of women who did talk about sexual matters does suggest that there may have been a shift to a more egalitarian form of sexual relations in which women had some power to manage the number of children born to them and the kind of relationship they needed. Mrs. Fellows recognised her authority in determining the limits of her pre-marital relationship with her husband,

I would have never have dreamed and I can say that in front of him, we never did what was wrong before we got married.

Did men think that they wouldn't do anything wrong either?

No, I don't think so...if I would have in them days, if I would have agreed, I think the women had to be strong. (41)

However, the power to manage reproduction depended upon the husband's agreement to family limitation and consequently to 'being careful and considerate'. In the majority of cases the husband did appear to have been in agreement about ideals of family size. Indeed, as Mrs. Walker cited above (page 275)

and the respondent quoted below reveal, it could well be the husband who recognised the benefits of small families both economically and emotionally,

I think when you have had two or three, unless you can afford children well you just draw the line at that...because Harold said like, "We were not having any more than two, it is as much as we can afford to bring up". (42)

Thus, whilst women may have had an increased degree of autonomy in managing their sexual relations and thereby limiting pregnancies, the ultimate control remained with the male as one respondent recognised. According to her, she could not sit down in the evening without her husband imposing his sexual demands upon her - the result was nine miscarriages and two children. However, she was an exception. The majority appear to have made a joint decision to limit their families; a decision which could only be implemented by a mixture of 'carefulness', 'consideration' and restraint on the part of the husband.

Motherhood and Childrearing

One of the characteristics of the twentieth century family, so it is claimed, has been an intense and more emotionally involved relationship with children: in the child-centred family 'gentler, more intimate and loving relationships were able to develop.' (43) Child-centredness is obviously linked with smaller families, a measure of affluence and a lengthier financial dependence; where children no longer contribute

financially to the family's well-being, having children becomes something 'good in itself'. Parents have children in order to enjoy them and thus have fewer, investing considerable time and energy into the few. As all my respondents had smaller families and were slightly more affluent than their parents, their attitudes to motherhood and child-rearing are worth examining to see how far this claim of child-centredness fits their experiences of bringing up children. Jamieson, on the same issue, concluded that,

If there is any class location where child-centredness was to be found, it was perhaps in the "boundary" of these two classes. In some of my upper working-class families and in lower middle-class households, less integrated into middle-class patterns of sociability, child-centredness was to a degree evident. But even there it was scarcely emotional child-centredness. Time spent on children was still predominantly on their physical care and on their education, not on "enjoying them". (44)

This was true of my respondents: whilst their children were immensely important to them and, as far as I can tell, loved and wanted, their daily lives could not really be said to have 'centred emotionally as well as practically, to an unprecedented extent, around the child' with one exception which I shall return to. (45) In this context it is surely significant that women remembered their daily and weekly round of housework with far more clarity and detail than they could recall when questioned about childrearing. Motherhood for these women was not yet primarily concerned with emotional nurture and the development of self-expressive qualities

Although the oral testimony provides some evidence of an increased tendency to 'enjoy' children and engage in activities with them there was little sense that mothers should be at the psychological service of their children.

Whilst the mothers interviewed undoubtedly loved their children and wanted the best for them, this best was almost always seen in terms of material improvement and conformity to 'respectable' values - a steady marriage, a solid and regular income and a 'respectable' lifestyle. As a result childrearing focused on physical care and the teaching of values although, as I shall show, this did not exclude time spent enjoying children's company. As in other areas of these women's lives, residual patterns of behaviour co-existed with emerging patterns. Thus, whilst the mother's role remained to a large extent provider of physical needs and disciplinarian, there is some evidence of an emerging role as companion and pleasure-provider. However, I would concur with Jamieson that the emotional child-centredness of the years since the Second World War was not yet predominant - time and energy, on balance, remained concentrated on rearing healthy and 'respectable' citizens. One way of assessing the extent and/or emergence of child-centredness would be to examine the role of 'outsiders' in the rearing of children. Did mothers expect to be solely responsible for the care of their children or did the older pattern of help from grandmothers and other

relatives persist and, related to this, were women turning to the ever-growing body of 'experts' through clinics, health visitors and books for advice? Answers to these questions could suggest the extent to which childcare was becoming privatised with the mother as the sole focus of the child's early life.

'Outsiders' and 'Experts'

Grandmothers undoubtedly had an important place in the lives of their grandchildren. All respondents continued to see their mothers (in one case where there was no mother, mother-in-law) regularly after marriage. The extent of involvement, however, could vary from actually living with the family as in two cases to a visit once a week. Where grandmother lived with the family her role would obviously be of more importance. Mrs. Mack's mother appears to have been the child's pleasure-provider, enabling Mrs. Mack to get her housework done,

Did you do the housework and cleaning?

Oh yes, I did the work.

And did your mother do that with you or did she go out?

She used to take our lad out and then she used to do a bit of baking. We used to live in together like. (46)

Where women continued in waged work, the grandmother's role was vital. The mothers of both Mrs. Wilkes and Mrs. Smith looked after their grandchild whilst the mothers were at work,

although Mrs. Wilkes also depended upon neighbours when her mother was at work. Mrs. Porter felt that it was quite common for children to be 'granny-reared' at that time.

I think a lot of children were granny-reared in them days...If mother couldn't do it there was always grandmother. Grandmother was always there - a bit of a tyrant she was - very Victorian but she was *there*. I mean if we came home from school, if mother wasn't...I mean after my mother got married again, my grandmother came back and lived with us, if mum wasn't there, granny, she was always there. (47)

The diversity of experience in this respect makes it difficult to draw general conclusions: as well as the above examples one respondent's mother lived with the family for a short period and others lived close enough to be involved on a daily basis. On the whole, however, the majority of respondents did not depend on their mothers for regular childminding although they might be glad of the respite from childcare visiting could offer,

Did your mother help at all when the children were little?

Well, she came regularly, one day a week she used to come across. I never expected her to do anything but she would knit for me and do a bit of sewing and she would take, when she was here, she looked after them when I was doing something else. (48)

This would seem to have been the more usual pattern: grandmothers knitted and sewed for their grandchildren, took them out sometimes and played with them. All the women maintained strong links with their mothers, sometimes as in Mrs. Stewart's case visiting three times a week or, like Mrs. Arthurs who worked part-time, spending her day off with her

mother. Willmott and Young drew attention to this dimension of working-class family life as late as the nineteen fifties in their study of Bethnal Green and it is well-documented in studies of late nineteenth century urban communities. (49) It has been generally assumed from the empirical evidence on large housing estates that one of the consequences of suburbanisation was the weakening of the interdependent relationship between mothers and daughters. My evidence from these small pockets of inter-war suburbs would suggest that this was not necessarily the case. Daughters may have been less reliant on their mothers for childminding as fewer 'respectable' working-class women engaged in waged work. Yet the mother/daughter relationship retained a strong place in family life, providing material resources such as children's clothing in return for care in old age. There was a strong sense of filial duty amongst the women interviewed which had its basis in the hard facts of an economic system which provided little material provision for rearing children or for old age. Many respondents cared for their elderly mothers in the post-war era and felt it their duty to do so even where earlier relations had been characterised by hostility.

Because my mother lived to be 84...and I took them children until they went to school every day or every other day up to my mothers and then when they were at school I used to go back and forth. I put my mother first...I looked after her. My brothers didn't bother the way I did but I always tried to do. I believe in it. (50)

Grandmothers might spend considerable time with the children if not necessarily in a childminding role and they undoubtedly continued to play an important part in the family's life, often living close by or at least within visiting reach. Women went to considerable lengths to maintain the relationship with their mother, recognising, I suspect, a mutual need based on their gender. Given the long hours worked by husbands, I also suspect, that many children saw more of their grandmothers than their fathers: fathers were often not home from work by the time the young children went to bed and were off in the morning before they were up. Equally many men worked Saturday mornings and it was quite usual for mothers to take their children to the Saturday morning show or the afternoon matinee at the cinema whilst the father was working. Added to this was the loss of that neighbourly familiarity which characterised the streets of central urban areas, allowing the community as a whole to watch out for and discipline the children. I intend to explore this in more detail later in the chapter but for now the point is that for children being brought up in the new suburbs there was a narrower range of people involved in their daily lives. More and more the burden of day-to-day childcare was falling on the mother although as yet, for these women, it remained focused on physical rather than emotional need. With an increasingly limited network of support and advice, then, did these women turn to the growing band of childcare experts?

The development of the infant and child welfare movement in these years focused attention on the health of the child (often at the expense of the mother). Baby and childcare manuals were concerned in the main with the physical aspects of childrearing and women's magazines, where they concerned themselves with woman's role as mother (rather than housewife), offered knitting patterns and children's recipes rather than advice on behaviour or psychology. The women interviewed, whilst concerning themselves with the same aspects, had little time for expert advice on or intervention in childcare which they saw simply as a matter of common sense.

We brought our children up without that sort of help. Common sense, it all boils down to common sense, don't you think?(51)

Particularly interesting in this respect is the attitude to infant welfare clinics and health visitors. In the nineteen twenties there were 2054 welfare clinics run by voluntary organisations and local authorities; by 1938 this number had increased to 4585 with over half run by local authorities. (52) Health visiting was an extension of that middle-class philanthropy which attempted to diffuse middle-class domestic ideology into working-class families. Both forms were concerned to educate, advise and, implicitly, keep a check on the methods used by women. The Health Visitor's brief was to supersede the 'bad' advice of grandmothers and others who might recommend the use of 'ignorant' and unhygienic methods

such as dummies or, presumably, Mrs. Wilkes' recipe for gripe water,

I more often than not made my own gripe water. I used to get some boiling water and get a cinder out of the fire and put it in and then strain it in very fine muslin. That was gripe water and better than any gripe water you could buy. (53)

Few women remembered a Health Visitor calling and those that did either ignored or scoffed the advice given. Miss Singer, a Health Visitor in York in the twenties and thirties recalled how her visits were frequently greeted with indifference from wives and abuse from husbands although, as the following account illustrates, women could be equally abusive, (54)

She only came once when I had been home with June from Acomb Hospital...came to see how I was coping with it being my first...and my mother came in, "Who are you?", "Oh, I'm so and so and so and so...and I have come to see your daughter and see how she is coping with her family". You know all that kind of thing. And mother said "Have you ever had any?" She said "No", "Well, bloody get out then!"..."Don't you come here talking, looking at a book, books and that. If you burned your finger would you run for a book to find out what you ought to do. Get out!" We never had anybody after that. (55)

Health Visitors were less tolerated than Welfare Clinics probably because they represented an unwelcome intrusion into the home: women had no control over the timing of visits and Visitors could be seen as potential judges of standards of housekeeping. Clinics, on the other hand, could be used by women to meet their own needs. The oral testimony suggests that those women who attended welfare clinics did so primarily to buy cheap dried milk and have the baby weighed,

We used to go to the clinic...and now I come to think of it we used to get dried mlk...Yes, I think you got it cheaper if you got it there and they used to weigh the baby there.

Is that why you went to have the baby weighed and get the dried milk?

Yes, both. (56)

It also provided 'a change' and somewhere to take the children and meet other mothers, 'I used to get to the welfare. Take them down to the welfare and the little park' (57) and 'It was a change, it was nice to meet other people and exchange ideas' (58) However, it was also possible to get babies weighed for a few pennies at the chemists and dried milk could be purchased there as well as from the clinics. Mrs. Walker didn't go to the clinic for long when she discovered she could get what she needed from the chemists and Mrs. Wilkes preferred having her babies weighed there because 'you didn't have to strip them in the chemists and let them catch cold'. (59)

A nutritious diet, personal hygiene and adequate sleep were the major concerns of child welfare experts and clinics, and health visitors advised on these issues, rather than medical queries which were jealously guarded by G.P.s. This emphasis on diet and cleanliness is hardly surprising, given the unhealthy and verminous conditions of many central urban areas; what is interesting is the stress on sleep. School Medical Officers of the period spoke of the 'unslept' child whose symptoms ranged through loss of appetite, fatigue and

bad posture to emotional instability. (60) The Board of Education handbook Health Education categorised the effects of inadequate sleep as malnutrition, lassitude and mental fatigue and recommended at least twelve to fourteen hours sleep a night for children up to adolescence. (61) One suspects on reading the reports that the issue was one of social control rather than health,

Careless parents, on the contrary, resort to the easy excuse that it is useless to put children to bed by daylight, and many leave them to run the streets even after dark and may be heard calling them in as late as 10 or 10.30. This is often the subject of remark by residents on housing estates where the class of tenant is mixed. (62)

This offers an illuminating insight into the kind of social distinctions made by the 'respectable'. 'Rough' families let their children roam the streets late into the evening, 'respectable' parents had their children safely tucked up in bed by six or six-thirty. All my respondents remembered putting their children to bed early though they gave no clear reason for this other than it meant they were not out on the street. Medical pronouncements on the health-giving aspects of plenty of sleep concurred with social commentators' dislike of children on the streets and parents' desire to be seen as 'respectable'. Early nights, of course, were also a pragmatic necessity for many women, for it was after the children were in bed that respondents like Mrs. Butcher and Mrs. Wilkes did a fair amount of their housework.

With only one exception all the women rejected the advice of babycare manuals, preferring as we have seen to rely on 'common-sense' and instinct. Mrs. Hutchings, however, was a victim of the pernicious Truby King system which recommended no cuddling, the enforcement of a rigid timetable and a generally authoritarian and repressive approach,

To train an infant for the first year is comparatively easy but after that the child begins to resent authority and the conscientious mother has to be prepared to fight and win all along the way in matters great and small. (63)

She recalls that she was introduced to this system at the nursing home where her first child was born and remembers the anguish it caused until she rejected it,

...there was a system called Truby King...and you were introduced to it at the nursing home. Every hour, not a minute before and not a minute after which was absolutely killing for both child and mother. Indeed no feeding in the night. Well, he just could not go through the night and we had some very unhappy nights so when my daughter was born Truby King was thrown out and I just fed her when I thought she was really crying because she was hungry and not because she wanted attention and we had a lot better time. (64)

However, it is noteworthy that even after rejecting such an inflexible system the emphasis, in line with my general argument, is firmly on catering for the child's physical needs rather than comfort or cuddling which is seen as 'attention-seeking'. Although no other respondents recalled Truby King or his followers directly, they believed strongly in teaching self-reliance and did not encourage what they saw as 'attention-seeking' behaviours. However, in view of their general dislike of books and experts, it is more probable that

this was a modified version of their mothers' authoritarian approach.

The Teaching of 'Respectable' Values

As I discussed in the previous chapter women exercised considerable time, energy and ingenuity in feeding and clothing their families and apart from cleaning, these tasks occupied most of their time. Housework, cooking, cleaning and washing took priority and the children's needs were fitted in around this rather than, as is common today, the other way around. Oakley has discussed the, often painful, contemporary conflict between the demands of childcare and those of housework - many women find it difficult to maintain their self-imposed standards of housework in the face of their children's need to play and make a mess. (65) Because housework took priority this conflict was not generally evident amongst my respondents and there was little guilt expressed, or at least remembered, as a result.

She [daughter] made a lot of fingermarks...As long as the place was tidy for my husband to come to that's all that bothered me. (66)

and,

Did you find it difficult to fit in doing all your housework - you know you said you had a day for each job - with David when he was little, as children make a mess don't they?

David used to be very helpful, he liked doing things, little jobs, you know, he'd clean me a window, or things like that...he'd wash up...he'd iron the straight things. (67)

Mrs. Stewart felt she was lucky because her children were 'unusually sleepy': they frequently slept for three hours in the afternoon and this enabled her to complete her housework. (68)

Where conflict did exist between the children's needs and domestic chores women might adopt strategies such as those of Mrs. Butcher,

I used to see father [i.e. husband] off on the first tram out to Shenley Fields. [He left home at 6.15 a.m.] Cos I was up and I'd sit and knit. I always knitted an ounce or more wool before the children started to move around...[Later] I used to put them in the pram - the second one with his feet in the well, the other one with reins walking by the side...buy my vegetables, pod the peas in the garden, or the park, or take a little knife and do the kidney beans and the children used to play round me and of course the baby was still in the pram. Then when it came 12.00 push them back home and give the midday meal...and then of course it used to be sleep time. Edna didn't want to go to sleep but she was quiet and played with books. Then in the afternoon I might be able to do a bit of ironing while that was going on, while they was sleeping and then Dad used to be home about 5.30 p.m. Then there was the meal and wash up. Top and tail them at night and put them to bed...And of course I'd be busy doing my jobs then. Quietly. I couldn't work and take them out in the daytime - three was a lot to have around you. (69)

Mrs. Harris, unlike the other women, was completely uninterested in housework: she devoted all her time to her children, taking them out and playing with them.

I would take bottles of milk and sandwiches and biscuits and a few sweets and I would roam the countryside with them children. All day long until it was nighttime...and so my house was never dirty...if it was raining then well I would sit and play with them on the rug or something like that. (70)

However, she was very much an exception: few women invested so much time in enjoying their children in this way although it was not unusual for mothers to provide the occasional treat such as an outing into the countryside or a visit to the cinema. For the most part, however, children were expected to find their own amusements. Mrs. Hutchings' children played out in the cul-de-sac and Mrs. Dickens can remember as a child in the thirties roaming the countryside around Tang Hall and playing in the streets with neighbours' children,

The lady next door she had two children, there was just a year between them.

Did you used to play with the other children round and about here on the estate?

Oh, yes, yes. Yes because there wasn't the traffic then ...in the Circle where we lived. (71)

Mrs. Matthews, the most nearly middle-class of the women interviewed, frowned on playing in the street or even in the front garden,

I was horrified once because...Elizabeth was next door playing and they were on the front doorstep playing with dolls...to be out at the front I thought it was, it just seemed to be so terrible...once you entered the front door you were in.

And you didn't play on the street?

Oh definitely no, not in the street. (72)

However, she was unusual. Although I expected to find women, particularly in suburban semi-detacheds, discouraging their children from playing in the street, this was not the case and children appear to have played in and out of each other's gardens and on the street.

Despite the new stress by psychologists and educationalists on the creative and self-expressive aspects of childhood, popular manuals emphasised the values of self-reliance and independence.

Mothers sometimes ask if they ought to play with the baby when he is awake. Yes, to a reasonable extent, when he is six months old, for that will help to develop his intelligence. But it is a mistake to spend too much time with him. He should be taught to amuse himself and not be dependent on others. If he begins in this way he will learn to be self-reliant from the start. Even quite a young baby can be left for a considerable time on end, without there being any need to worry about him. (73)

This emphasis on self-reliance and independence was typical of advice given to mothers and although most of the women interviewed had little time for baby or childrearing manuals, as we have seen, a general belief that children should be self-reliant was pervasive in working-class families where children were far less sheltered from the realities of poverty and drudgery than their middle-class counterparts. Self-reliance was also, of course, one of the cardinal virtues of 'respectable' people as a bulwark against the vicissitudes of working-class life at a time of minimal welfare and insurance provision. As one respondent said 'in those days you had to stand on your feet however hard it was'. (74) However, this stress on independence undoubtedly mitigated against close parent/child relations,

In some ways its lovely [today] because mothers and daughters are so close and things and children are closer because you talk and things, discuss, well we never discussed a thing with our children. (75)

Whilst all respondents believed they were not as strict with their children as their mothers had been, nevertheless, they continued to teach very much the same values and acceptable behaviour - good manners, particularly at mealtimes, clearing up mess after them, cleanliness, and, above all, regard for authority were common rules. Teaching good behaviour was seen as important for the child's future at a time when jobs were scarce and 'respectability' could be seen as the passport to a better future. As Mrs. Walker told her son when admonishing him for cutting the 't's off the end of words,

I said, look the time will come when you wish you could speak properly. I said some day when you have to go for interviews for jobs and that, if you don't know how to be polite and how to speak properly you might not fit and you might not get the job. (76)

However, a number of these rules, it should be remembered, also had their basis in practical reality. 'Messing with food' which was particularly frowned upon, has to be seen in the context of providing an adequate diet on fairly meagre resources. Equally, cleanliness and tidying up becomes important when housework and washing were such arduous, time-consuming tasks.

No-one admitted to smacking or hitting their child in order to enforce the rules and the general feeling was that a sharp word or look was preferable to physical punishment, although, interestingly, most respondents accepted corporal punishment in schools to 'keep discipline'. I would suspect that smacking a recalcitrant child was one of those behaviours

perceived as 'rough' in parents but accepted in schools in the context of a wider concern with law and order. Despite their dislike of experts and wariness of outsiders, mothers appear to have sanctioned the rule of external authority in the form of the police or the school. A policeman's 'clip round the ear' or a school's punishment was seen as reinforcing a general regard for authority rather than punishing the actual offence committed and could therefore be perceived as upholding parental values unlike the intervention of childcare experts which was so often felt to be interference. (77)

The majority of respondents believed that their own upbringing, despite the lack of demonstrated affection, had been a good one, preparing them well for adult life and, without exception, they followed their mother's model as the following answers to the question 'Do you think you brought your children up in the same way as you were brought up?' reveal.

Oh, definitely, everything had to be right otherwise I repeated [as her mother had said to her] "if you can't do the job right, don't do it at all" and they know that today...They would ask if they could leave the table and all that, you know, oh yes. (78)

Yes...to respect older people, and to respect other people's property, and never to get into debt and never enter into hire purchase...and they have been very stable responsible people. (79)

Oh yes, because she was very strict with us...If she looked at us across the table, elbows would come off, she would have you sitting up...I did the same, and the children did the same. (80)

One noticeable difference, however, does emerge between the generations. My sample is too small to suggest a conclusive trend but there is some evidence that less domestic help was being asked of children particularly amongst the slightly more affluent. Younger respondents who were children in the twenties reported a lighter load of domestic chores than their older counterparts

Wash up, help wash up and things like that but nothing else. Didn't have to do anything else. (81)

and none of the women who were mothers in the thirties appear to have expected the same amount of domestic help as was expected of them as children. Washing-up or dusting, as Mrs. Pearce's account above (page 303) illustrates, were more likely to be seen as a way of amusing children rather than as an expected contribution to family life. This was perhaps because better housing conditions relieved women to some extent of domestic drudgery and allowed them to spare their children, particularly daughters, the burden they had carried and could therefore be taken as an indicator of an emerging child-centredness.

To summarise then, whilst there were hints of an emerging child-centredness amongst this group of women in line with their increased affluence, smaller families and potentially lighter load of housework, the main focus of childrearing continued to give priority to physical and educational needs. Mothers were above all else concerned that their children

should be adequately fed, clothed and disciplined and, whilst slightly less autocratic than many of their mothers, retained and reinforced an authoritarian role rarely questioning their right to mould and train their children. As Mrs. Walker said 'I tried to make them as I would have liked them to be...we expected them to behave as we trained them' (82)

Husband, Wife and 'Others'

One of the themes of this study has been the extent to which women's domestic lives became more privatised with the provision of better housing and an improved standard of living. It has become apparent that with regard to living conditions, housework and childcare, women were beginning to experience a model of domesticity which was less rooted in the community and neighbourhood than hitherto. At the same time this was never as absolute and complete as is sometimes claimed. Whilst housework and childcare were undoubtedly becoming more isolated during this period, the single form family, sufficient unto itself for all its emotional and material needs and epitomised in the popular song 'Just Molly and me and baby makes three/In our blue heaven' was by no means a universal experience amongst respondents. By attempting to assess the place of the marital relationship and the role of friends and neighbours in these women's lives, I hope to suggest the diverse and complex network of family

relationships which belie any explanations involving a simple shift from collectivity to self-sufficiency.

Two-thirds of respondents (fifteen) were conventionally married, that is they lived with a husband whose income provided the major source of family income. However, before discussing the place of marriage in these women's lives, it is worth examining the sizeable minority whose family life was not structured in this way (six). Two were widows, (one remarried but this was shortlived) two were married but continued to live with parents, one moved from single parenthood to marriage and back again, and one only married after the death of her parents. Although marriage was important to these women, it was by no means the emotional centre of their lives: force of circumstances or choice had rendered them tough and independent, relying as much on relationships with their mothers and children as on their ephemeral husbands. Mrs. Wilkes lived with her mother while her husband was away in the army and now a widow of longstanding was adamant that she would not remarry despite opportunities; Mrs. Mack chose to live with her parents when she married because,

you see we always lived with my mother and father, you see because there was only them, and when we come up here we got this three-bedroomed house because they had me, we was living with them, and that is how we got it you see. Because I didn't want a separate house, you see what I mean. (83)

and Mrs. Smith who waited nine years to marry the father of her child, had few qualms about 'throwing him out' (84) when he proved an unreliable provider. Perhaps Mrs. Crowe's answer to why she waited so long to marry best evokes what was a fairly typical attitude to husbands amongst all respondents,

Oh for sake, I'd got enough to do here without *taking on* another one...I couldn't do it all and I wouldn't have left them [parents] so that was the end of that. (85) (my italics)

'Taking on' a husband was a double-edged sword. As we have seen in the chapter on courtship, women were anxious to make a good choice of husband and prudential calculation about financial reliability, sobriety and stability played a larger part in this choice than romantic attachment (although the two were not mutually exclusive). Where husbands failed to live up to these criteria they could indeed become a burden. Mrs. Pearce divorced her first husband after a brief marriage because,

Well, it just didn't work, I mean, wine, women and song. You can only stick so much can't you. (86)

and Mrs. Harris has always regretted her decision to marry a man she'd known only three weeks rather than her regular boyfriend,

You see he was down to earth, regular. He would have made a good husband in that way. I was a fool really when I look back...all that mattered to me was going dancing and being dressed up and folk saying "You look lovely tonight". This is all that my life was, it was silly, it was a silly life, it was living in a cloud because you have to come down to earth.

And did you come down to earth?

Oh I did! With a bang! Oh I did, oh yes, I did that!...He used to be coming in at two in the morning

and he had been having the time of his life and I had to come down to earth. We stayed together but things didn't.....(87)

However, the majority of respondents appear to have had a harmonious married life, although this was based on mutual respect and possibly a certain detachment rather than the kind of personal intimacy associated with late twentieth century marriage. As Mrs. Butcher said 'We were very reserved, very reserved...even now. Always have been'(88) and Mrs. Walker summed up the general feeling when she commented,

You were taught to keep a reserve, have restraint. My attitude is that respect comes before love. If you respect each other well the other follows but if you don't respect them then.....(89)

'Respectable' working-class marriage was characterised by mutual respect, a certain distance and a sexual division of labour within the home. Husbands were responsible for providing the major source of income and as we have seen for ultimate control over family size. Wives managed the family budget, provided food and undertook the domestic tasks of cleaning and childcare. Husbands were not expected to participate to any great extent in the latter and were reluctant to be seen cleaning windows or steps and although they might 'help out' when their wives were ill this consisted of little more than making a cup of tea or washing up. Mrs. Kitchin's responses to questions about help with domestic tasks capture the general expectation that a husband's contribution would be minimal.

Did he used to help you with the housework?

Yes. He does now. When he feels like it.

What sort of jobs would he do to help you?

Well, he would do washing up and peel the potatoes, any odd jobs.

Is there anything he wouldn't do?

He wouldn't do the washing, or cleaning windows, wouldn't clean windows.

What about pushing the pram?

Oh, my goodness, no!

Or changing nappies?

No, thank you very much! (90)

Gender roles within the home appear to have changed little from respondents' childhoods except in one important respect. Husbands were far less likely to spend their leisure time in the pub or the Working Man's Club. As we have seen in chapter six council landlords encouraged home-based activities for men, promoting gardening rather than drinking as an acceptable and 'respectable' leisure activity. All respondents, except those mentioned above, said that their husbands only drank very occasionally and certainly not on a regular basis. The lack of public houses on new estates and the greater comfort of the home undoubtedly encouraged husbands to centre their leisure time around the family rather than the pub. This was reinforced by the loosening of that ideology which conflated manliness with drunkenness and allied sobriety with

'respectability'. On the subject of drinking Mrs. Fellows observed that,

The women tolerated it you see, and a lot of very bad drunkenness went on...with the married people and that, and there was no respect in lots of instances. (91)

Self-respecting women, as we have seen, were less inclined to accept heavy drinking in a husband, having witnessed in childhood the consequent poverty and, at times, violence that went with it. This is not to deny that a considerable amount of bullying and drunkenness remained, but that, for those respondents who appeared to maintain an ordered and harmonious family life, there was a quite specific commitment to sobriety. (92)

Nevertheless, although increased leisure time and a husband's increased commitment to the home meant that the family might enjoy an outing to the country on a Sunday or a visit to the cinema, none of the women recalled going out as a couple on anything more than the rare occasion. Babysitters in an evening were unheard of and husbands and wives who did engage in outside activities used each other as babysitters. (93) A number of husbands belonged to Gardening Clubs or church choirs and some played cricket or football. Wives, not surprisingly, had less time for outside activities particularly when the children were small and the majority cited knitting and reading as leisure activities. Husbands and wives do not appear to have shared joint interests except for those pursuits centred around the home. For example,

gardening became for a number of couples a joint pursuit as did the enjoyment of radio programmes in the late thirties and, for a few, entertaining friends for Sunday tea. Mrs. Jones remembers the informal entertaining that went on in her home as a child,

We had the radio and we used to listen to that and of course listening to a radio we could do a lot of other jobs at the same time. Such as knitting. But we also used to play a lot of cards...my brother used to bring his friends like and of course there were four of us...we used to play a lot of Canasta...and you used to go round to another house. (94)

There is some evidence in these activities of the development of a privatised family life but it was by no means complete. Although husbands and wives might spend more time together this was not necessarily spent in shared activities or intimacy. The family, rather than the couple, remained the primary unit in 'respectable' ideas of leisure, just as the family remained the significant unit in terms of income and resources. Moreover, family, as we have seen, continued to include at least the wife's mother and often other relatives even if geographically more separate. Neither did the role of neighbours and friends diminish dramatically; they continued to play an important, if changing, part in working-class family life.

As we have seen mothers were visited and visited regularly, usually at least once a week. Even where there was hostility as in Mrs. Harris' case, she lived on the same council estate and helped to nurse her mother when she was ill. Neighbours

and friends also continued to play a part in women's lives although the parameters of these relationships were changing. I was constantly struck by the network of women known to respondents, in all cases going back to the early days of marriage and often before into school days. Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Walters had been at school together in Rubery and remembered, by name, another respondent: Mrs. Crowe and Mrs. Kitchin had grown up together in the jewellery quarter of Birmingham, moved to the same council estate and at the present time see each other once a week; Mrs. Fellows has remained in constant touch with a school friend who now lives close by; Mrs. Butcher still has a number of friends from her single working days at Typhoo Tea and Mrs. Smith writes to an old school friend now living in Canada. These longstanding friendships have in many cases outlived the marriages they pre-dated and are a source of present comfort in widowhood.

Yet, all respondents felt there was a change from the easy familiarity with neighbours characteristic of the streets and this undoubtedly was associated with achieved status. Mrs. Hutchings recalled that,

We chatted to each other but we were never in and out of each other's houses like you were in the old streets...we all knew that if anybody wanted anything we would have all helped - there was a friendly atmosphere but there was not the running in and out of people's houses. (95)

and Mrs. Jones, whose father took her to visit relatives in central Birmingham, felt that suburban people were more inclined to 'keep themselves to themselves',

...they kept themselves more to themselves than in the terraces. They seemed a bit inclined to, they didn't want people to know what was in their house sort of thing. (96)

However, few women remembered feeling isolated in new housing as a result of this reserve - 'we were too busy' as one respondent commented. (97) Friendships were carried on outside the home and contacts made at the shops, over the garden fence and through children. Mrs. Walker remembered the network of contacts she had as a young mother,

You had people who lived near around about, we were friendly with and of course I had sisters-in-law as well, we used to meet, I remember, Wednesday mornings we used to go and have a cup of coffee at Leak and Thorpes and shop and window-gaze.

Did you meet other mothers with children that you could be friendly with?

Oh, yes, oh yes. (98)

The general feeling was that whilst 'popping in' was frowned upon, help was available when required but might well be the only time women entered each other's homes,

Oh when you were in a street like, you used to all help each other out. Mind you I have helped people out and they have helped me out when I have been poorly. We have gone in next door when anybody has been poorly. I don't think they would see you fast but I think we were closer in the streets because you just bobbed out of one door into another, but I wouldn't say they don't help each other up here because we have had some good neighbours. (99)

Mrs. Smith, for example, was often called upon in times of emergency when she lived on the council estate at Burton Stone Lane. On occasion she undertook laying-out rites for the dead,

If anybody were poorly they always came for me. Old Mrs. Bardy, she took poorly and he ran for me because she had had a stroke...I laid out old Mr. Walker next door. I laid out old Mr. Bardy, there was a snicket at the end of our block you see and Edie Hodges lived next door and her husband ran for me...If any of the bairns around about was poorly they always came to me for stuff, if they got stung they always came to me for the blue bag. (100)

It would be misleading to see these women as cut-off from the local community: neighbourly help was still expected and given in times of crisis such as illness, bereavement or childbirth and daily contacts were maintained at local shops, in gardens and whilst cleaning front paths and sills. The church provided a local focus for a number of respondents through women's groups like the Mother's Union and many recalled a sense of local identity because 'we all moved in at the same time'. (101) Set against this, however, must be the growing emphasis on privacy. Contacts between women were increasingly made outside the home. Few women recalled spending time with women friends or neighbours inside the house and for those, like Mrs. Stewart, who did, such relationships could be ambivalent. Mrs. Stewart enjoyed her friendship with a neighbour but,

it did become a pest because my husband had his lunch hour from one till two...which did make it very awkward. It meant that half of his lunchtime instead of being

able to talk to him I was talking to her you see. So it did become a bit of a bind. (102)

There was a distinct boundary between the home which was reserved for the marital relationship and the outside world where other contacts could be made. The women interviewed appear to have rationalised this in terms of 'respectable' expectations rather than a desire or need for greater marital intimacy. 'Rough' families and those living in the streets went in for 'neighbouring': self-respecting women, so they claimed, were too busy and anyway, as Mrs. Hutchings observed 'we felt we had come up one'. (103)

Conclusion

Smaller families undoubtedly benefited women in terms of financial security and more time. Yet, as we have seen in chapter ~~seven~~ women used these benefits to establish complex routines of housewifery, children were expected to amuse themselves rather than be amused and there was little evidence of an increase in demonstrative affection or child-centred discussion. Mothers remained figures of authority whose aim was to rear healthy, well-disciplined children. They loved their children but the expression of this affection took the form of providing material security and the training, perceived necessary for working-class adulthood. Neither, despite a growing home-centred lifestyle, was there any evidence to suggest that women saw the marital relationship as

their sole locus of emotional fulfilment. Although there was a certain convergence of interest focused on the home - both were committed to building a more comfortable home and family life than they had experienced in childhood - gender roles remained segregated. Husbands were breadwinners, wives 'kept house'. The emotional characteristics of these marriages appear to have been respect, restraint and self-dignity and this must have mitigated against close personal intimacy. Equally, although contacts with the wider community were not missing, these were subject to elaborate codes of behaviour and maintained outside the home and family. 'Respectability' may have appeared a rational solution to poverty and drudgery but the price was, I suspect, inhibition and emotional detachment. Women lost those networks of female support which provided not only material help but that supportive solidarity which might enable them to question the constraining structures of their lives.

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24. Interview Mrs. Walker.
25. Royal Commission on Population gives the following figures for those who only used non-appliance methods. Many couples employed both non-appliance and appliance methods:
- | | Social Class II* | Social Class III* |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Married 1920-24 | 43% | 39% |
| Married 1925-29 | 39% | 48% |
| Married 1930-34 | 34% | 38% |
- *Social Classes II and III here refer to all those employed in skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manual work.
26. Brookes B. Abortion in England 1900-1967 Croom Helm, London, 1988; Gittins Fair Sex pp.149-151; Report of the Interdepartmental Committee on Abortion H.M.S.O., London, 1939; Royal Commission on Population op.cit. pp.165-173.
27. Brookes B. Abortion in England pp.62 and 99.
28. Roberts E. A Woman's Place p.100.
29. Interview Mrs. Hutchings.
30. Interview Mrs. Wilkes.
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35. Interview Mrs. Hutchings.
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37. For a detailed and thought-provoking discussion of these changes see Jeffreys S. The Spinster and Her Enemies.
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55. Interview Mrs. Wilkes.
56. Interview Mrs. Walker.
57. Interview Mrs. Butcher.
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63. Liddiard M. The Mothercraft Manual 1st published Churchill, London, 1928 cited in Newson J. and E. Four Years Old in an Urban Community Allen & Unwin, London, 1968, p 428.
64. Interview Mrs. Hutchings.
65. Oakley A. The Sociology of Housework pp.170-174, Martin Robertson, London, 1974.
66. Interview Mrs. Arthurs.
67. Interview Mrs. Pearce.
68. Interview Mrs. Stewart.
69. Interview Mrs. Butcher.
70. Interview Mrs. Harris.
71. Interview Mrs. Dickens.
72. Interview Mrs. Matthews.
73. Edynbury R. Real Life Problems p.18.
74. Interview Mrs. Fellows.
75. Interview Mrs. Matthews.
76. Interview Mrs. Walker.
77. Jamieson L. 'A case study in the development of the modern family' Chapter 5 also makes this point as a result of the oral evidence she collected.
78. Interview Mrs. Wilkes.
79. Interview Mrs. Hutchings.
80. Interview Mrs. Matthews.
81. Interview Mrs. Walters.
82. Interview Mrs. Walker.
83. Interview Mrs. Mack.
84. Interview Mrs. Smith.
85. Interview Mrs. Crowe.
86. Interview Mrs. Pearce.
87. Interview Mrs. Harris.
88. Interview Mrs. Butcher.
89. Interview Mrs. Walker.
90. Interview Mrs. Kitchin.
91. Interview Mrs. Fellows.
92. Sarsby J. Missuses and Mouldrunners notes a decline in the ideology of the hard-drinking, bullying male, though, of course, it has never gone completely out of fashion. Sarsby speaks of a new lifestyle 'based on the comfortable home, rather than on the split-site home of the threadbare but crowded house and the till-ringing pub.' p.119. She, however, dates this decline from the nineteen fifties whereas my oral

testimony suggests that this style of married life was emerging before the Second World War.

93. Mrs. Walker became more involved with church activities as the children got older, Mrs. Butcher was a keen guider and later ran a Brownie Pack and Mrs. Harris spent much of her spare time on local committees for charity. As much of this occurred beyond the scope of my period I do not intend to examine this community involvement in detail but it is interesting to note a possible connection between 'respectability' and local involvement. This evidence also tends to work against the idea of a cosy self-sufficient domesticity and suggests both a diffusion of the middle-class ideal of philanthropy downwards to these newly affluent families and a continuing role for women in the community.

- 94. Interview Mrs. Jones.
- 95. Interview Mrs. Hutchings.
- 96. Interview Mrs. Jones.
- 97. Interview Mrs. Arthurs.
- 98. Interview Mrs. Walker.
- 99. Interview Mrs. Dickens.
- 100. Interview Mrs. Smith.
- 101. Interview Mrs. Hutchings.
- 102. Interview Mrs. Stewart.
- 103. Interview Mrs. Hutchings.

CONCLUSION

My analysis of the oral evidence reveals that this particular group of working-class women were highly committed to values of 'respectability' and that these values significantly influenced their lives as housewives and mothers. Self-reliance, thrift, self-improvement and restraint played a large part in their choice of husbands - these women married prudently rather than passionately. The same values shaped their attitudes to sexuality and family limitation and the ways in which they reared their children. This commitment to prudence and common-sense brought with it certain rewards; a limited measure of affluence, a sense of status within the working-class and the opportunity to maintain an ordered, comfortable home life in contrast to the chaos, as they perceived it, experienced by poorer or 'rough' families. The opportunity of improved housing and better living conditions reinforced such distinctions and fostered an ideal of family life based on privacy and self-sufficiency - the good tenant of council estates was an extension of the late Victorian ideal of the self-respecting artisan now increasingly focused on the home and its maintenance.

The cardinal values of caution and restraint were passed down to their children who, for the most part, had themselves become stable, 'respectable' citizens in the eyes of their

parents. Indeed a high proportion, notably the sons, had achieved a measure of material success beyond that of their parents - they numbered amongst them a managing director, a small hotel manager and a successful commercial artist. Whilst I did not question respondents directly about their children's lives and cannot therefore draw any firm conclusions, I gained the impression from conversation that daughters inherited their mothers' values which they, in turn, accommodated to post-war and contemporary life.(1) All the women interviewed had contact with their daughters who visited or telephoned regularly, took them out or had them to stay. Many continued the pattern of frequent visiting particularly where the mother was very elderly or widowed - Mrs. Stewart visits her daughter once a week; Mrs. Brown's daughter calls in every day and takes her mother to the old people's Luncheon Club; Mrs. Harris's daughter and son both called while I was interviewing to fetch shopping and go to the Post Office for her, and Mrs. Jones' daughter and grandchildren called while I was interviewing. Further research into the continuing mother/daughter relationship and its role in the socialisation process might suggest significant links between 'respectability' and girls' perceptions of their future role.

Nevertheless, despite improved housing and a limited measure of affluence respondents continued to see the family and their own interests as inseparable. Much ingenuity and hard work went into maintaining and displaying the family's status as

'respectable' and whilst they undoubtedly derived considerable self-esteem and certain material rewards from this, the price may well have been a loss of ease and openness in their personal relationships. A council house or small semi-detached was a very much more self-contained unit than the crowded housing of older areas. Set in its own garden and off the street, it offered opportunities for self-sufficiency that were not possible in the close-knit communities of urban streets. This resulted in pride in one's own house and condemnation of neighbours who failed to meet the required standards of outward show. It also meant the end of that easy visiting which had characterised older neighbourhoods: to hold open house could mean revealing the home and its standards to outside scrutiny and the possibility of becoming the subject of talk. In this way the garden and the external appearance of the house became important, as did the parlour or front room into which privileged visitors might be received. Material privacy might also have led to a closing off of personal intimacy and close contacts between women - the fear of becoming the subject of neighbourly talk worked to emphasise an outward show at the expense of any genuine intimacy. This would be reinforced by the 'respectable' emphasis on reserve which I have noted in both marital and mother/child relationships as well as neighbourly contacts. It may well be that whilst 'respectability' assured material benefits and social status, the price was a somewhat narrow

conformity and lack of genuinely close relationships for this group of women.

'Respectability' was, therefore, not simply about 'keeping up appearances'. These manifestations were the outward signs of a profounder reformulation of women's social identity. The internalisation of 'respectable' values ensured that working-class women would see their primary sphere as the home and family with paid work, outside interests and women's networks as secondary. It also meant that within the family they would see their role as providing physical subsistence and reproduction of those values. In order to fulfil this role it was often necessary to keep emotional intensity at bay: sexual passion, close friendships with other women, intensity over children could threaten the prudential and secure basis women had worked so hard to build. 'Respectability', given the higher living standards of the interwar period, may have paved the way to a materially improved lifestyle. Yet, it also ensured working-class women's constriction to a single sphere and a single, constraining role.

REFERENCE

1. My impressions of mother/daughter relationships in the present are inevitably subjective. They are drawn from observations and conversations with only a few daughters. Mrs. Brown's daughter was present throughout the interview and made a number of contributions; a number of other daughters called in while I was there and Mrs. Stewart's daughter has been known to me for many years.

APPENDIX 1

BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS OF RESPONDENTS

BIRMINGHAM

Mrs. Arthurs D.O.B. 1908. Father's occ. miner. Lived Hednesford, Staffs as child in rented cottage. School leaving age: 14. Occ. prior to marriage: domestic servant. M. 1932. Husband's occ. Mental nurse. Housing after marriage: council house, Allens Cross Farm. Number of siblings: 5. Number of children: 1. Occ. after marriage: casual cleaning.

Mrs. Butcher D.O.B. 1905. Father's occ. policeman. Mother died, reared by stepmother. Lived in rented villa, Sparkbrook, Birmingham. School leaving age: 14. Occ. prior to marriage: Packer at Typhoo Tea. M. 1931. Husband's occ. local authority caretaker. Housing after marriage: council house on Allens Cross Farm. Number of siblings: 2. Number of children: 3. Occ. after marriage: none after birth of first child.

Mrs. Crowe D.O.B. 1919. Father's occ. motor mechanic. Lived central Birmingham as child in back to back. School leaving age: 14. Occ. prior to marriage: wages clerk. M. 1967. Husband's occ. works manager (bodyworker, Austin Motor Co. 1928-40). Lived with parents in council house on Allens Cross Farm - still lives in this house. Number of siblings: 0. None of children: 0. Occ. after W.W.2: own hairdressing business.

Mrs. Godfrey D.O.B. 1914. Father's occ. toolsetter. Mother's occ. capstan operator. Lived rented villa in Selly Oak as child. School leaving age: 14. Occ. prior to marriage: office clerk. M. 1935. Husband's occ. factory operative. Housing after marriage: council house in Selly Oak/Kings Norton. Number of siblings: 5 + 2 died in infancy. Number of children: 2. Occ. after marriage: nil until later.

Mrs. Holder D.O.B. 1912. Father's occ. domestic servant. Mother's occ. domestic servant. Lived Cannock, Staffs as child in rented accommodation. School leaving age: 14. Occ. prior to marriage: nursemaid. M. 1935. Husband's occ. factory worker, Austin Motor Co. Housing after marriage: rented semi-detached on private suburban estate at Rubery, Birmingham. Number of siblings: 7. Number of children: 2. Occ. after marriage: nil till post World War 2.

Mrs. Jones(interviewed for mother) D.O.B. 1922. Father's occ. mental nurse. Mother's occ. small shopkeeper. Lived in private owner-occupied, semi-detached at Rubery, Birmingham.

School leaving age: 14. Occ. prior to marriage: wages clerk. M. 1943. Housing after marriage: owner-occupied semi-detached. Number of siblings: 4 + 1 who died. Number of children: 2
Occ. after marriage: nil till children grown.

Mrs. Kitchin D.O.B. 1916. Father's occ. cannot remember, was unemployed throughout her childhood. Lived central Birmingham in back-to-back. School leaving age: 14. Occ. prior to marriage: kitchen assistant in hotel. M. 1936. Husband's occ. sous-chef in hotel. Housing after marriage: council house on Allens Cross Farm. Number of siblings: 5 + 2 died before respondent born. Number of children: 2. Occ. after marriage: casual, part-time cleaning.

Mrs. Matthews D.O.B. 1909. Father's occ. fishmonger. Mother's occ. cook. Lived rented semi-detached villa at Kings Norton, Birmingham. School leaving age: 14. Occ. prior to marriage: photographer's assistant. M. 1933. Husband's occ. local authority weights and measures inspector. Housing after marriage: small detached built 1933 in Northfield. Number of siblings: 2 + twins died at birth. Number of children: 2. Occ. after marriage: piano teaching at home, helping out in father's shop.

Mrs. Porter (interviewed for mother) D.O.B. 1920. Father's occ. mining surveyor (stepfather for a few years after father's death, he was a chemist). Mother's d.o.b. 1896. Mother's occ. housekeeper/landlady. Lived rented semi-detached on suburban estate at Kings Norton. School leaving age: 14. Occ. on leaving school: factory worker at Cadburys - 'Cadbury's Angel'. M. 1941. Number of mother's siblings: 10. Number of respondent's siblings: 2. Number of children: 3

Mrs. Stewart D.O.B. 1912. Father's occ. postman. Mother's occ. casual cafe work. Lived rented accommodation (thinks Bournville Village Trust) as child. School leaving age: 14. Occ. prior to marriage: wages clerk. M. 1936. Husband's occ. toolmaker. Housing after marriage: rented semi-detached on estate in Northfield (later bought it). Number of siblings: 3. Number of children: 2.

Mrs. Walters (interviewed for mother) D.O.B. 1922. Father's occ. lorry driver. Mother's occ. took in sewing. Lived owner-occupied, semi-detached in Rubery as child. School leaving age: 14. Occ. on leaving school: 'Cadburys Angel' (see above). Number of mother's siblings: 4. Number of respondent's siblings: 2. Number of children: 2

YORK

Mrs. Brown D.O.B. 1895. Father's occ. painter British Rail. Mother's occ. took in washing. Lived terraced house, Leeman

Road as child. School leaving age: 14. Occ. prior to marriage: cream packer, Rowntrees. M. 1920. Husband's occ. night watchman, Rowntrees Fire Brigade. Housing after marriage: council house, Burton Stone Lane. Number of siblings: 7. Number of children: 2. Occ. after marriage: casual seasonal work at Rowntrees.

Mrs. Dickens (interviewed for mother as well as self) D.O.B. 1915. Father's occ. died when respondent in infancy. Mother's occ. casual cleaning/washing. Lived in terraced house on Leeman Road until aged 10, then in council house on Tang Hall. School leaving age: 14. Occ. prior to marriage: factory operative at printers, packer at Rowntrees. M. 1940. Husband's occ. sheet metal worker. Housing after marriage: council house on Tang Hall. Number of siblings: 6. Number of children 3. Occ. after marriage: seasonal work at Rowntrees.

Mrs. Fellows D.O.B. 1916. Father's occ. labourer on Railway. Lived in rented villa on Poppleton Road. School leaving age: 14. Occ. prior to marriage: factory operative, Rowntrees. M. 1942. Husband's occ. builder. Housing after marriage: owner occupied semi-detached. Number of siblings: 3. Number of children: 2. Occ. after marriage: nil till later.

Mrs. Harris D.O.B. 1905. Father's occ. boilermith. Mother's occ. taking in washing. Lived in a court off Gillygate as a child. School leaving age: 14. Occ. prior to marriage: factory operative, Rowntrees. M. 1935. Husband's occ. painter and decorator. Housing after marriage: council house on Burton Stone Lane. Number of siblings 4. Number of children: 3. Occ. after marriage: casual jobs, cleaning etc.

Mrs. Hutchings D.O.B. 1904. Father's occ. grocer. Mother's occ. domestic service. Lived in terraced house in Bishophill as child. School leaving age: 13. Occ. prior to marriage: clerk in insurance firm. M. 1929. Husband's occ. grocer. Housing after marriage: subsidised private semi-detached on Tang Hall. Number of siblings: 4 + 2 died in infancy. Number of children: 2. Occ. after marriage: nil.

Mrs. Mack D.O.B. 1904. Father's occ. soldier. Lived in rented rooms near Fulford barracks as child. School leaving age: 14. Occ. prior to marriage: various factory jobs at Rowntrees. M. 1927. Husband's occ. driver for wood merchant. Housing after marriage: council house, Burton Stone Lane. Number of siblings: 2. Number of children: 1 + 1 who died in infancy. Occ. after marriage: went back to Rowntrees part-time after the Second World War.

Mrs. Pearce D.O.B. 1903. Father's occ. tailor. Lived in rented cottage in village near Stoke-on-Trent as a child. School leaving age: 13. Occ. prior to marriage: shopwork. M. 1929 (divorced in 1931: remarried soon after). Second

husband's occ. taxi proprietor. Housing after marriage: owner-occupied semi-detached in Scarborough. Number of siblings: 2. Number of children: 2 (1 stepchild). Occ. after marriage: took in boarders.

Mrs. Smith D.O.B. 1901. Father's occ. brass furnacer. Mother's occ. domestic service/casual cleaning and taking in washing.. Lived in court in central York as a child. School leaving age: 14. Occ. prior to marriage: factory operative, Rowntrees. M. 1929. Husband's occ. engine driver. Housing after marriage: council house on Burton Stone Lane. Number of siblings: 5 (2 killed in World War I). Number of children: 2 (? 9 miscarriages). Occ. after marriage: shopwork, casual cleaning, later hospital cleaning.

Mrs. Walker D.O.B. 1904. Father's occ. woodcutting machinist. Mother's occ. milliner. Lived in terraced housing in the Groves (central York) as a child. School leaving age: 14. Occ. prior to marriage: photographer's assistant. M. 1931. Husband's occ. signals and telecommunications engineer, British Rail. Housing after marriage: council house, Tang Hall estate. Number of siblings: 3. Number of children: 2. Occ. after marriage: nil.

Mrs. Wilkes D.O.B. 1913. Father's occ. farmer. Mother's occ. 'worked on land'. Some confusion about where lived as a child. School leaving age: 14. Occ. prior to marriage: domestic service/farm servant. M. 1932. Husband's occ. soldier. Housing after marriage: council house, Burton Stone Lane. Number of siblings: 3. Number of children: 2. Occ. after marriage: casual work on land/cleaning.

Note: I have included mothers' occupations where the information is reliable. Many respondents could not remember when, where and at what their mothers had worked. Where this is the case I have left this blank, though it may well be that their mothers engaged in some form of hidden work.

APPENDIX 2

SCHEDULE OF QUESTIONS ASKED

Childhood

What was your father's occupation? What was your mother's occupation? How many brothers and sisters were there? Where did you live as a child? What kind of house was it? Can you describe it to me?

As a child did you have to do domestic chores? Tell me about the chores you did. Did your brothers? Did your father help out in the home? How did you feel about this? Were you ever kept off school to help with chores or look after the family?

Did your mother work? What did she do? Do you remember her doing washing for others, or cleaning, or looking after children? (If she worked) Who looked after you?

Was your father ever unemployed, on strike?

Was your mother strict? Was your father strict? What kinds of things were they strict about? Do you remember your parents cuddling you, reading to you, playing with you?

Did your father go out by himself? Did your mother? Did they go out together? What did your mother do in the evening? What did your father do in the evening? What did you do? Were you allowed out? Did you play in the street? Did you have to be in by a certain time? Who did you play with? Where? Tell me about any family outings or holidays if you went on any?

How old were you when you started school? Did you like it? How old were you when you left? Did you gain any qualifications?

Did you do any further education? Did the children you were at school with come from the same sort of homes? What was your favourite subject? What did you dislike most?

Did your parents go to church? If so, which? Did you go to Sunday School? How old were you when you stopped going to Sunday School? Could you do what you liked on Sundays?

Did your grandparents live near when you were little? How often did you see them? Did they help your parents in any ways? Did your parents help them? Repeat for other relatives if appropriate.

Adolescence

When you left school did you choose your job? If not, who did? What sort of work was it? How many hours did you work? Did you work on Saturdays? How much were you paid? Did you enjoy your work?

Did you give part of your wages to your mother, your father? If so how much? How much pocket money did you get? What did you use your pocket money for?

When you went to work did you have to do less domestic chores? Did you have more spare time? What did you do in your spare time? Where did you go? With whom? Did you have friends at work, did you go out with them? Where did you go?

What time did you have to be home?
Did you go to the cinema, to dances? How often? What sort of films did you like? What sort of dances did you like? Can you describe going to the cinema or to a dance?
Did either of your parents explain about birth and sex to you? Your mother? Your father? Did your mother tell you about periods? If not who did? How did you find out?

Courtship and Marriage

Can you remember when you first started going out with boys? Where did you go? How did you meet boys? Did your parents have any rules about going out with boys?
How did you meet your husband? How long did you go out with him before you were married? What did your parents think of him? What sort of boy did you look for as a future husband?
Where did you go when you were courting?
How old were you when you got married? Do you think it was the right age?
Before you got married did you save money (either of you), know where you'd live, talk about how many children you'd like, when you'd have them?
Did you want to work after marriage? Why? What did your husband think about you working?
What was his occupation when you married? Had he had other jobs? Can you remember how much he was earning when you got married? Was he ever unemployed, on strike? (if yes) How long? When? Why? Who paid the bills? How did you make decisions about spending money? What did you pay for?

Housing

Where did you live when you got married? For how long? What kind of house was it, can you describe it? Repeat for all moves. How many rooms were there? Was there an inside toilet, a bathroom? What sort of heating, lighting? Was there a garden? Who used the garden? Did you grow vegetables, flowers?
If renting, how much rent did you pay? How did you pay the rent? If mortgage, how much? Did you like your new house? Was it far from shops, buses, parks etc.? Was your husband far from his work? Did you know your neighbours? Did you visit them? Did they visit you? Did they ever help you out? Did you ever help them out? In what ways?
How did you get furniture and household items? Did you decorate the house or did the landlord? If you, who did it, you or your husband?
Did you have any of the following - 'fridge, vacuum cleaner, washing machine, iron?
How was it different from where you were brought up?

Married Life

Did you work after marriage? Did you work part-time? Did you ever do cleaning, washing, childminding or anything else for other people? How did this fit in with your housework? What did you use the money for?

Who did the washing, cleaning, shopping, cooking? Did your husband help? What jobs would he do? What jobs wouldn't he do? Did you have a routine with housework? Can you describe it? How long did washing take, cleaning take? What sort of things did you cook? Did you bake bread, cakes? Did you shop every day, once a week? Where? Where else did you go during the day beside the shops? What other things did you do beside cleaning, washing, cooking and shopping? Did you sew, knit? When? Who did you sew and knit for? Which task did you most enjoy? Which did you dislike? What did you do in the evening? Your husband? Did you have a radio? Did you listen much? Did you ever go out together? Where? How often? Did you visit friends, relatives, mother? When? Did they visit you? When? Did they help you in any way? Did you help them? Did you read books, magazines, newspapers? If so which? Did you belong to any clubs? Which? What did you do?

Children

How long were you married before you had children? How many did you have? What sex? Were you satisfied with your family size? Where did you have them, at home, in hospital? Who looked after you, your husband, your mother, others? How did you feed your babies? Did you have a routine? Did a Health Visitor ever call on you? How did you feel about that? Did you ever go to the clinic? What did you go for? Did you ever read baby books? Where did you learn how to bring up children and babies? Who told you what to do? Who did you ask if you wanted help? Did your husband help with changing nappies, feeding? Would he push the pram? Did he take the children out when they were older? Do you think you were strict? As strict as your mother? What kinds of things were you strict about? Cleanliness? Manners? Cheek? Bedtimes? Did you play with your children, read to them, cuddle them? More than your mother, less, about the same? Did you take the children out to the park, the clinic, the shops, the cinema. Where did they usually play? Did you let them play in the street? Did you punish the children if they misbehaved? What kinds of punishment? Did you expect them to help you with household chores? Where did you get their clothing? Did you buy toys for them? Did you and your husband take them on family outings, holidays? Did you bring them up in the same way as your mother had brought you up?

APPENDIX 3

QUESTIONNAIRE

Don't worry if you can't answer all the questions - fill in what you can remember.

Housework - tick or underline your answer

Cooking

Who did the cooking? You Your husband Others (e.g. servants)

What kinds of meals do you remember cooking?
e.g. stews, roasts, etc.

Did you spend a lot of time cooking or only a small amount of time? Lot of time Medium Small amount
Did you bake your own bread or cakes: Bread Cakes Both
Did you use tinned food? Yes Sometimes Never
Did you buy bread and cakes? Yes Sometimes Never
Did you make jam? Yes Sometimes Never
Did you eat meat? Every day Some days Only on Sunday
Did you grow vegetables? Yes No
Did you use tinned vegetables? Yes Sometimes Never

Washing and Ironing

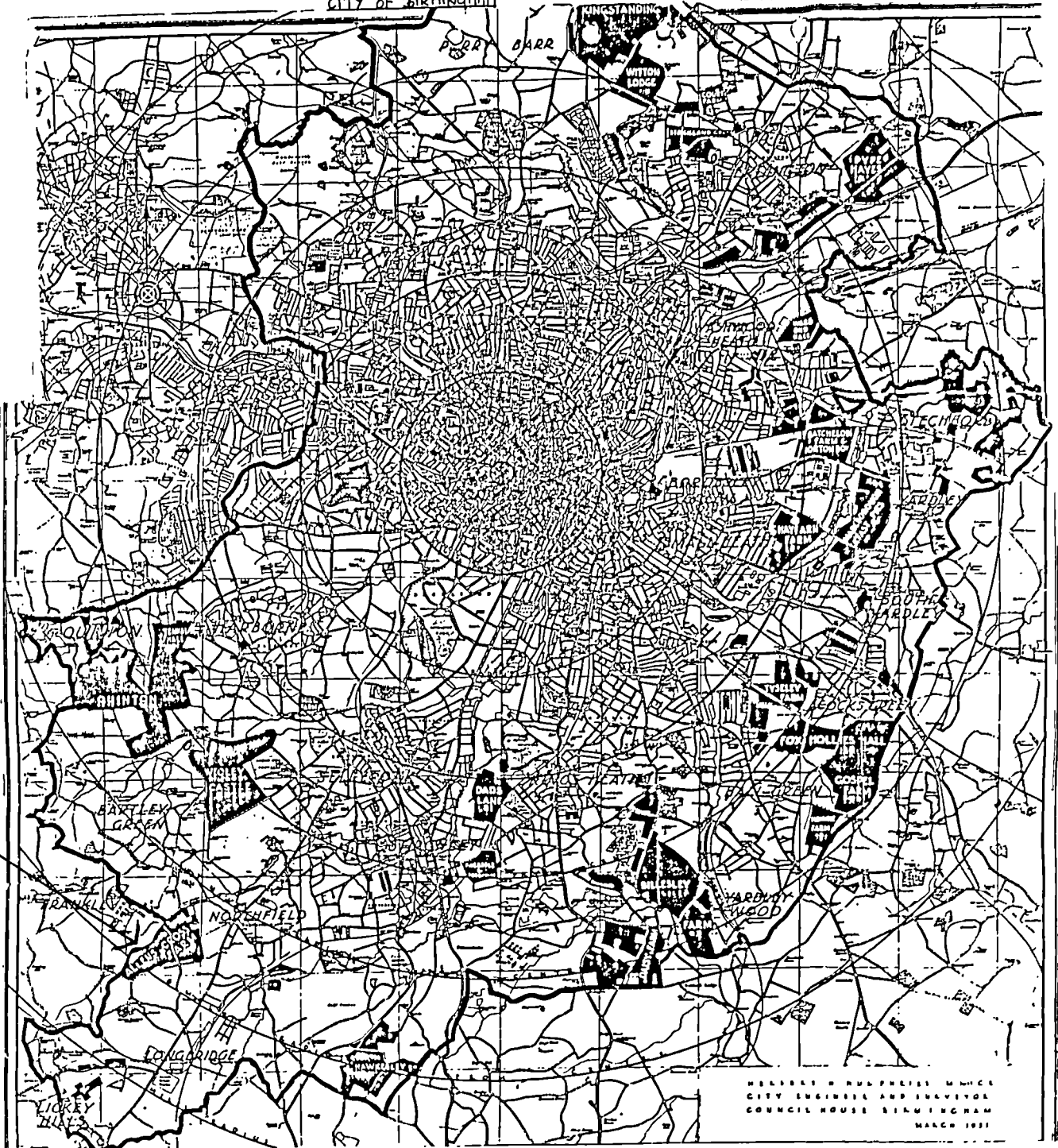
What did you wash in? Sink Copper Washing machine
Where was it kept? Kitchen Outhouse Other
Did you ever use a laundry?
 For sheets etc. Sometimes Always Never
 For clothes Sometimes Always Never
What day did you usually wash on?

Did you use starch Yes No
Did you use blue Yes No
Did you have an electric iron? Yes No
How long did ironing take? All day Half day One hour
Did all the clothes have to be ironed or could some be folded?

Cleaning

On the floors of did you have?	Fitted Carpet	Lino	Rugs	Carpet Squares
Did you have a vaccuum cleaner?	Yes	No		
Did you polish furniture?	Everyday	Once a week		Once a month
Did you dust?	Everyday	Once a week		Once a month
Did you wash floors?	Everyday	Once a week		Once a month
What did you use to wash floors?			
Did you do cleaning on certain days?			
Did you clean in the morning or afternoon or both?			
<u>Sewing and Knitting</u>				
Did you do dressmaking?	A lot	Sometimes		Never
Did you enjoy sewing?	No	Yes		
Did you do knitting?	A lot	Sometimes		Never
Did you enjoy knitting?	No	Yes		
Who did you sew for?	Family	Friends		Yourself
Who did you knit for?	Family	Friends		Yourself
Where did you get patterns from?	Shop	Magazine		Friends
When did you sew or knit?	Morning	Afternoon		Evening
<u>General</u>				
Who liked the house to be clean and tidy?	You	Your husband		Both
Did you like housework?	No	Sometimes		Yes
Which task did you dislike most?			
Which did you like most?			
Do you think housework was easier for you than for your mother?			
Do you think housework is easier for women today?			

APPENDIX 4
CITY OF BIRMINGHAM

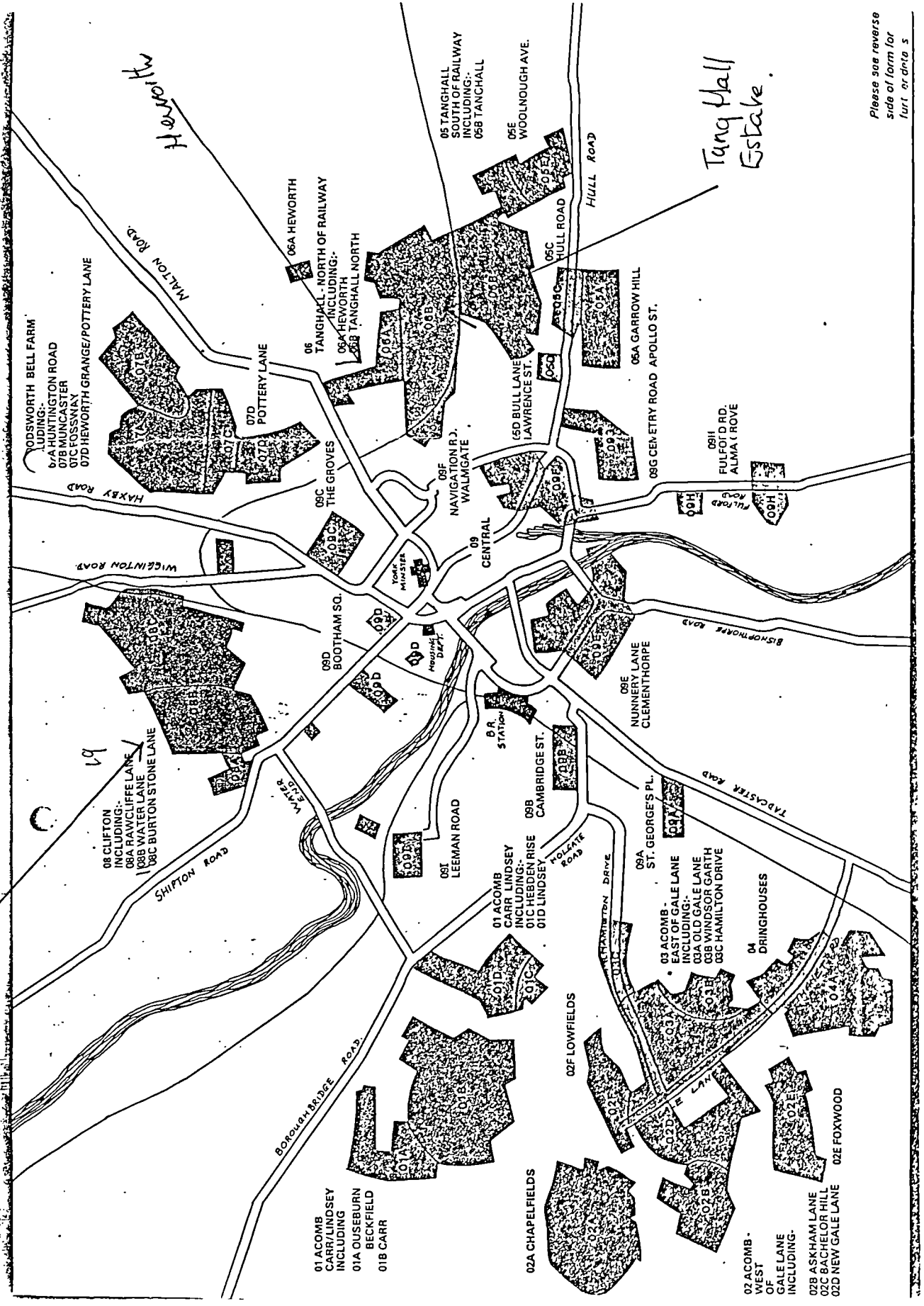


Allens Cross Farm.

HOLLIST H. AND PRESS MANCE
CITY ENGINEER AND SURVEYOR
COUNCIL HOUSE BIRMINGHAM
MARCH 1931

APPENDIX 5.

Burton Stone
Lane Estate



Please see reverse
side of form for
furl. or deta. 5

APPENDIX 6

Weekly Earnings and Pocket Money at aged 14, 1914-1936, as remembered by respondents

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Wage</u>	<u>Pocket Money</u>
Packer (Rowntrees)	6s. 7½d	6d.
Clerk, Insurance Office	6s. 3d.	-
Photographer's Assistant	4s. 6d.*	-
Packer (Typhoo Tea)	9s. 0d.*	2/6d
Hand coverer (Rowntrees)	10s. 3d.	3d.
Shopfloor	11s. 0d	1/-
Nursemaid	5s. 0d.	-
Kitchen Assistant (Hotel)	7s. 6d.	3d.
Hairdresser's Assistant	6s. 6d.	2/0d.
Factory operative	10s. 0d.	-
Clerk in Laundry	7s. 6d.	-
Hand coverer (Cadburys)**	10s. 6d.	2/6d.
Hand coverer (Cadburys)	9s. 6d.	-

*4s.6d. went up to 5s. after one month and 9s.0d. went up to 10s. after a month.

** 10s.6d. was the wage paid in 1936, the other is for 1934.

Note: Neither of the women who were in domestic service could recall their rate of pay. Anthony S. Women's place in Industry and Home Routledge, London, 1932, pp.30-34 states that the juvenile rate (under 18) for resident domestic servants in the South of England was 7s. per week. Anthony also cites juvenile shop assistant rates as 8s. to 9s. per week in London for a 53-54 hour week, rising to 12s at age 18. Such rates were probably lower outside London.

APPENDIX 7

LENGTH OF COURTSHIPS

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age at which began courting</u>	<u>Age at marriage</u>
Mrs Arthurs	16	24
Mrs. Butcher	20	26
Mrs. Crowe	28	48
Mrs. Godfrey	-	21
Mrs. Holder	20	23
Mrs. Kitchin	17	20
Mrs. Matthews	19	24
Mrs. Stewart	17	24
Mrs. Brown	17	25
Mrs. Dickens	19	25
Mrs. Fellows	18	26
Mrs. Harris	15	30*
Mrs. Hutchings	18	25
Mrs. Mack	16	23
Mrs. Pearce	-	26
Mrs. Smith	19	28
Mrs. Walker	23	26
Mrs. Wilkes	17	19

* Mrs. Harris courted a man for 15 years but actually married another man whom she'd only known three weeks.

** I have excluded three respondents who were married during the Second World War. All three were married at 20 or 21.

Out of 16 cases where the age at which respondents started courting was remembered:

1	started at	15
2	started at	16
4	"	17
2	"	18
3	"	19
2	"	20
1	"	23
1	"	28

Therefore 50% began courting before the age of 18, and 75% before the age of 20.

The average age at first marriage of all women interviewed was 24, this includes three who married during the Second World War for whom their age at marriage was 20 and 21 and one who did not marry until the age of 48 when her parents died, but who had been courting 20 years.

APPENDIX 8

Size of respondent's family of origin and number of children born to respondents

<u>Name</u>	<u>No. of children in family of origin</u>	<u>No. of children in family of marriage</u>
Mrs. Arthurs	6	1
Mrs. Butcher	3	3
Mrs. Crowe	1	0
Mrs. Godfrey	5 + 2 died in infancy	2
Mrs. Holder	7	2
Mrs. Jones	4 + 1 died in infancy	2
Mrs. Kitchin	5 + 2 died in infancy	2
Mrs. Matthews	2 + twins stillborn	2
Mrs. Porter	3	3
Mrs. Stewart	4	2
Mrs. Walters	3	2
Mrs. Brown	8	2
Mrs. Dickens	7	3
Mrs. Fellows	4	2
Mrs. Harris	5	3
Mrs. Hutchings	4 + 2 died in infancy	2
Mrs. Mack	3	1 + 1 died in infancy
Mrs. Pearce	3	2 (1 stepchild)
Mrs. Smith	6	2
Mrs. Walker	4	2
Mrs. Wilkes	4	2
Average size of family excluding infant deaths	4.3	2.0
Average size of family including infant deaths	4.76	2.04

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