

Making Home

Working-Class Perceptions of Space, Time and Material Culture in Family Life, 1900-1955

**Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Leicester**

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Abstract

Making Home

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Life, 1900-1955**

Lucy Faire

The thesis aims to provide a comprehensive study of working-class home life in the first half of the century. It examines the autonomy of working-class domestic culture by questioning assumptions of emulation and 'trickle down' and assesses the class experience of home. It also shows the diversity of domestic experience within the working class as determined by age, gender, status, life cycle, occupation and geographical location. The subjective nature of home life is stressed throughout the thesis. Its main source, over 100 autobiographies, enables working-class people to describe their own experiences. This source shows how people actively participated in the construction of their own domestic environment as well as how they were subjected to it. Home life is examined through four main concepts: space; time; material culture; and family. The first concept examines the extent, uses and meaning of space to the families in the autobiographies. The second analyses the objects they had in their homes, how they acquired them and which ones they considered were special either to themselves or to members of their family. The third examines domestic rhythms and the allocation of tasks in the home, and the fourth family relationships. The emphasis is on continuities within the period as much as change, and on male as well as female experiences of home. Throughout, the division between the so-called public and private spheres is questioned and the thesis concludes by arguing that these terms are particularly inappropriate for working-class home life in the period 1900-1955.

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1

INTRODUCTION

Chapter One

Houses or Homes?

We spend the greater part of our lives in our homes, with our families around us, and this very familiarity causes us to accept them without considering how they affect our lives, our relationships with other people, and the development of our ideas.¹

This is a history of working-class home life in the period between 1900-1955. The central aim of the thesis is to understand home life as it was perceived by working-class people and to examine the class basis of their construction of the domestic environment. Although it is about home life, it is not just a history of women, but of children and men as well. There have been various definitions of what home and family life entails. Jennifer Mason conceptualised home in terms of: the material (location rather than objects); temporal (over time, daily); metaphysical (ideological/values) and social (relationships between people).² Allan and Crow have defined home life as “[w]hat goes on inside houses”, while John Berger sees home as “built” of habits and emotions; for him homes are not dwellings.³ Schuurman considers home life in terms of domesticity, which he describes as the exertion and care in the interest of house and household; the devotion to home life in the family circle; and cosiness (“de bemoeienis in en zorg voor de belangen van huis en huishouding; de gehechtheid aan het leven thuis in de familiekring; en gezelligheid”).⁴ Unlike Mason, his emphasis is on the material side of home life in terms of objects, rather than location, and how these objects reflect emotional involvement in family life.

I have taken home life to include: family relationships; material culture; working-class daily rhythms; the physical fabric of the house; and the social and

¹ Dennis Chapman, “People and Their Homes”, *Current Affairs* 108 (n.d., c.1950s), p. 3.

² Jennifer Mason, “Reconstructing the Public and Private: the Home and Marriage in Later Life” in G. Allan and G. Crow, eds., *Home and Family: Creating the Domestic Sphere* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 103.

³ Graham Allan and Graham Crow, eds., *Home and Family: Creating the Domestic Sphere* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 1; John Berger, “A Home is Not a House”, *New Society*, June (1983), pp. 462-463.

⁴ A. J. Schuurman, “Is Huiselijkheid Typisch Nederlands?”, *Bijdragen en Mededelingen Betreffende de Geschiedenis Der Nederlanden*, CVII 4 (1992), p. 745.

spatial functions of housing all of which combine to make a class experience of home. Although I do not go as far as Berger and reject the material fabric of the home, neither do I agree with Allan and Crow that home life necessarily happens within the walls of the home. The last point is a reflection of the class of the inhabitants and the historical context of the homes I describe.

I chose to study the working class because although they form the largest group of the population, popular conceptions of domestic culture and lifestyle are based on the experiences of the dominant minority. This is well illustrated by a BBC news report last year (1997), about a Sheffield woman whose electricity had been cut off for twenty years. She had lived "without a television, 'fridge or proper lighting", cooking by gas and using candles and oil lamps, living what the reporter described as a "nineteenth-century lifestyle."⁵ While it may have been the lifestyle of the wealthier middle class in the nineteenth century, it ignores the fact that the majority of the urban working class did not get gas until the first two decades of the century (and rural areas later than this) and that candles and oil lamps were still being used in homes in the 1950s. Even where the families had electricity, only a very small percentage of the population had televisions before the mid 1950s, and only one third had refrigerators by the mid 1960s. The main reason why I originally chose the period 1900-1955, was that I assumed that many of these changes in technology associated with the twentieth century were altering working-class domestic experiences by 1955. This happened to a limited degree, but generally the experience of the Sheffield woman was the experience of most of the working class in the first half of this century and beyond. Because the working class are the majority of the population, their domestic experiences, rather than that experienced by only a minority, should form the common perception of home.

Another popular perception of home is that it is a pleasant place to be, eulogised in mottoes like "home sweet home" or "an Englishman's home is his castle" (an ironic saying in the context of the historiography of domestic life which has largely excluded male perceptions). However, Allan and Crow have pointed out that "the home is also the site of conflict and tension, argument and abuse."⁶ Although a great deal is known about dwellings, the history of home life and its actual, diverse experiences have been far less studied. The studies which do exist cut across several

⁵ Radio Four News, 15/7/97, 7 p.m.

⁶ Graham Allan and Graham Crow, "Constructing the Domestic Sphere: The Emergence of the Modern Home in Post War Britain" in H. Corr and L. Jamieson, eds., *Politics of Everyday Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), p. 11.

disciplines. Anthropology, ethnology, history, architectural and design history each offer different perspectives and render a survey of the subject problematical. Previous research is, therefore, divided into two categories. The first deals with external aspects of housing such as the planning, construction and design of dwellings. The second concerns the internal components of the dwelling: how people lived in and furnished their homes. This division is based on the "dual historical perspective" of Roderick Lawrence in which the "external" aspects of housing are viewed as the "macro" (or a 'top-down') approach and the use of dwellings by inhabitants ('bottom-up') as the "micro" approach to housing.⁷

Outside: The "Macro" Approach

One of the broader themes of housing history in the nineteenth and twentieth century is the impact that increasing urbanisation and industrialisation had upon the type and quality of houses built. From the start of the nineteenth century, the substantial increase in urban population generated a huge demand for houses which speculators and landowners exploited by putting up cheap, compacted and poor quality buildings for the working class. Contrasting with this trend was the de-urbanisation of middle-class housing, as the middle classes continued their flight to the low-density suburbs. With few or no sanitary facilities the housing conditions of the poor fostered infectious diseases. By the second half of the nineteenth century even the *laissez-faire* spirit of the Victorian era could no longer tolerate this and the authorities felt obliged to intervene in the interests of public health. Thus, there was increasing public intervention into the ordering of the urban environment both in the layout of dwellings and in the provision of necessary amenities. Building byelaws laid down the regulations for the urban layout of these dwellings, but also set standards for the individual buildings. The reasons for this change in policy have also been explained by increasing fears that the city was 'out of control': Daunton has argued that bye-law housing was an attempt to open up the city, making it more accessible so that the authorities would be better able to regulate it.⁸ At the same time the houses themselves became more private and self-contained. Mark Schaevers has developed this argument further in his study of working-class housing in Belgium. He suggested

⁷ Roderick Lawrence, "What Make a House a Home?", *Environment and Behavior* XIX 2 (1987), p. 165. Lawrence considers furnishing as part of the 'macro' perspective since he believes that it is not about user studies, but I have included it as part of the "micro" approach because it is located inside the home and demonstrates what people feel about it.

⁸ Martin Daunton, "Public Place and Private Space: The Victorian City and Working-Class Household" in D. Fraser and A. Sutcliffe, eds., *The Pursuit of Urban History* (London: Arnold, 1983), p. 218.

that the building of single-family dwellings on open-ended streets was a deliberate attempt to stifle working-class communication and thus keep urban unrest at bay.” Therefore, house type and housing in relation to the wider urban context have received a great deal of attention from historians, architects and geographers. They have also assessed the effect of changes in infrastructure upon housing style and density. For example, the arrival of the railway caused the urban landscape to alter by removing many dwellings (often ‘slums’) and frequently causing houses in adjacent districts to be over-crowded.¹⁰ On the other hand, the emergence of a tram network also encouraged the building of suburban housing for better-off artisans and lower middle classes since it made such areas more accessible.¹¹ This population movement was accelerated in the inter-war period with increasing incomes and helps to explain the large number of suburban-semis that appeared in this period.

Another broad theme in housing history examines the production of the dwellings. This entails an assessment of the building industry: the economic factors that influenced housing production and the forms of construction and types of materials which were used. Dyos has argued that the quality of urban dwellings was very much dependent upon local factors and industry and that these had a greater impact than the international market economy.¹² Local supply of materials and the form of land tenure present in a particular urban centre have been used to explain regional diversity in housing.¹³ It has also been stressed that the building industry was subject to considerable fluctuations which affected the quality and uniformity of dwellings. Subsequent research has shown that there was no parallel between house

* Mark Schaevers, “‘Veel meer dan huizen bouwen’: Belgische arbeidershuisvesting en politiek gezien vanuit Foucault”; Marleen Meulenbergs and Lionel Devlieger, “Stad and Moraliteit: paternalisme in de negentiende eeuw” (Paper presented to Studio Open Stad Seminars, Antwerpen, 1993); Lucy Faire, “‘Niets Gaat Boven Eigen Haard’ (Nothing is Better Than Your Own Hearth)” (Unpublished Exhibition Catalogue for “Inside/Outside: Greetings From Stuivenberg”, ANTWERPEN ‘93).

¹⁰ John Kellet, *The Impact of Railways on Victorian Cities* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969).

¹¹ A. D. Ochojna, “Lines of Class Distinction: an Economic and Social History of the British Tramcar with special reference to Edinburgh and Glasgow” (Edinburgh: Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, 1974).

¹² See Rodger and Morris for discussion on the “Atlantic economy” hypothesis and Dyos’s argument for the importance of local variations in building industry: Robert Morris and Richard Rodger, “An introduction to British Urban History, 1820-1914” in R. J. Morris and R. Rodger, eds., *The Victorian City: A Reader in British Urban History, 1820-1914* (London: Longman, 1993), pp. 1-39.

¹³ Sutcliffe argues that the prevalence of ‘feu’ in Scotland resulted in the building of tenements while the leasehold system present in London encouraged landowners to build single family houses: Sutcliffe, “Introduction” in Anthony Sutcliffe, ed., *Multi-Storey Living: The British Working-Class Experience* (London: Croom Helm, 1974), pp. 12-13.

type and tenure, although it could still create obstacles for the building industry.¹⁴ Discussions of rural housing have also considered the question of who produced the dwellings and this has been related to the question of land ownership in a particular parish. 'Open' parishes in which the land was owned by several small landowners have been traditionally seen as containing dwellings of worse quality than those in 'closed' parishes where the land was held by one or two great landowners.¹⁵ Regarding construction and building materials, historians of rural housing have perhaps been more successful in stressing the regional diversity of materials and the impact that these may have had upon life in the dwelling.¹⁶ These regional variations in materials declined with improved transportation and the mass production of building materials by firms such as the London Brick Company and other large regional producers. This resulted in the increasing standardisation of house exteriors. Historians of twentieth-century housing have shown a great deal of interest in experimental construction of dwellings and this is a standard element of many housing and architectural histories.¹⁷

A central discussion point in the historiography of nineteenth-century and twentieth-century housing concerns the emergence of state housing. Dyos saw the increasing numbers of philanthropic houses built in the second half of the nineteenth century as further inspired by the rise in municipal socialism in the 1880s: he claims that this made council housing inevitable in 1918.¹⁸ On the other hand, Tarn has argued that rather than council housing being a logical outcome of philanthropic

¹⁴ Richard Rodger, *Housing in Urban Britain, 1780-1914* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1989), p.15.

¹⁵ B. A. Holderness, "'Open' and 'Close' Parishes in England in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries", *Agricultural History Review* XX (1978), pp. 126-139; Gordon Mingay, "The Rural Slum" in Martin Gaskell, ed., *Slums* (Leicester: University Press, 1990), pp. 92-143; Sarah Banks, "Nineteenth-Century Scandal or Twentieth-Century Model? A New Look at 'Open' and 'Close' Parishes", *Economic History Review*, 2nd. Series XLI (1988), pp. 51-73.

¹⁶ See Gordon Mingay's discussion in "The Rural Slum" in Martin Gaskell, ed., *Slums*, pp. 92-4; L. Faire, "Vernacular and Domestic Living Conditions in the Victorian Countryside" (Leicester: Unpublished M.A. Dissertation, 1991). Muthesius focuses mainly on house plans rather than materials in his discussion of regional diversity of small houses: Stefan Muthesius, *The English Terraced House* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982).

¹⁷ For some examples see Ravetz's discussion of Leeds's Quarry Hill flats in "From Working Class Tenement to Modern Flat: Local Authorities and Multi-Storey Housing Between the Wars" in Sutcliffe, ed., *Multi-Storey Living*, pp. 129, 131-132; Brenda Vale on the construction of prefabricated dwellings in her *Prefabs: A History of the UK Temporary Housing Programme* (London: E.&F.N. Spon, 1995); Michael Harrison on housing experiments in building materials and construction in "Bournville, 1919-1939", *Planning History* XVII 3 (1995), pp. 22-31.

¹⁸ Cited in Martin Daunton's "Introduction" in Daunton, ed., *Councillors and Tenants: Local Authority Housing in English Cities, 1919-1939* (Leicester: University Press, 1984), pp. 2-3.

ventures, it was the failure of the latter that resulted in the provision of state housing.¹⁹ Daunton has attacked such arguments because "the history of housing should involve far more than a Whig interpretation of the coming of the council initiative."²⁰ Both he and Rodger have pointed out that philanthropic housing was a continuation of the policy of *laissez-faire* since it was based on paternalistic principles and never intended to provide housing for any other than the 'deserving poor'. They believe that the advent of council housing was by no means inevitable and was the result of specific economic conditions. The building industry was beset by obstacles in the last decades of the nineteenth century: rising land costs and taxation; and increasing building costs to meet the standards set by the bye-law housing acts. Thus by 1914, interest in building working-class houses had waned considerably because it was no longer a profitable venture.²¹ Combined with rent control and a cessation in house building during the First World War, this meant the state was forced to step in to avert a crisis in 1919.²²

Histories of twentieth-century housing begin where the histories of the nineteenth-century housing ended - with the arrival of municipal housing. These studies focus on the politics and economics of the production and construction of local authority housing: how local and central government officials responded to housing problems and how they attempted to alleviate them. Much of this is based on discussion of state housing acts and reports, especially the 1918 Tudor Walters, 1944 Dudley and 1961 Parker Morris Reports, which laid down the standards for local authority houses, how they should be financed and what style the dwellings should take.²³ Daunton has argued that these studies have concentrated too much on policy and the level of state intervention and has called for greater discussion of the

¹⁹ Cited in Daunton, "Introduction" in *Councillors and Tenants*, p. 4.

²⁰ Martin Daunton, "Public Place and Private Space: The Victorian City and Working-Class Household" in D. Fraser and A. Sutcliffe, (eds.), *The Pursuit of Urban History* (London: Arnold, 1983), p. 232.

²¹ Richard Rodger, "Political Economy, Ideology and the Persistence of Working-Class Housing Problems in Britain, 1850-1914", *International Review of Social History* XXXII (1987), p. 134; Daunton, "Introduction" in Daunton, ed., *Councillors and Tenants*, pp. 3-7.

²² Early council housing was also intended for the respectable poor. The difference was that it was funded by government subsidies.

²³ M. Swenarton, *Homes Fit For Heroes: The Politics and Architecture of Early State Housing in Britain* (London: Heineman, 1981); Gillian Darley, "Pattern Book to Design Guide - Dictation or Suggestion?", *Built Environment* V 1 (1979), pp. 12-21; Alison Ravetz, "The Home of Woman: A View From the Interior", *Built Environment* 1X 1 (1984), pp. 8-17. Nearly half of Alison Ravetz's *The Place of Home: English Domestic Environments 1914-2000* (London: E.&F.N. Spon, 1995) is devoted to housing policy.

Houses or Homes?

relationship between the council and their tenants.²⁴ However, Daunton stills sees the inhabitants as tenants rather than home dwellers and thus this is still very much an 'external' viewpoint.

Not all twentieth-century housing policy revolved around building houses; much of it was concerned with defining 'unfit' houses that should be removed. This aspect of state policy has received less attention than the creation of new houses, despite the fact that slum clearance exceeded the building of council housing in the 1930s. Because the studies discuss the deficiencies of certain types of housing, they also include information on living conditions in the houses, utilising the writings of social observers who generally did not have to live in them. Jim Yelling has used a few autobiographies to understand the inhabitants' experience of living in 'slums' in terms of room usage. This is, however, only a small part of a study whose main aim is to explain how the authorities categorised slums and what was the regional distribution of slums in London.²⁵

Recently there have been more attempts, usually by architects or designers, to assess the design element of housing. These studies examine the ideologies behind the internal layout of the dwellings and the value system on which their design was based. Feminist architects, in particular, have denied that design exists in a vacuum as 'art' and stress that it is culturally and politically determined being a reflection of the values of male, middle-class architects. Thus, housing was designed to reflect a middle-class ideal of living: an isolated, nuclear family cared for in the private sphere by mother and in the public sphere by father.²⁶ This division of public and private did not only occur between the home and the outside world, but there were also public and private divisions within the home. Thus, the private rooms were usually at the back of the terraced house and the 'public' rooms at the front.²⁷ Feminist historians have sought to show that architecture was also instrumental in controlling and moulding the way men and women should live. When planning working-class housing, male, middle-class designers and policy makers produced dwellings that encouraged a

²⁴ Daunton, *Councillors and Tenants*, p. 25. *His House and Home in the Victorian City: Working-Class Housing 1850-1914* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983) is more sympathetic to the experiences of the dwellers.

²⁵ Jim Yelling, "The Metropolitan Slum: London 1918-51" in Gaskell, ed., *Slums*, pp. 186-233.

²⁶ For example, Matrix, *Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment* (London: Pluto Press, 1984).

²⁷ Daunton, "Public Place and Private Space"; C. E. Clark, "Domestic Architecture as an Index to Social History: The Romantic Revival and the Cult of Domesticity in America 1840-1870", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* VII (1976), pp. 33-66.

middle-class lifestyle with its adherence to gender divisions.²⁸ Kirsi Saarikangas has explained how these attitudes were manifested in the design of the Finnish type-planned houses. She has demonstrated that this housing was designed to foster and protect the working-class nuclear family in the post-war period when Finland's population was in decline. The spatial arrangement of the house was organised on the assumption that the wife would remain at home and do all the domestic work; the kitchen was designed for the averaged-sized Finnish woman and was attached to the children's room which stressed her maternal role.²⁹ Marion Roberts has made a similar argument with regards to British housing which she sees as the "the key site of gender division and subordination" since both owner-occupied and state housing "bolstered the male-dominated nuclear family."³⁰ The drawback of this perspective was the failure to recognise that men, and especially working-class men who do not produce or design homes, have their lives and roles prescribed by architects as much as women do.

Although the main focus of these studies are the attitudes and aims of planners and policy makers, usually some attempt is made to understand how inhabitants may have experienced space. Daunton's research on nineteenth-century working-class homes has a chapter on space usage and domesticity.³¹ Feminist historians have examined in detail the Women's Sub-Committee to the 1918 Tudor Walters Report, which interviewed working-class women to try and discover what they considered necessary for their homes.³² Marion Roberts has one chapter that utilises oral history to try to understand how the inhabitants of a new 1950s housing estate viewed the design of the flats when they first moved in and how this layout affected their domestic patterns.³³ Michael Harrison's recent article on housing in inter-war Bournville concludes by looking at what the inhabitants felt about the new housing

²⁸ Marion Roberts, *Living in a Man-Made World: Gender Assumptions in Modern Housing Design* (London: Routledge, 1991) and "Gender and Housing: The Impact of Design", *Built Environment* XVI 4 (1990), pp. 257-268. Louise Christie discusses how this domestic ideology influenced the design of council housing, and how the design was used to encourage the working classes to adopt middle-class ideology in "Gender, Design and Ideology in Council Housing: Urban Scotland 1917-1944", *Bulletin of the International Planning History Society* XV 3 (1993), pp. 6-13.

²⁹ Kirsi Saarikangas, *Model Houses for Model Families: Gender, Ideology and the Modern Dwelling. The Type-planned Houses of the 1940s in Finland* (Helsinki: S.S.H., 1993).

³⁰ Roberts, *Living in a Man-Made World*, pp. 1, 7.

³¹ Daunton, *House and Home in the Victorian City*.

³² Christie, "Gender, Design and Ideology in Council Housing"; Ravetz, "A View From the Interior".

³³ Roberts, *Living in a Man-Made World*.

using Mass Observation's *An Enquiry into People's Homes*.³⁴ However, the main parts of the article are on more traditional subjects: finance, construction and town planning, and as with Roberts and Saarikangas, the central concern of the study is still policy and design.³⁵ Although Roberts and Saarikangas show clearly how design can dictate lifestyle, the relegation of user studies means that they undermine the "hidden transcript" whereby people contest the attempts to control them, or are unable to live up to the expectations of the designers.³⁶

Inside: The "Micro" Approach

In France, the *Annaliste* approach to history which focuses on *mentalité*, has generated a number of studies concerned with understanding how people lived and experienced their everyday lives.³⁷ Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou* considers how peasants described their dwellings and daily lives, and how they structured their space and time; these perceptions are given meaning by relating them to religious and superstitious beliefs.³⁸ Barthélemy and Contamine have examined the changes in domestic space during the medieval period, the meaning in the layout of rooms and their names. The period of these studies is often medieval or early modern and this applies to histories of material culture as well. Daniel Roche has considered consumption patterns and material goods of the poorer population of Paris, while Annik Pardailhé-Galabrun has assessed how objects affected the spatial arrangement of the dwellings. She has related objects to the way that people lived in their homes and has used them to analyse how material goods altered according to class, period and region.³⁹ Outside France, Schuurman has related ideas of 'huiselijkheid' (domesticity) with the objects in Dutch homes. He has shown how changes in, and

³⁴ Harrison, "Bournville, 1919-1939".

³⁵ Young discusses the affect of women's paid labour on the home and the multi-functional uses of rooms due to lack of separation between night and day-time activities in the tenements: Jean K. Young, "From 'Laissez-Faire' to 'Homes Fit For Heroes': Housing in Dundee, 1862-1919" (St. Andrew's: Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, 1991).

³⁶ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

³⁷ E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village, 1294-1324* (French 1978, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980).

³⁸ D. Barthélemy and P. Contamine, "Civilising the Fortress: From the Eleventh to the Thirteenth Century" in P. Ariès and G. Duby, *A History of Private Life II: Revelations of the Medieval World* (French 1985, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1988), pp. 397-423.

³⁹ Daniel Roche, *The People of Paris: an Essay in Popular Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (French 1981, Leamington Spa: Berg Publishers Ltd., 1987); Annik Pardailhé-Galabrun, *The Birth of Intimacy: Privacy and Domestic Life in Early Modern Paris* (French 1988, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

access to, material goods altered between town and country.⁴⁰ Lorna Weatherill has explained regional, occupational and class diversity in British material culture and has related it to other aspects of domestic life.⁴¹ The interest in material culture in the early modern period is no doubt due to inventories which are the principal sources used by Weatherill, Schuurman and Pardailhé-Galabrun. The petering out of inventories towards the end of the eighteenth century removed a valuable source for the study of objects in later centuries. Linda Young has used bankruptcy records: these have the advantage of indicating the practical and emotional value of objects, but like inventories, exclude the majority of the working class.⁴²

Close to these studies are ethnographic histories which have analysed people's perception of domestic life through the study of folklore and vernacular architecture and furniture. They argue that these are particularly appropriate sources for "user studies" since these were designed by people to suit their own needs.⁴³ James Deetz describes vernacular architecture as forming "a sensitive indicator of these persons' inner feelings, their ideas of what is or is not suitable to them."⁴⁴ He argues further that vernacular architecture was more likely to reflect changes in values and attitudes of the populous than 'polite' or 'academic' architecture.⁴⁵ Ethnographic folk studies, assess people's culture through the concepts of occupation, race and location. They have applied these ideas to specific objects used in the home in order to evaluate what they meant to particular groups of people. E. E. Evans provides a useful example by assessing what the table and hearth signified in the Irish peasant home and the uses

⁴⁰ A. J. Schuurman: "Is Huiselijkheid Typisch Nederlands?", pp. 745-759, *Materieele Cultuur en Levensstijl: Een Onderzoek Naar de Taal der Dingen op het Nederlandse Platteland in de 19e Eeuw: de Zaansteek, Oost-Groningen, Oost-Brabant* (Wageningen en Utrecht, 1989) and "Woonculturen op het Nederlandse platteland in het verleden" in Joost van Genabeek, ed., *Het Wonen* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), pp. 45-63.

⁴¹ Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain 1660-1780* (London: Routledge, 1988).

⁴² Linda Young, "Material Life in South Australia", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* XXV 1 (1994), pp. 56-84.

⁴³ Frank Atkinson, *Life and Tradition in Northumberland and Durham* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1977); Joan Ingilby and Marie Hartley, *Life and Tradition in the Moorlands of North-East Yorkshire* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1972); J. G. Jenkins, *Life and Tradition in Rural Wales* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1976); William Rollinson, *Life and Tradition in the Lake District* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1974).

⁴⁴ James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life* (New York: Anchor Press, 1977). His approach lacks a class dimension.

⁴⁵ Such a view point does not acknowledge that people often continue to live in a traditional manner because they have always done this and not necessarily because it is the most appropriate way to live.

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given them to generate a sense of Irishness in their way of living.⁴⁶ However, as with much research on material culture, the history of folk culture concentrates on rural interiors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁴⁷

Material culture has been researched by design historians and within the remit of museum studies. Traditionally both disciplines have had a tendency to focus on artefacts and designers in isolation from political, economic and cultural circumstances. More recently there have been more attempts to contextualise the production of goods and to question the meanings which these objects are given by producer and user. Adrian Forty's *Objects of Desire: Design and Society, 1750-1980* argued that objects were politically and culturally defined to manifest or re-enforce ideas of social difference based on class, gender and age.⁴⁸ The meaning of these objects can change over time, reflecting or encouraging values or attitudes held in a particular period.⁴⁹ An important branch of this research acknowledges that people do not necessarily use objects in ways that the designer intended, and even redesign them to suit their own requirements as a kind of modern day, folk-culture equivalent operating in a mass consumer society.⁵⁰ The focus of these studies is the relationship between objects and people rather than domestic life in general, although museum studies is broadening its scope to include more traditional historical methods and sources which makes such a perspective more feasible.⁵¹

Roderick Lawrence, an architectural historian, has used ethnographic methods in order to understand how dwellers used their domestic space and why. He has classified modes of behaviour within the house and, in order to give meaning to the

⁴⁶ E. E. Evans, *Irish Folk Ways* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957).

⁴⁷ James Ayres, *The Shell Book of the Home in Britain: Decoration, Design and Construction of Vernacular Interiors, 1500-1850* (London: Faber, 1981).

⁴⁸ Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society, 1750-1980* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986).

⁴⁹ Marion Bowley, "Women and the Designed Environment", *Built Environment* XVI 4 (1990), pp. 245-8.

⁵⁰ Judy Attfield, "Inside Pram Town: A Case Study of Harlow House Interiors, 1951-61" in J. Attfield and P. Kirkham, eds., *A View From the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design* (London: The Women's Press, 1989), pp. 251-238; Angela Partington, "The Designer Housewife in the 1950s" in Attfield, and Kirkham, eds., *A View From the Interior*, pp. 206-214; Philippa Goodall, "Design and Gender: Where is the Heart of the Home?", *Built Environment* XVI 4 (1990), pp. 169-278.

⁵¹ For example see Annette Carruthers: "Bringing Down the Walls: An Interdisciplinary Study of the Scottish Home, 1660-1950", *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library, Manchester* LXXVII 1 (1995), pp. 81-90; Annette Carruthers, ed., *The Scottish Home* (Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland, 1996). Clark uses autobiographies: Helen Clark, "Living in One or Two Rooms in the City" in Carruthers, ed., *The Scottish Home*, pp. 59-82.

way domestic space is used, believes that it is important to compare the inhabitants' descriptions of living in their homes with its design.⁵² Moreover, he takes into account the demographic profile of the inhabitants and their historical and geographical context. Ravetz has also succeeded in combining the traditional macro approach of housing history with an examination of how houses were used and perceived by the people who lived in them. She attempts to convey what it was like to live in the home by examining technology, room usage, gardens and by activities and rituals. However, the more personal side of home life is missing from her study, as she freely admits:

There remains something still more intensely internal and subjective which can only be glimpsed and guessed at...All such experience is by definition impossible to arrive at through objective data: it must be reached, if at all, through diaries, biography, literature, or psychological awareness.⁵³

Her sources, are therefore not based on the "experience" of the inhabitants and are mainly governmental reports and housing surveys. This means that perceptions of working-class homes are mediated through the middle-class beliefs and values.

In contrast to the approach employed by Ravetz, the histories of domestic relations and activities do use 'subjective' sources of oral history and autobiographies. Together these highlight the variety of experiences. Carl Chinn is concerned with women of the poorer section of the working class between 1880 and 1939. Elizabeth Roberts' accounts of women's lives in Barrow, Lancaster and Preston demonstrates the impact of locality and occupation on women's experiences of home, family and work.⁵⁴ Jacqueline Sarsby has employed a similar approach to Roberts in her study of women in the Potteries.⁵⁵ In contrast, Judy Giles concentrates on the suburban, rather

⁵² Roderick Lawrence's work includes: "Domestic Space and Society: A Cross Cultural Study", *Comparative Studies in Society and History: An International Quarterly* XXIV (1982), pp. 104-130; "Integrating Architectural, Social and Housing History", *Urban History* XIX 1 (1992), pp. 39-63; "Public Collective and Private Space: a Study of Urban Housing in Switzerland" in Susan Kent, (ed.), *Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space: An Interdisciplinary Cross-Cultural Study* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1990), pp. 73-91. The drawback to his approach is the lack of class and occupational analysis. See also Robert MacDonald, "The Appropriation of Space Inside the Small English 'Bye-law' Terraced House, 1913-1979" (University of Liverpool: Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, 1983).

⁵³ Ravetz, *The Place of Home*, p. 224

⁵⁴ Carl Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives: Women of the Urban Poor in England, 1870-1939* (Manchester: M.U.P., 1988); Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984) and *Women and Families: An Oral History 1940-1970* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

⁵⁵ Jacqueline Sarsby, *Missuses and Mouldrunners: An Oral History of Women Pottery Workers at Work and at Home* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988).

than urban, women between the wars.⁵⁶ The central interest of these histories is women's lives in general, in which home life plays an important part.⁵⁷ However, this tendency for domestic history to be formulated within the framework of women's history, has meant that the two are seen as synonymous. Men's domestic experiences are ignored or viewed only in relation to women. Davidoff and Hall have perhaps encouraged this type of history by their theory of "separate spheres". Although their works stressed the gendered aspect of this ideology, historians before and after have concentrated more on the female half of this dichotomy in discussions on home life. Davidoff and Hall's conclusions on male participation in the home and the fact that the ideology was originally devised by the middle class for the middle class is forgotten.⁵⁸ Roberts's second volume on the Lancashire towns has a more gendered perspective but it is still principally about women.⁵⁹ The work of Joanna Bourke has broken this tradition by discussing male participation in the home. She has employed gender theory to examine the perceptions of the home and activities within it of both men and women.⁶⁰ Likewise Anna Davin's study of children in London, while claiming to focus primarily on girls' experiences of childhood and home, also includes that of boys.⁶¹

The intention of housing history has been to explain the wider economic and political contexts within which housing has been produced and the internal domestic environment is generally considered to be tangential to these issues. The range of studies on home contents and home life indicate the diversity of issues that relate to the home which have yet to be studied in one volume. Alison Ravetz has come closest to achieving this, since her study provides a general overview of the interior and exterior of the home between 1918-2000. However, because she rejects 'subjective'

⁵⁶ Judy Giles, "'Something That Bit Better': Working-Class Women and Domesticity, 1919-1939" (York: Unpublished D.Phil. Thesis, 1989) and *Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain, 1900-50* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995).

⁵⁷ Deirdre Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars, 1918-1939* (London: Pandora, 1989); Leonore Davidoff and Belinda Westover, *Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words: Women's History and Women's Work* (London: Macmillan, 1986).

⁵⁸ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, "The Architecture of Public and Private Life. English Middle-Class Society in a Provincial Town 1780 to 1850" in A. Sutcliffe and D. Fraser (eds.), *The Pursuit of Urban History* (London: Arnold, 1983), pp. 325-345 and *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 1987).

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and Families*.

⁶⁰ Joanna Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁶¹ Anna Davin, *Growing Up Poor: Home, School and Street in London 1970-1914* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1996).

sources she fails to illuminate both the complexity of domestic experiences and the emotional investment which people have in their homes.

Home as an Indicator of Personality?

The importance of the home in terms of personal development has been studied by sociologists and social-psychologists since the 1970s. They recognise that experiences of home, whether negative or positive, can have an impact on our present and future experiences. Thus, they have used the home in order to understand the self; they see the home as reflecting "what you are in life". Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton have claimed that:

a home is much more than a shelter, it is a world in which a person can create a material environment that embodies what he or she considers significant. In this sense the home becomes the most powerful sign of the inhabitants that dwell within.⁶²

Likewise, Perla Korosec-Serfaty sees the home signifying "unity with the self."⁶³ This means that it is possible to use the home to understand the values of the inhabitants because they choose things which they feel signals their social and cultural affiliations. This perspective has been taken up by other disciplines. For example, Annette Carruthers, working within the field of design and art history, has claimed that: "[t]he appearance of our homes and the nature of our household goods indicate very directly the values of our society."⁶⁴

While material culture and lifestyles do reflect the values of a society, the role of personality in the construction of home and image should not be over-estimated. It is important to recognise that individuals are not free actors and that they operate within economic, social and historical constraints. More recently, work on the material environment has stressed the lack of choices people have because income and class both determine the appearance of home and person.⁶⁵ This brings us back to a class experience of home mentioned as the beginning of the chapter.

⁶² M. Csikszentmihalyi and E. Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1981), pp. 128, 3.

⁶³ Perla Korosec-Serfaty, "Experience and Use of the Dwelling" in I. Altman and C. Werner, eds., *Home Environments* (N.Y. & London: Plenum Press, 1985), pp. 69-73.

⁶⁴ Carruthers, "Bringing Down the Walls", p. 81.

⁶⁵ Colin Campbell, "The Meaning of Objects and the Meaning of Actions: A Critical Note on the Sociology of Consumption and Theories of Clothing", *Journal of Material Culture* I (1996), 93-105.

Home as an Indicator of Class

The workplace has traditionally been the focus of studies of class difference, but now historians acknowledge that other areas of life, including home life, are also relevant. Peter Williams has stressed:

...it is essential to think beyond the workplace to other settings (or locales) where social interaction takes place and where social relations are composed and contextualised...the home must rank high amongst them and perhaps stands alongside the workplace as the key social setting.⁶⁶

Martin Daunton provided the justification for this change in focus by suggesting that there was a move from a workplace- to a home-orientated culture at the end of the nineteenth century.⁶⁷ This has led some historians to perhaps overstate the significance of the home in the study of class difference. For example, Roberts and Attfield have concurred that "the home - its contents, location and women's experience of it should prove a more fruitful field for the exploration of gender and class difference than previous studies of the workplace."⁶⁸

While I do not argue that home is a more appropriate way to analyse class or gender distinctions, it is a fundamental arena for class and gender relations. Thus, my intention is not only to show the political importance of home life, but also to bring social and cultural factors to the more conventional economic view of class. This is what Pierre Bourdieu attempted to do in his *La Distinction*, in which he examined all aspects of life such as leisure, taste in music and art, home furnishings and education.⁶⁹ He arrived at three different types of lifestyles for three classes: the "choice of necessity" for the working class; the "cultural goodwill" of petite bourgeoisie who seek to emulate the class above them; and the "sense of distinction" of the upper and middle classes. This seems to tie in with what Blackwell and Seabrook have termed the "culturalist" approach in which class is informed by lived experience.⁷⁰ Carl

⁶⁶ Peter Williams, "Constituting Class and Gender: A Social History of the Home, 1700-1901" in P. Williams and N. Thrift, eds., *Class and Space: The Making of Urban Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 154.

⁶⁷ Daunton, "Public Place and Private Space", p. 222.

⁶⁸ Attfield, "Inside Pram Town" in Attfield and Kirkham, eds., *A View From the Interior*, cited in Roberts, *Living in a Man-Made World*, p. 157.

⁶⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (French 1979, London: Routledge, 1984, 1994 reprint).

⁷⁰ Trevor Blackwell and Jeremy Seabrook, *A World Still To Win: The Reconstruction of the Post-War Working Class* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p. 25. The only example they give

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Chinn has used the cultural approach to explain differences within the working class. He argues that the “urban poor...were distinguished as a separate section of the working class as much by their cultural distinctiveness as they were by their impoverishment.”⁷¹

In the thesis, I draw out three major themes which concern the experience of the home and the manifestation of class difference through domestic culture. These are autonomy, complexity and subjectivity. The first sheds light on the theoretical framework, the second on my analytical framework and the third on the type of sources used.

Autonomy

The benefit of Bourdieu’s critique of taste and lifestyle is that he accredits the working class with an autonomous culture whose defining characteristics differ from those of other classes. I have adopted a similar perspective by assessing whether working-class domestic life was distinct from that of the middle class in the period 1900-1955: was there an identifiable working-class lifestyle and how does this enlighten theories of emulation and “trickle down”? Thus, I examine which aspects of home life were similar to those of the middle class; how far did working-class families adapt a middle-class lifestyle to suit their own needs; and did such adaptations result in a working-class lifestyle that was totally alien to the middle class?

Complexity

Bourdieu’s work suffers from two major drawbacks: the first is that he assumes the working class synchronically have the same experience; second that he does not account for change over time in working-class lifestyle. However, the working class is not homogenous and experience within it differs. Seabrook and Blackwell emphasise “the complexity and ambiguity of working-class life and experience” and “the great divisions within the working class”. They explain the form these divisions take: “the class has been divided between town and country, manufacture and service, skilled and unskilled. Superimposed upon these divisions is the deep separation of experience through gender and through race.”⁷² Roderick Lawrence divides the factors

of this approach is Richard Hoggart’s *Uses of Literacy* (1957) which they criticise for the lack of historical context and his failure to recognise the continually changing nature of working-class culture. Bourke recognises the importance of this methodology by setting out to examine “the construction of ‘class’ as it was developed out of the experience rooted in the intimate local of the body, the home, and the neighbourhood”: Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures*, p. 26.

⁷¹ Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives*, p. 4.

⁷² Blackwell and Seabrook, *A World Still To Win*, p. 38.

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which influence the creation of the home (and thus how people experience it) into three groups: socio-demographic (age, status and gender), cultural (religious, ethnic or linguistic) and psychological (personal).⁷³ These complex sub-divisions form the basis of my analytical framework, with particular emphasis given to the socio-demographic factors.

Subjectivity

The previous paragraphs imply that people were subjected to their situation, but the working class did not always experience their lives passively or act according to roles expected of them. The thesis assesses how people actively participated in the construction of their own domestic environments and how they managed to adapt their experiences to suit their own needs. Lizabeth Cohen has commented that the working class "still made revealing choices in the process of ordering their personal environments" even though they had low incomes.⁷⁴ This can be translated into how they gave uses and meanings to all aspects of home life so that the household members are seen not just as consumers but as material and social producers in their own right. For this reason it was important to find sources on lifestyle in which working-class people discussed their own subjective experiences.

The thesis is divided into four sections, each of which draws on the themes of autonomy, complexity and subjectivity set out above. The first section examines space and concerns issues such as the amount of space in working-class homes and how this impacted on: working-class use of domestic space; access to space personal space and privacy; and the symbolic significance of certain rooms such as the living-kitchen or parlour. The second section looks at material culture, a term which incorporates furnishings, ornaments, utensils and technological equipment. It is concerned with what choices the working class had in the selection of household goods, how they used their goods, and if this differed from the 'intended' use. This section also addresses matters such as which objects people considered special and why they were valued. The third part assesses domestic activities and examines: how time was managed in the home; when routines were disrupted; how rhythms were maintained in difficult circumstances; and what was the reasoning and significance behind rigid routines of time-management. This section examines the allocation of tasks as well, and how this was affected by the complexity of working-class

⁷³ Lawrence, "What Make a House a Home?", pp. 154-168

⁷⁴ Lizabeth Cohen, "Embellishing a Life of Labor: An Interpretation of the Material Culture of American Working-Class Homes, 1885-1915" in Thomas Schlereth, ed., *Material Culture in America* (1982, Nashville, Tennessee: The American Association for State and Local History, 1989 reprint, article first published in 1980), p. 291.

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experience. The final part focuses on people's experience of family relationships: this section relies the most on the subjectivity of the autobiographies and is the aspect of home life which shows the greatest continuities.

Chapter Two

Methodology

History should be telling about the lives of tidy, ordinary folk pegging away as they have always done; folk like you and me, and her and him, making history.¹

Autonomy: The Working Class

Since this is a study of working-class domestic culture in all its diversity, it is necessary to begin by explaining what I mean by the working class. Because it is generally agreed that any definition of the working class is problematic, I decided, somewhat arbitrarily, to use a socio-economic indicator of class supplemented by a perceptual definition. The first is based on the occupation of the father, husband or main breadwinner of the household, and the second, subsidiary, definition on people's own interpretations of their class. Joanna Bourke, who favours the perceptual definitions of class, highlights the problems of occupational classifications. For example, she argues that a middle-class woman married to a working-class man would be classified as working class, although she might view herself still as middle class.² Likewise, Diana Gittins has criticised the use of male occupation to classify women, arguing that it is important to see women "according to their own relations to the socio-economic system".³ Bourke does not fully explore the difficulties involved in using the "individual perceptions of class position" which depend on people being open about their class background and consistent about describing their class.⁴ However, the two definitions provide a necessary starting point.

Diversity: Differences in Working-Class Experience

The working class itself does not consist of a homogenous group of people and the various status groups within it are equally hard to define. As with class, the main

¹ Joe Loftus, "Lee Side" (Brunel University Library, Unpublished Typescript, c.1987), p. 2.

² Joanna Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 4.

³ Diana Gittins, *Fair Sex: Family Size and Structure, 1900-1939* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), p. 27.

⁴ Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures*, p. 4.

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means to assess difference were economic and perceptual. The labels 'rough' and 'respectable' have been employed by members of the working class and other classes and are useful in that they highlight the existence of different lifestyles within the working class. However, they are oppositional labels and do not account for people who match neither category. Moreover, if people's own definitions of their status were to be used, it would be hard to find people who admit to being 'rough' - they would be either 'respectable' or neither. Giles has found that none of the women she interviewed admitted to being anything other than respectable, though other working-class women might not have labelled them as such.⁵ In this sense 'rough' should perhaps be viewed in the same way as the word 'slum', which Alan Mayne has pointed out was used by people who did not live in housing considered to be a 'slum'. Those who were in the 'slum' did not view themselves as slum dwellers.⁶ The label 'poor' did not have the same stigma as 'rough' and this was perhaps because, while it was acceptable to have had a poor childhood in a pre-welfare state period, it was not acceptable to be un-respectable.

Economic definitions have relied on the major breadwinner's occupation to identify status difference within a class. This was used by the censuses, where factors such as level of skill, energy used in work, environmental conditions and the "social and economic status associated with the occupation" were used as an indication of status.⁷ The *Registrar General's Occupational Classification of 1950* noted the problems which arise from grouping people by occupation:

Since the unit of assignment is the occupational group, and not the individual occupation nor individual circumstances, it may happen that an assignment based on the group as a whole would not necessarily be appropriate for a particular occupation considered in isolation, had that particular occupation been judged worthy of separate identification in the Occupational Classification.⁸

⁵ Judy Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life, in Britain, 1900-50* (London: Macmillan, 1995), p. 27. The differences between how people described themselves and how they were seen by others is made less clear in her D.Phil. thesis on domesticity and respectability. For this Giles interviewed women who described themselves as 'respectable': Judy Giles, "'Something That Bit Better': Working-Class Women, Domesticity and Respectability, 1919-1939" (York: Unpublished D.Phil. Thesis, 1989).

⁶ Alan Mayne, "A barefoot childhood: So What? Imagining Slums and Reading Neighbourhoods", *Urban History* XXII 3 (1995), pp. 380-1. Elias and Scotson in their 1965 study on "Winston Parva", compared the attitudes of those who lived on the estate and those who lived in the village: the village looked down on the estate dwellers as "rough", but the occupants of the estate did not view themselves in this way: Norbert Elias and John Scotson, *The Established and the Outsiders: a Sociological Enquiry into Community Problems* (London: Cass, 1965).

⁷ *Registrar General's Occupational Classification 1950* (London: HMSO, 1951), p. i.

⁸ *Registrar General's Occupation Classification 1950*, p. iii.

In spite of these problems, the Registrar General provided officially recognised (though by no means more accurate) status categories, by which the impact of social and cultural factors on (socio)economic/workplace indicators could be gauged. Although produced at the end of the period, it was retrospective and utilised the social groupings of the 1921 and 1931 censuses (Table 2.1). The classification divided occupations into social classes I to V whose 'actual' class the Registrar seems reluctant to specify. However, social surveys of this period understood group I to cover the middle and upper class, group II to refer to the "intermediate classes", and groups III to V to cover the working class, ranging from skilled to unskilled workers.⁹

Table 2.1: The Social Classes in the Registrar General's Occupational Classification 1950.¹⁰

Class or Status Group	Occupations Covered
Class I	Professional occupations, directors, bankers, clergy, judges etc.
Class II	Intermediate Occupations such as farmers, farm foremen, proprietors, managers, teachers, retail
Class III	Skilled Occupations a: mineworkers b: transport workers c: clerical workers d: armed forces e: others
Class IV	Partly Skilled Occupations (also includes those who are unemployed skilled or semi-skilled) a: agricultural workers b: others
Class V	Unskilled Occupations a: building and dock labourers b: others

Age and life cycle generated different experiences of home as well, which potentially cut across class and status, but were also affected by them. Differences between generations occurred synchronically, in the sense that children perceived the home in a different way from their parents or grandparents, and diachronically in that when children grew up, their experiences of their own homes contrasted with those of their parents. Within the same generation, home could be viewed differently according to where the individual was in relation to their life cycle. For example,

⁹ For example Richard Titmus, *Birth, Poverty and Wealth* (London: 1943), p. 26, cited in Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures*, p. 8.

¹⁰ Registrar General's Occupation Classification 1950, p. iii.

school children might have alternative perceptions of the home to siblings who were in full-time employment. Married couples had different perceptions of home, depending on whether they had young children, teenagers or grown-up children who had left home.

Age as a factor causing difference has been generally marginalised. This is not the case for gender, although both are of equal importance. Joan Scott has called for the "historicization and deconstruction of sexual difference" by relating it to class, period and politics.¹¹ For this reason, gendered experiences need to be related to other factors including class, status and age. Giles, while arguing against "polarised models of sexual differentiation to explain both work-place practices and domestic experience", still believes that there are essential differences in the way that men and women see their class: "Women's social class is constituted in their relations with men as fathers and husbands; for men class is understood in terms of workplace and their relation to capital."¹² Despite the element of truth to this statement, it fails to appreciate the fact that it is as unreasonable for men to be seen only in relation to work and capital, as it is for women to be seen only in relation to home and family. By focusing on women's subjective experiences, Giles has neglected those of men. One intention of the thesis is to allow men to be the subjects of their domestic experience and to see them on their own terms and not just in relation to women.

Apart from age, gender and status, perceptions of the home were also affected by occupation, geographical location, and whether it was in a town or the countryside. However, because the thesis covers the whole of Britain, regional differences are harder to identify, although certain places stand out more than others: Glasgow; London; the north west; and the north east. The impact of occupation on lifestyles is easier to assess and this applies to both male and female occupations. Certain occupations had stronger influences on the experience of home. These were those which employed miners, fishermen, female textile workers and sailors. In addition to these factors, the temporal dimension which caused continuities and change in perceptions of home and lifestyle between 1900 and 1955 needs to be accounted for.

¹¹ Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 41-42.

¹² Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life*, pp. 10, 13.

Subjectivity: The Source

To find how people viewed their homes, it was important to select a source in which the inhabitants could express themselves without having their descriptions filtered through the expectations of members of another class. The major source used was working-class autobiographies which were selected in the following way. Firstly, the main bread winner of the family had to have an occupation that was classified in groups III to V by the Registrar General, although because of the ambiguity of borderline classes, eight people from the "intermediate classes" have been included. Of the latter, one considered his family to be working class.¹³ Secondly, they had to contain descriptions of the home, domestic chores, furnishing, home and daily life, hygiene and sanitation. Some of the autobiographies only included two or three of these topics, others nearly all of them.¹⁴ Thirdly, the main part of the autobiography had to cover the period 1900 to 1955.

The autobiographical descriptions of home were supported by surveys and reports which were composed of interviews and questionnaires with working-class people. The surveys were given less weight because although they were based on information gained from the working class and from participant observation, working-class perceptions were still being mediated through the opinions of a different class who did not directly experience working-class home life. As Carl Chinn has explained, they were "a stage removed from the individuals with whom they dealt" and "their impressionistic observations...remain just that."¹⁵

Autobiographies, however, are not without their drawbacks and these have already been discussed in depth by others.¹⁶ The main criticism is that they are a

¹³ Louis Heren, *Growing-Up Poor in London* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1973).

¹⁴ These contents were listed in John Burnett, David Mayall, and David Vincent's *The Autobiography of the Working Class: An Annotated Critical Bibliography, Volume Two 1900-1945* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1989). The majority of the autobiographies published or written before 1988 were found in this bibliography.

¹⁵ See Chinn for discussion of the problems of using surveys: Carl Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives: Women of The Urban Poor, 1870-1939* (Manchester: M.U.P., 1988), pp. 5, 8.

¹⁶ See David Vincent's *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Autobiography* (London and New York: Methuen, 1981), John Burnett's *Destiny Obscure: Autobiography of Childhood, Education and the Family from the 1820s to the 1920s* (London: Allen Lane, 1982), and the introduction to John Burnett, David Mayall, and David Vincent's, *The Autobiography of the Working Class: An Annotated Critical Bibliography: Volume One, 1790-1900* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1984) which all discuss the potential problems in using autobiographies. Julia Swindells' *Victorian Writing and Working Women: The Other Side of Silence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985) has a more 'literary' approach to autobiographies. Carolyn Steedman's *Landscapes for a Good Women* (London: Virago, 1987) is an autobiography as well as

retrospective source, written some time after the events they describe. This means that they do not necessarily represent how the author felt about the events or things at the time. For example, things may look better or worse, hardships are ignored in a wave of nostalgia, or poverty is exaggerated to stress the differences between the author's youth and the present day. Some of the autobiographers freely admitted that their memories were selective: "...what I choose to tell is a bit like looking back on holidays and mostly remembering the best times. My strongest memories are of the good times, the pleasant times, the reet gradely folk I am proud to have known, lived and worked with."¹⁷ Others were emphatic that they were accurate in their description of the past: "I personally have never exaggerated in my accounts of those days..."¹⁸ Sometimes it is difficult to know if the authors described the things they thought would be interesting for others to read and omitted to record more mundane events. This could lead to the assumption that a particular event was the norm when it was actually a rare occurrence, remembered or recorded because it was noteworthy. A final problem is that the autobiographies were often written with a motive in mind, frequently to vindicate past actions or to condemn the way the author was treated by someone else in the past and this could result in (deliberate) "misrepresentation" of the past.¹⁹

These problems, have been used to justify the use of surveys and reports to the detriment of autobiographies. Such an attitude fails to acknowledge that surveys, like all historical documents, are also subjective: although their authors were not subjected to working-class family life, they were still the subjects of their own lifestyle and opinions. Everyone has an agenda but that of the autobiographies is more blatant - and thus even easier to make allowances for - than others. Vincent, Mayall and Burnett all stress that autobiographies are the only way of reaching people's experience of their lives and events, at least in the pre-oral history period. They point out that the memory does not deteriorate physically until extreme old age and that the subjective selection process is important. As Burnett sums up: "the outstanding merit of autobiography lies in the fact that it is the direct, personal record of the individual himself - the act or eye witness - without the intermediary of another person who may change the situation or misread the experience."²⁰

an exploration into psycho-analytical interpretations of autobiographies.

¹⁷ Joe Loftus, "Lee Side" (Brunel University Library, Unpublished Manuscript, c.1987), p. 8.

¹⁸ Betty Dickinson, *Never Far From Wincobank Hill* (Sheffield, 1992), p. 4.

¹⁹ Burnett et al comment that studies of texts have indicated that there have been few "deliberate misrepresentations" in autobiographies: *The Autobiography of the Working Class, Volume One*, p. xxi.

²⁰ John Burnett, ed., *Destiny Obscure*, p. 11.

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Oral history is another way of obtaining people's experiences, but was avoided for several reasons. The first was because I wanted the subjects themselves to set their own agenda and to remember the things that were important to them. As Burnett stressed "the author [of the autobiography] has chosen his own ground, patterned his experiences, and has painted a self-portrait which is more revealing than any photograph."²¹ I am aware that many autobiographers wrote in workshops or creative writing classes where they were encouraged to write about certain things, but even given this, autobiographies are generally far less structured than interviews. The second reason was that oral history usually produces quite a small sample, because of difficulties in finding respondents. Giles interviewed 21 women for her thesis, Gittins interviewed thirty women for her work on family structure and Marion Roberts eighteen for her work on 1950s council estates.²² Because I wanted to give some idea of the trends in perceptions, it was important that the number of people used was large enough to allow for this. Elizabeth Roberts had 160 male and female respondents for *A Woman's Place*, and 98 for *Women and Families*, but no quantitative analysis.²³ The third reason was that it was very hard to find people who remember the earlier part of my period from 1900-1914, but there are a number of autobiographies written about this time.

The thesis is therefore based on the autobiographies of 112 people: of these, two were autobiographical novels and ten were oral histories.²⁴ All the autobiographers described their childhood; seventeen their adult life as well. Two of the autobiographers lived in more than one household as a child: one was evacuated in the Second World War and another lived with two aunts. One autobiographer lived in two different households as an adult. This meant that in total 132 households were

²¹ Burnett et al, *The Autobiography of the Working Class, Volume One*, p. xxi; Burnett, ed., *Destiny Obscure*, p. 11.

²² Giles, "Something That Bit Better"; Gittins, *Fair Sex*; Marion Roberts, *Living in a Man-Made World: Gender Assumptions in Modern Housing Design* (London: Routledge, 1991). Michael Peplar made thirty interviews on men and women for his "Official Discourse and Remembered Experience in British Culture, 1945-1970", Paper presented to the Social History Society Conference, 1998. Sarsby interviewed seventy women, but this would not have been a large enough number to show quantitative differences within the working class: Jacqueline Sarsby, *Missuses and Mouldrunners: An Oral History of Women Pottery Workers at Work and at Home* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988).

²³ Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place. An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984) and *Women and Families. An Oral History 1940-1970* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

²⁴ Leslie Paul, *The Boy Down Kitchener Street* (London: Faber & Faber, 1957); Margaret Penn, *Manchester Fourteen Miles* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1947). All footnotes to autobiographies hereafter will include the title only. Full details can be found for each in the bibliography.

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described. A 'household' could move from place to place; these between them lived in more than 179 dwellings. A change of address by an autobiographer did not always create a new record of a dwelling because sometimes there was not enough information on the house and home to include it. The quantitative data is based on either the number of households (132) or number of dwellings (179) according to which is the most relevant. Although the dwellings were located all over the country, the highest concentrations were in London and the north west (Table 2.2). Approximately three-quarters of the dwellings were in towns and cities, about one fifth in villages or the countryside (Figure 2.1). Two thirds of the homes were privately rented, one tenth were council-owned and an even smaller fraction were owner-occupied (Figure 2.2). However, it is important to note that the autobiographers were not selected on the basis that they would be representative of the entire population.

Table 2.2: Geographical Location of Dwellings²⁵

Part of Country		Counties Covered	N°
South Western	SW	Cornwall, Devon, Gloucester, Somerset and Wiltshire	18
Southern	S	Dorset, Hampshire, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire	9
London, South Eastern	LSE	Kent, Sussex, Surrey and Middlesex	30
Eastern	E	Essex, Cambridgeshire, Huntingdon, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk	6
Midland	M	Hereford, Worcester, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire,	9
North Midland	NMID	Northamptonshire, Leicestershire Lincolnshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire	16
Wales	W	north and south	3
North Western	NW	Lancashire, Cheshire,	31
Yorkshire	EWR	East and West Ridings	21
Northern	N	Northumberland, Durham, North Riding, Cumberland, Westmorland	10
Scotland	Scot	highland and lowland	5

²⁵ Based on the regions used in the *Census 1951 England and Wales: General Report* (London: HMSO, 1958), p. 224.

Figure 2.1: Location of Households²⁶

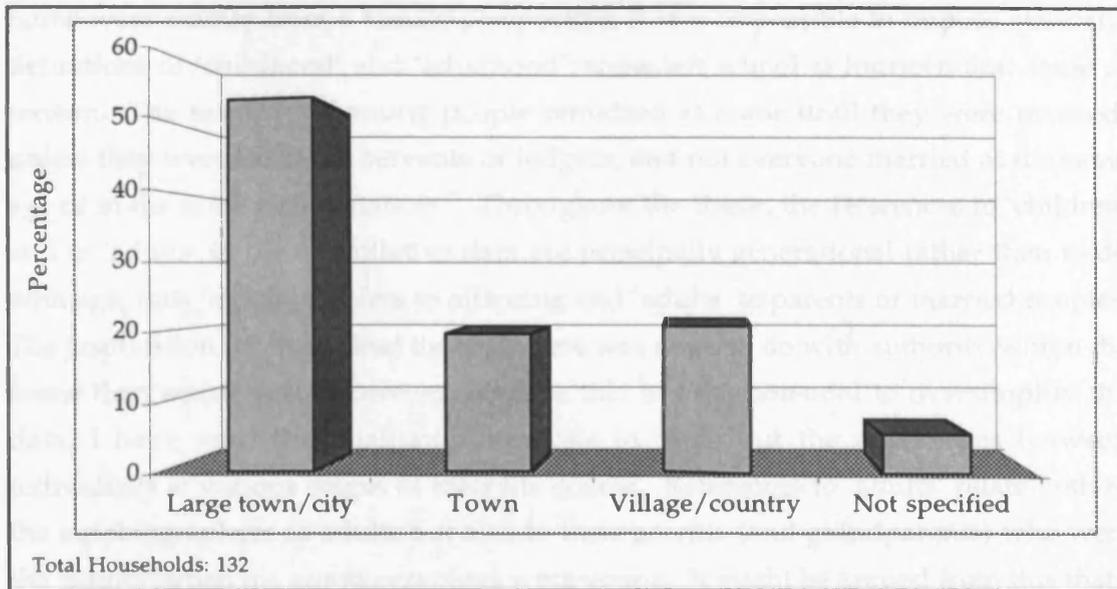
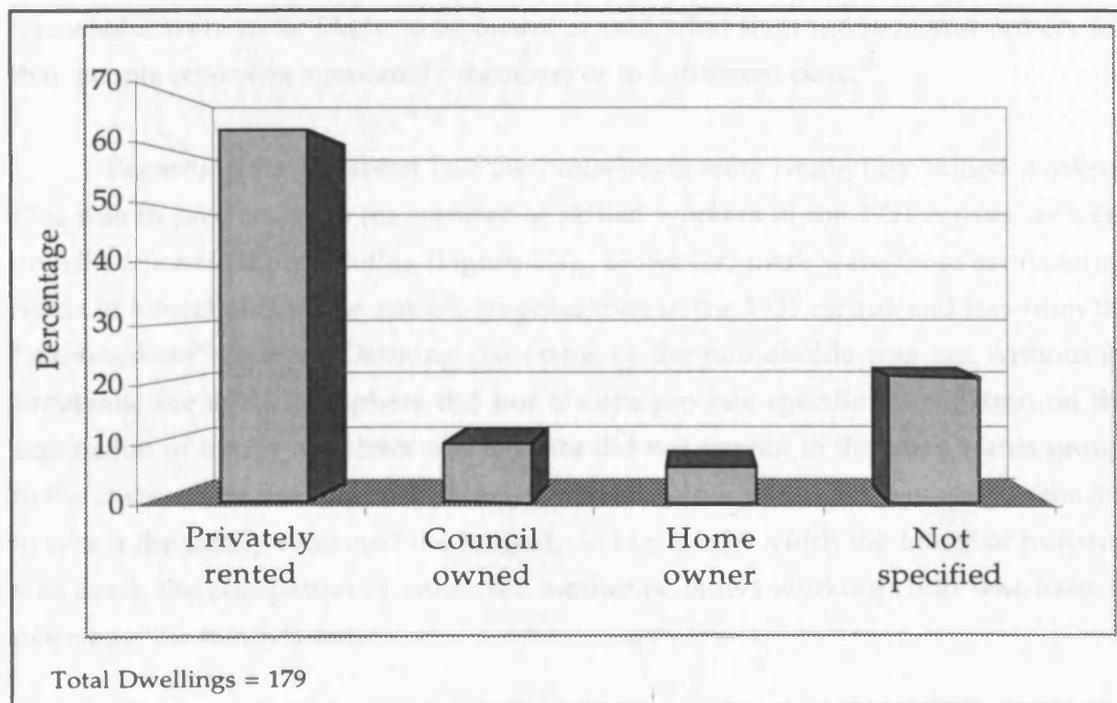


Figure 2.2: Types of Dwellings



The demographic profile of the autobiographers was as follows: 63 were women and 49 were men. This ratio is further unbalanced because of the seventeen autobiographers who described their adult life all but three were women. This meant

²⁶ A large city was any town with a population of 80,000 and above, a town with a population of between 80,000 and 5,000 and village/country were places with a population of less than 5,000, which therefore also included small towns. The size of the communities were obtained from the *Census 1951 England and Wales: Index of Place Names A-Z* (London: HMSO, 1956).

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that the descriptions were nearly always of the childhood home, and those of the adult home were mainly from a female perspective. It was impossible to impose standard definitions of 'childhood' and 'adulthood': some left school at fourteen and some at sixteen. The majority of young people remained at home until they were married, unless they were domestic servants or lodgers, and not everyone married at the same age or in the same circumstances.²⁷ Throughout the thesis, the references to 'children' and to 'adults' in the quantitative data are principally generational rather than to do with age; thus 'children' refers to offspring and 'adults' to parents or married couples. The justification for this is that the issue here was more to do with authority within the home than actual age. However, because this has the potential to oversimplify the data, I have used the qualitative analysis to draw out the differences between individuals at various stages of their life course. References to 'adults' relate both to the autobiographers as adults but also to their parents (and grandparents) who were the 'adults' when the autobiographers were young. It might be argued from this that I am not always studying the direct experience because the parent's feelings were mediated through the children. However children, as members of the working-class household, were more likely to be aware or told what their mothers and fathers felt than people who were non-family members or in a different class.²⁸

Regarding status, about half the households were headed by skilled workers. This was in proportion to the number of skilled workers in the 1931 census, as were unskilled heads of households (Figure 2.3). However, there were more semi-skilled heads of households in the autobiographies than in the 1931 census and less from the "intermediate" classes. Defining the status of the households was not without its problems: the autobiographers did not always provide specific information on the occupation of family members and families did not remain in the same status group. In the cases where the latter happened, the household's status was recorded as the one in which the family remained the longest. In families in which the father or husband was dead, the occupation of either the mother or oldest working child was used to determine the family's status.

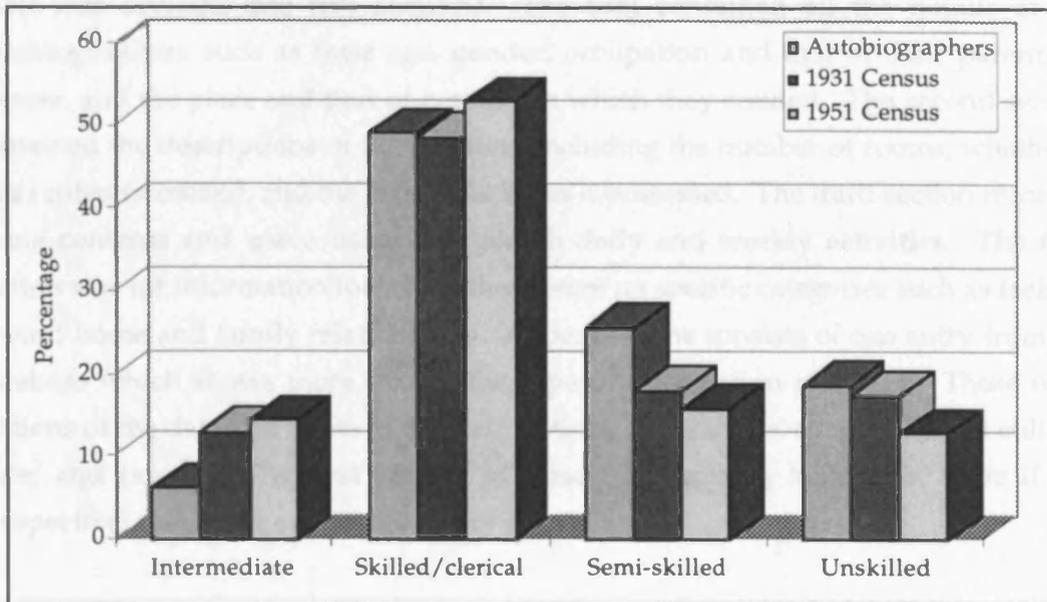
The households were generally nuclear families although ten fathers were absent or dead and four mothers were dead. The two World Wars created temporary

²⁷ In 1951, the average age of marriage for women was 24.6 and for men 26.8: Jane Lewis, *Women in Britain Since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 44.

²⁸ Some noted that they did not appreciate the problems their parents had to face when they were children but the autobiographies were informed by the authors' subsequent experiences which enabled them to reflect back on how their parents must have felt.

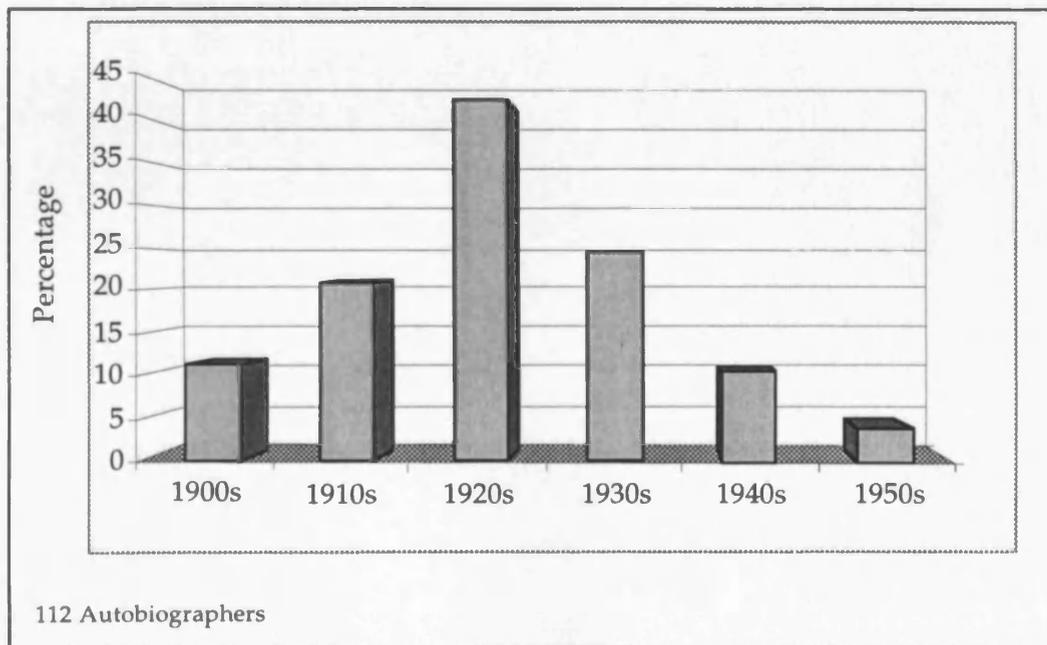
and permanent single-parent families. There was only one single-person household and the homes without children were young, not old couples. Furthermore, although the period covered was 1900-1955, the bulk of the autobiographies mainly described family life in the 1920s and 1930s and thesis is therefore biased towards the inter-war period (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.3: Status of Autobiographers Compared With Census



Source: *Census1951 England and Wales: General Report*; 132 households of the autobiographers.

Figure 2.4: Periods Covered by the Autobiographies



Methodology

The details of the autobiographers and their descriptions of home life were entered into a database which permitted both textual and quantitative analysis. The figures and tables in the chapters which follow are all based on the autobiographies, unless otherwise specified. It is important to stress that the quantitative approach was used because I felt it was necessary to give some idea of proportion. It was not meant to be statistically accurate, but to offer a better sense of proportion other than just "some", or "many" or "most", though these terms are unavoidable. The database itself was divided into five sections. The first contained all the details of the autobiographers such as their age, gender, occupation and that of their parents or spouse, and the place and part of country in which they resided. The second section contained the descriptions of the dwelling including the number of rooms, whether it was rented or owned, and the type of facilities it possessed. The third section recorded home contents and space usage, the fourth daily and weekly activities. The final section was for information for which there were no specific categories such as feelings toward home and family relationships. Appendix One consists of one entry from the database which shows more clearly the type of information recorded. These main sections of the database relate to the four sections of the thesis: space; material culture; time; and family. The first section is closest to housing history in topic if not perspective: that of the extent and use of space.

2

SPACE

Chapter Three

Physical Space

The suitability of a dwelling for any particular household depends among other things, on the number, size and shape of rooms, the heating arrangements, the size, composition and character of the household, the number and types of domestic possessions, and of course, on the ability of members of the household to make good use of the accommodation available.¹

Defining Domestic Space

'Domestic' is that which relates to or takes place in the home and so domestic space can be defined as those areas in which activities which relate to the home occur.² Helen Clark has suggested that the Scottish home was "at the centre of a network of sites"; it was not just confined by the walls of the home proper, but extended into the hall, the street and even neighbours' homes and public houses, and this applied to rest of the country.³ While Clark correctly identifies the fact that domestic activities did not just take place within the walls of the home, this did not mean these external spaces were considered to be part of the home. This was because the home was not just about activities but about control over space and in the same fashion domestic space can also defined in terms of levels of autonomy. For this reason I have divided domestic space into three categories: home space; adjacent domestic space and non-adjacent domestic space.

Home space was that area over which families had the greatest level of autonomy. The boundaries of home space were dependant, however, on the type of dwelling. For families occupying a single-family house, the home started at the front door or front garden and ended at the back door unless there was a yard or garden. Within this area, families had the greatest control over the inside of the building because its boundaries were more exclusive than the boundaries of the front or back garden. For families who lived in divided dwellings or flats, home space started at the door(s) to the flat or, if the rooms were at the top of the building, then the home space

¹ Phyllis Allen, "Evening Activities in the Home", *Sociological Review* XLV (1951), p. 127.

² *Collins Cobuild English Dictionary* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995), pp. 490, 1597.

³ Helen Clark, "Living in One or Two Rooms in the City" in Annette Carruthers, ed., *The Scottish Home* (Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland, 1996), p. 65.

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might start at the stairs. This was the case for Alice Linton and Joyce Storey whose stoves were situated on the landing which meant that the landing was part of their home space.⁴ However, compared with single family houses, the autonomy of home space in divided houses was more ambiguous because the doors were not necessarily designed to be locked. Moreover, the boundaries for the landing space were mental rather than physical and could be more easily invaded. Valerie Avery and her mother, for example, were accustomed to the family downstairs going into their rooms while they were away which was why the mother was so happy to have her own front door in their new council flat.⁵ The ambiguity of boundaries to the home was even greater for families living in sub-let rooms. For Emily Glencross and her husband, their home began at the thresholds of the two rooms they rented and they managed to find "privacy" within them.⁶ Home space, therefore, was shared only with family members and it was the space over which people had maximum control. In this sense it fitted the dichotomy of public and private, though it did not ensure privacy within the family, and there was no guarantee that people had absolute autonomy over it.

Adjacent domestic space was those shared parts of the dwelling and spaces next to the home over which there was joint control and therefore less individual family autonomy. Shared wash houses, yards, entries, hallways, staircases and gardens were all 'adjacent' domestic spaces. In houses where sub-letters had one or two rooms there was greater ambiguity over what was shared domestic space and what was the home. For sub-tenants, the kitchen, bathroom and hall were shared domestic spaces, as in Emily Glencross's case. To the main tenants, however, these rooms were home because they had rented them directly and could dictate the terms of use to the sub-tenants. This situation could have applied to lodgers who had their own room in the house but ate with the family: the lodgers might have seen their room as their home, but the family might also consider the sub-let room to be part of their home too, and counted it when they listed the rooms in their home. Adjacent domestic space was neither public nor private, though they were spaces where people might find privacy.

Non-adjacent domestic space consisted of places over which families had minimal control such as the bath house, bake house, the public wash house, the front

⁴ Joyce Storey, *Joyce's War*, p. 14; Alice Linton, *Not Expecting Miracles*, p. 73.

⁵ Valerie Avery, *London Morning*. See also: Henry Blacker, *Just Like it Was*; Ron Barnes, *Coronation Cup and Jam Jars*; Helen Forrester, *Twopence to Cross the Mersey* who all had their 'flats' on the top floor.

⁶ Emily Glencross, *For Better or For Worse*, p. 3.

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street or common land.⁷ They were important because they alleviated some of the pressures on domestic space by relocating space-consuming activities to areas away from the home entirely. These spaces were considered to be “public” but did not fit the oppositions of public and private because while they were generally accessible, like adjacent domestic space, they could provide privacy that could not always be obtained in the home. This division of domestic space into three types, indicates that there was no simple divide of public and private space, and, for the working class especially, greater or lesser degrees of privacy were not arranged in neat concentric layers.

David Morgan, in his explanation of what space entails, has argued that there are two main types of space which coexist: social space and physical space. He has also stressed that the study of space is the study of boundaries and the impact they have on the extent, use and meaning of space.⁸ Using this division between social and physical space, this section is divided up into two chapters. This chapter concentrates on the form and amount of physical space in home and adjacent space in which the boundaries were physical, mainly in the form of walls, doors, or fences. It examines how people perceived the physical space they had and how they experienced it. Chapter Four analyses the social uses and meanings of space in which the boundaries were physical, mental and temporal and were constructed by working-class people within or beyond the confines of the physical boundaries. However, this division between physical and social is admittedly somewhat artificial because it is impossible to assess one type of space without referring to the other.

Part One: House size

This part of the chapter looks at the number of rooms, and how this was affected by the life cycle and status of the inhabitants and the location and type of dwelling. It also examines other spaces demarcated by physical boundaries such as gardens, sheds, and cupboards.

⁷ Daunton saw the back street as being domestic rather than public space: Martin Daunton, *House and Home in the Victorian City: Working-Class Housing 1850-1914* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), p. 281.

⁸ David Morgan, *Family Connections: An Introduction to Family Studies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), pp. 138-139.

Table 3.1: Distribution of Household Occupations by Size 1921, 1931, and 1951 and Intercensal Changes⁹

Rooms Occupied	Percentage distribution of Households occupations			Autobiographers' dwellings n = 123 ¹⁰
	1921	1931	1951	1900-1955
All Sizes	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
1-3	29.7	28.4	25.7	31.1
4-5	45.3	48.3	58.9	38.2
6 and over	25.0	23.3	15.4	30.1

The number of rooms was the clearest way in which autobiographers indicated the size of their homes. Two thirds of the autobiographers listed the rooms in their homes; the smallest had one room, the largest home had ten. The most common numbers of rooms inhabited by the autobiographers were four and six rooms: about a quarter of the autobiographies who listed their rooms lived in four-room houses and a fifth lived in six-room houses. After these two the next most frequent were five and three-room dwellings. Compared with the 1921, 1931 and 1951 censuses, which found that that the highest percentage of occupied dwellings had four and five rooms (Table 3.1), the autobiographers inhabited more houses of six or more rooms. This was possibly due to the disparity in the way that the autobiographers enumerated their rooms and the way they were counted in the censuses: the former generally listed their sculleries, the census did not.¹¹ This suggests that what the censuses considered to be marginal or unimportant room was not perceived in the same way by working-class inhabitants. Tom Wakefield described his home as a two-up, two-down house with a back kitchen. Not all autobiographers counted sculleries: Daisy Noakes and Catherine Cookson both referred to their homes as having three rooms but they did not include their sculleries.¹² Size and function of the scullery may have been the issue here. Catherine's scullery contained only two shelves, while Tom's had a sink and later an electric stove. The cooking function of Tom's back kitchen made it more important and it had to be large enough to accommodate these items. Thus, there would have been fewer 'six-room homes' if the autobiographers had recorded their house sizes in the same way as the census: what was unimportant in middle-class homes could be crucial in those of the working class.

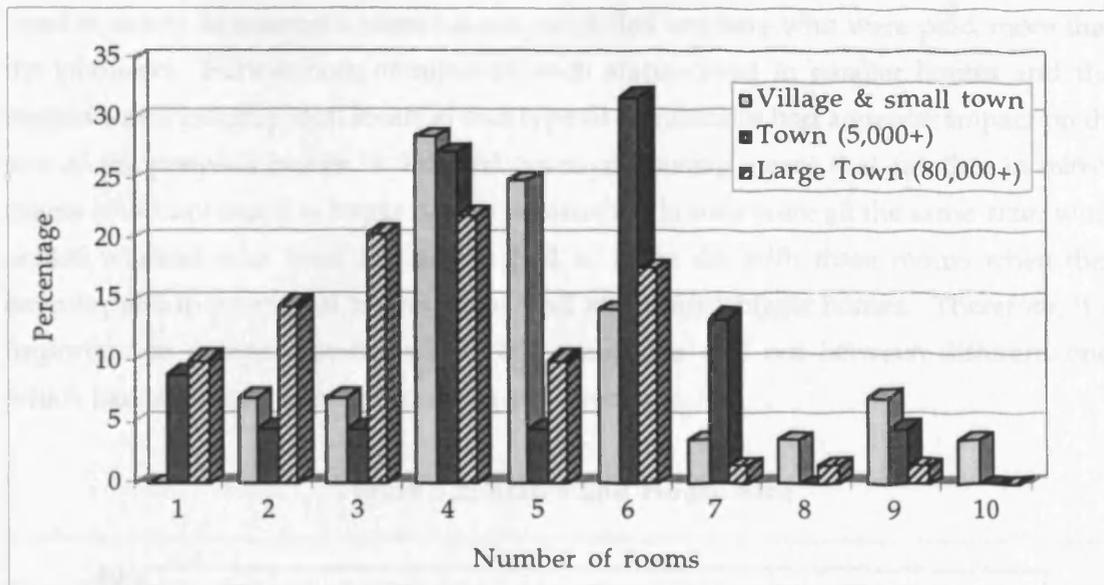
⁹ *Census 1951 England and Wales: Housing Report* (London: HMSO, 1956), p. xxvii. The autobiographies included Scottish homes as well which generally had less rooms.

¹⁰ 123 of the total 179 dwellings had the number of rooms given.

¹¹ Census policy was not always standard. Dauntton explained that enumerators for Leicester in 1911 counted the sculleries: Dauntton, *House and Home in the Victorian City*, p. 50.

¹² Daisy Noakes, *Faded Rainbow*, p. 5; Catherine Cookson, *Our Kate*, p. 22.

Figure 3.1: Home Size and Location



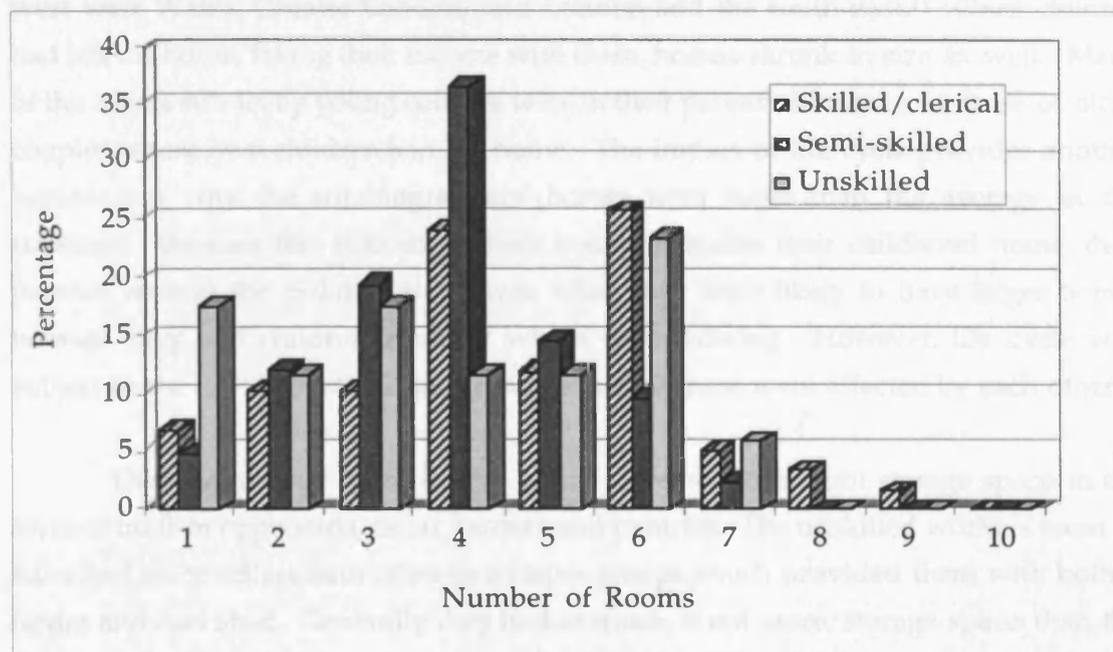
Dwellings = 123 (65% of total dwellings)

The location of the homes in terms of settlement type and geography, affected their size. The autobiographers' homes consisting of one to three rooms were principally located in town or cities with a population of more than 80,000 in 1951. Nearly half the three-room homes were in London in subdivided houses where each family had one floor. In provincial towns small homes were sub-let rooms, back-to-backs, and court housing. Homes with six and seven rooms were more often located in medium-sized towns with a population of between 5,000 and 80,000, while four and five-room homes were commonest in small towns and villages (Figure 3.1).¹³ The latter also contained the largest houses which were occupied by the intermediate class, suggesting that the number of rooms in the home was linked to the head of household's income. None of the intermediate class lived in a home smaller than five rooms and this even applied to the autobiographer who grew up in London. However, the link between income and home size was not clearly reflected in the size of homes of the three status groups of the working class. Data for skilled and semi-skilled workers did support the theory to an extent: more semi-skilled workers lived in three and four-room homes, while skilled workers lived in four and six rooms (Figure 3.2). Unskilled

¹³ The 1951 Census noted that house size related to the period in which the town had urbanised: *Census 1951 England and Wales: Housing Report* (London: HMSO, 1956), pp. cxxvii-cxxviii. Towns which had urbanised in the later nineteenth century tended to have larger dwellings. The 1854 bye-laws specified that houses had to have rear space, which was not possible with back-to-backs which had been the main type of housing for the working class in the older, northern, industrialised towns. This meant that these smaller homes were phased out except in a few specific towns: Stefan Muthesius, *The English Terraced House* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 112.

workers, on the other hand, lived in more one-room homes, as would be expected, but lived in nearly as many six-room houses as skilled workers who were paid more than the labourers. Furthermore, families of each status lived in smaller homes and this suggests that geographical location and type of community had a greater impact on the size of the people's homes.¹⁴ Limited types of housing meant that families in mining towns could not move to larger homes because the houses were all the same size; while skilled workers who lived in London had to make do with three rooms when their counterparts in provincial towns could find and afford bigger homes. Therefore, it is important to compare status within the same area and not between different ones which had different housing pressures and problems.

Figure 3.2: Status and House Size



116 Dwellings out of 179 (remainder either intermediate class or rooms not listed)

Life cycle was another factor which tempered the impact of status on house size. Two thirds of one and two-roomed dwellings were occupied by the autobiographers just after they had got married but their subsequent homes increased in size (Table 3.2). Newly married couples often rented rooms after they had married and the reasons given for this were: difficulties in finding an entire house; the inability to afford anything more than one or two rooms; the fact that they did not need more space until they had children; and because they had less furnishings and possessions.

¹⁴ The variety in regional house plans has been discussed in detail by Muthesius, *The English Terraced House*, pp. 101-142.

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Their homes generally expanded once they had children and the family income rose.¹⁵ This process usually began one or two years after marriage, though some had to wait much longer. Kathleen Dayus's home consisted of one room for ten years (though she had access to other rooms in the shared dwelling). This was partly because she lived in Birmingham and partly because her husband was unemployed for much of the 1920s which meant that they could not afford to rent anything larger.¹⁶ Joyce Storey was also living in one room eight years after her marriage: "during that time, we, and thousands like us, had never had a house of our own."¹⁷ In her case, 1930s slum clearance and the Second World War had exacerbated the situation of the 1930s when 19.8% of households shared dwellings.¹⁸ Joyce also lived in Bristol: in 1951 the south west had a higher percentage of households sharing dwellings than the north, the Midlands, and the eastern regions; the places with a greater percentage than the south west were Wales, Greater London, and London and the south east.¹⁹ Once children had left the home, taking their income with them, homes shrunk in size as well. Many of the rooms sub-let by young couples were in their parent's homes or in those of older couples whose own children had left home. The impact of life cycle provides another explanation why the autobiographers' homes were larger than the average in the censuses. Because the autobiographers mainly describe their childhood home, their parents were at the point in their lives when they were likely to have larger homes because they had children, some of whom were working. However, life cycle was subject to the effects of status and location, just as these were affected by each other.

There were other home spaces which were not rooms but storage space in the form of built-in cupboards, cellar, larders and pantries. The unskilled workers seem to have had more cellars than other two status groups which provided them with both a larder and coal shed. Generally they had as much, if not more, storage space than the other two groups and the reason for this was the result of location and house type. Mass Observation found that homes built during the inter-war period had fewer cupboards than nineteenth-century dwellings and commented that their survey showed "that less care was taken to see to this aspect of home-planning in the new

¹⁵ Winifred Albaya remembered feeling revulsion for her once-cosy home because with the arrival of a third sister the home seem "cramped and inadequate for her longings": Winifred Albaya, *A Sheffield Childhood*, p. 60.

¹⁶ Kathleen Dayus, *All My Days*, p. 73.

¹⁷ Joyce Storey, *Joyce's War*, p. 146.

¹⁸ A. H. Halsey, *British Social Trends Since 1900* (1972, London: Macmillan, 1988 reprint), p. 367.

¹⁹ Halsey, *British Social Trends*, p. 367. Scotland was not included in Halsey's data.

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houses built after 1920 than in the old ones erected in the nineteenth century.”²⁰ This explains why unskilled workers had the highest percentage of storage space. Unlike skilled workers, the unskilled did not have access to early council houses or suburban semis. As Burnett explained, “the council tenant of the 1920s and early 1930s was a man in a ‘sheltered’ manual job which had not been seriously endangered by the depression, who earned slightly more than the average wage and had a family of two children.”²¹ This meant that the unskilled tended to live in the older, nineteenth-century houses such as that like Kathleen Dayus’s which had been banned by the city council by 1870s.²² However, houses with cellars were located in particular areas. Kathleen lived in Birmingham, but three-quarters of the cellars in the autobiographers’ homes were attached to houses in northern towns.²³ Ironically, although more storage space was required between 1900 and 1955, when the working class were acquiring more possessions, dwellings were built increasingly with less storage space and with less space altogether. Evidently from the skilled worker’s point of view, the quality and prestige of living in a council house compensated for the lack of storage areas.

Table 3.2: Life Cycle and Size of Home²⁴

Number of Rooms	Total Houses n=35	First House n=13	Second House n=8	Third House n=5	Fourth House n=4	Fifth+ House n=5
One	29	54	13	20	25	0
Two	20	38	13	20	0	0
Three	9	8	25	0	0	0
Four	17	0	50	20	0	20
Five	9	0	0	20	25	20
Six+	17	0	0	20	50	60

Total Dwellings = 35

²⁰ Mass Observation, *An Enquiry into People’s Homes* (London: John Murray, 1943), p. 149.

²¹ John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing 1815-1985* (1986, London: Routledge, 1993), p. 238. See also Martin Daunton’s “Housing” in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *Cambridge Social History of Britain* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1990), p. 240. Rents on new council estates were sometimes two or three times the amount paid for previous residence: Alison Ravetz, *The Place of Home: English Domestic Environments, 1914-2000* (London: E.&F.N. Spon, 1995), p. 20. See Chapter One (the “macro approach”).

²² Daunton claims that many of them were built in the early nineteenth century: Daunton, *House and Home in the Victorian City*, pp. 43-44.

²³ Rodger points out that cellars were common in older cities such as Leicester, Nottingham, London and Liverpool, which would explain their presence in Sheffield homes: Richard Rodger, *Housing in Urban Britain, 1780-1914* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1985), p. 33.

²⁴ This table is based only on the dwellings of the autobiographers when they were adults on the assumption that they could not have remembered the early years of their parents’ marriage.

Table 3.3: Status Distribution of External and Storage Space (Percentage)

Category	All Status Groups	Skilled/ clerical	Semi-skilled	Unskilled
Number of dwellings =	179	85	52	29
Wash house	11	13	8	14
Pantry	17	20	8	17
Cellar	9	7	10	17
Cupboard under stairs	5	8	2	3
Midden	4	5	2	3
Shed	35	35	37	34
Garden	24	18	31	31
Yard	30	22	36	38

Home space and storage space did not just consist of rooms but also of other spaces such as wash houses, sheds and yards. Unlike room space, however, not all families had access to external space and some had to share it with other families which reduced its value. Gardens were never shared, but about a third of wash houses and yards were. The significance of a garden was that it created a space of outdoor privacy, therefore it could not be shared. On the other hand, although a yard could create privacy, it often did not and thus did not have the same connotations as a garden. About a quarter of the dwellings were described as having gardens and slightly more had yards; some had both. Like the number of rooms, the amount of external space a family had access to was affected by location, status and life cycle. More than half the autobiographers living in villages and small towns referred to some sort of garden compared with under half in medium-sized towns and a quarter of those living in large towns and cities. Only a tenth of the autobiographers mentioned wash houses and proportionally more were in villages and medium sized towns than in large towns. *People's Homes* reported that the better-off had reasonably large gardens but in the autobiographies the semi-skilled and unskilled were more likely to have gardens.²⁵ This may have been due to rural areas containing a higher proportion of semi-skilled workers, and it was in such areas that gardens were more common. The sharing of facilities, however, was confined to the less well off and a third of both the unskilled and semi-skilled shared their yards compared with just over one fifth of skilled workers. As the people most likely to sub-let, young couples had to share external facilities but their access to them depended the good will of the main tenant. Given that couples had less control over shared facilities is not surprising that they wanted to get 'a home of their own'. It may have also been more important for better-off families to have more control over their domestic space if they expected others to judge them by the state of their home environment. Moreover, sharing space was often

²⁵ Mass Observation, *An Enquiry into People's Homes*, p. 162.

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inconvenient and a source of contention because it was only available at certain times and required negotiation to use. This was why working-class women were generally against the 1918 Women's Sub-Committee proposals for communal living.²⁶

Room type was affected by the number of rooms in the homes. Four-room dwellings could accommodate parlours, but while a third of six-room houses were recorded as having parlours, only a quarter of the former possessed one. Living kitchens were generally found in homes with less rooms, while kitchens (used only for cooking and washing) and dining rooms were more often found in larger homes. This suggests that the more rooms a home possessed the greater the differentiation in room usage.²⁷ Because skilled and unskilled workers were living in the six-room houses, they were more likely to have parlours than semi-skilled workers. The lack of difference between the top and bottom half of the working class is interesting given the agreement among autobiographers and historians that the parlour was a sign of status: Grace Foakes, who did not have a front room as a child, explained that it was only in the poorest homes that people did not have a parlour.²⁸ Thus, having a front room had as much to do with access to certain types of houses than income and this relates back to the discussion above on location. Londoners of any class generally lived in three rooms, and to increase their house size often had to move out of London altogether. Living in medium sized towns and provincial cities generally meant that larger homes were available (though not in the north west where homes often only had four rooms) and this meant that they were more likely to be within reach of the unskilled workers' income.

Table 3.4: Size of Home and Room Type (Percentage)

N° of Rooms	Front room n = 48	Bathroom n = 16	Living- kitchen n = 84	Dining room n = 10	Scullery - n = 44	Kitchen n = 18
1	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	2	0	12	0	0	0
3	10	6	19	0	7	6
4	21	19	31	10	36	28
5	17	19	11	0	18	11
6	35	56	21	50	20	50
7	6	0	2	10	9	0
8	0	0	0	10	0	0
9	6	0	2	20	7	6
10	2	0	1	0	2	0

²⁶ Louise Christie, "Gender, Design and Ideology in Council Housing: Urban Scotland 1917-1944", *Bulletin of the International Planning History Society* XV 3 (1993), p. 9.

²⁷ This is addressed in Chapter Four.

²⁸ Grace Foakes, *My Part of the River*, p. 161.

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The census did not count bathrooms and they were not counted as rooms in the data above. Autobiographers who had one certainly mentioned it and this was because bathrooms were a rarity among the working class. The houses with bathrooms had five or six rooms; Valerie Avery was the only autobiographer who had a bathroom in a three-roomed house, though in sub-divided houses there was sometimes a bathroom for the whole house.²⁹ Valerie and her mother had a bathroom because they lived in a council flat: the type of house was important in determining whether families got a bathroom. All of the council houses occupied by the autobiographers possessed bathrooms with the exceptions of those of Winifred Albaya, whose family lived in a pre-1918 municipal flat, and Rose Gamble, whose bath was in the kitchen. In contrast, *People's Homes* noted that seventy percent of the Victorian housing stock did not possess bathrooms, whereas only two percent of the houses built since 1918 lacked bathrooms. This meant that until post World War II, it was mainly skilled workers and employed semi-skilled workers who has access to bathrooms: none of the unskilled workers had bathrooms until this time.³⁰

To summarise, the size of the home in terms of number of rooms, storage space and external facilities was reliant to an extent on the income of the families. However, the size of home was also subject to regional house type and to the life course of householders. The income of wife and children (not taken into account by the census in their allocation of status) meant that the family of an unskilled worker could sometimes afford a bigger home than a skilled worker with young children. This was the case for Joe Loftus's family. Although his father was a labourer, they lived in a house with at least six rooms. Joe was the youngest and for much of the time that he was growing up, his three elder brothers were working in skilled occupations and this increased the family income. Jim Bullock was the youngest of twelve and his older brothers, like his father, were miners. They only lived in four rooms despite being classified as status group III by the census. The problem for Jim's family was not that a larger home was unaffordable, because the combined income of the father and brothers would have permitted this, but that they lived in a mining town in which all the houses were exactly the same size. Margaret Monkham's home size was the result of different factors again. She lived in only three rooms in a back-to-back. Her father was also a miner, and although her elder sister was in service, it was principally his income on which the family survived. However, as the children got older, they moved

²⁹ Helen Forrester, *Twopence to Cross the Mersey*, p. 47; Ron Barnes, *Coronation Cups and Jam Jars*, p. 123.

³⁰ Valerie Avery, *London Spring*, p. 160; Joyce Storey, *Joyce's War*, p. 164.

into progressively larger houses. The next home had a scullery and a coal house and the following one a garden.³¹

Part Two: Perceptions of Space

Knowing how many rooms there were in a home provides only an idea of how big it was because room size varied from house to house. For example, in Scotland two-room tenements were common, but these rooms were on average larger than in English cottages.³² The rooms in pre-1918 dwellings were often larger than those in council houses. Mass Observation noted that the most complaints about the size and number of rooms came from dwellers in garden cities and housing estates because they had to fit their possessions in a ten foot square parlour rather than one which was "typically 14 ft 6 in by 12 ft."³³ It is possible to estimate room size using housing plans. However, the room size is relational; it needs to be compared to the objects, activities and people which consumed and used the space. Mass Observation produced diagrams of rooms and their contents and noted the space between walls, floor and ceiling.³⁴ Room size is also relational to people's perceptions of how much space they have: to an outsider a room might seem crowded with people and full of furniture, but to the people using it might feel that the space they have is adequate. This part of the chapter, therefore, deals with people's perceptions of the extent of space; how they described it and whether they thought that they had enough. Since the average sized home was four rooms, did this meet the requirements of the working-class family? It also focuses on the experiences of space which related to furnishings, people and activities and how these experiences shed light on the way people perceived it.

The autobiographers rarely stated the actual size of their homes. Of all the households, only two gave the measurements for all the rooms. Kay Pearson's "tiny" house had a kitchen that was "about 12" [sic] square" and a scullery that was "6 yards square [sic] so you will realise how small was the bedroom above".³⁵ The attic

³¹ Joe Loftus, "Lee Side"; Jim Bullock, *Bower's Row*; Margaret Monkham, *As I Remember*.

³² Daunton, *House and Home in Victorian City*, p. 54.

³³ Mass Observation, *An Enquiry into People's Homes*, pp. 56, 66-7.

³⁴ Rodger has done this for Glasgow tenements: Richard Rodger, "Scottish Housing and English Cultural Imperialism c.1880-1940" in Susan Zimmermann, ed., *Urban Space and Identity* (Budapest: Central European University, 1995), p. 78.

³⁵ Kay Pearson, *Life in Hull*, pp. 26-27. She presumably meant twelve feet square and six square yards.

went the whole depth of the building. Jim Bullock's living room was larger at five yards square unlike Betty Dickinson's which was only twelve square yards.³⁶ Her three-storey home had one room on each floor so the other rooms were the same size as this. Others gave measurements for only one or two rooms or detailed the size of the yard or garden. Tom Wakefield's backyard was ten foot square and James Charlton's garden (which was separate from his yard) went back fifty yards.³⁷ More often vaguer terms were used. Tom Wakefield's garden (as opposed to his yard) was "at least" a hundred yards long and between thirty and forty feet wide; Ralph Glasser's hall was "a yard or so wide".³⁸ No one gave the size of all the rooms, yards and out houses they used for domestic purposes.

The qualitative accounts of the amount of space, though inaccurate, indicated what people felt about the quantity of home space. If someone described a room as being small then it was small to them, whereas if they thought a room was large then it was still large to them even if was small to someone else. The majority of references to rooms size were of this qualitative type. Josephine Gibney described her back bedroom as "no bigger than a large airing cupboard", while Ralph Glasser sister's room was a "cubby hole".³⁹ Spike Mays considered that his kitchen was "tiny", Margaret Ward referred to "our small room" and Betty Dickinson thought that her twelve square yard living room was "unusually small".⁴⁰ Not all the comments were about small rooms: Edith Evans's Nissan hut kitchen and Alice Markham's farmhouse kitchen were "large". Maggie Newbery's tenant farmhouse was "large and roomy" and Eric Fairclough had a "light and airy" bedroom.⁴¹

It is easy to assume that small rooms were viewed negatively and large rooms positively, and the increase in house size in connection with life course indicated that most families, like Margaret Monkham's, wanted homes with more space. Maggie Newbery described her family's three-room home in Bradford as congested after the

³⁶ Jim Bullock, *Bower's Row*, p. 2; Betty Dickinson, *Never Far From Wincobank Hill*, p. 36.

³⁷ Tom Wakefield, *A Forties Child*, p. 12; James Charlton, *More Sand in My Shoes*, p. 94.

³⁸ My italics in both: Tom Wakefield, *A Forties Child*, p. 13; Ralph Glasser, *Growing Up in the Gorbals*, pp. 148-9.

³⁹ Josephine Gibney, *Joe McGarrigle's Daughter*, p. 32; Ralph Glasser, *Growing Up in the Gorbals*, p. 148.

⁴⁰ Spike Mays, *Reuben's Corner*, p. 53; Margaret Ward, *One Camp Chair in the Living Room*, p. 6; Betty Dickinson, *Never Far From Wincobank Hill*, p. 35.

⁴¹ Edith Evans, *Rough Diamonds*, pp. 229, 29; Alice Markham, *Back of Beyond*, p. 27; Maggie Newbery, *Reminiscences of a Bradford Mill Girl*, p. 8; Eric Fairclough, *In a Lancashire Street*, p. 85.

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nine-room farm house in which she had spent her childhood in the 1900s. As soon as they could afford it, they moved to a six-room house.⁴² This example shows that satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the size of home was often linked to past experiences. Eric Fairclough had shared a bedroom with his brother before he got the “airy” bedroom, so the change in the subjective impression of size could be attributed as much to the absence of his brother as to area of the room. Edith Evans had grown up in a house which she described as having a tiny kitchen and had spent the early years of her marriage during Second World War in rented rooms. It was not surprising that she thought the kitchen of a Nissan hut “large”.⁴³ Some of the descriptions about size seem to be more neutral such as “small” or “tiny” halls. Their function and contents meant that it was less problematic if they were small, unlike living rooms or bedrooms which contained more furniture and had to provide space for a wider variety of activities.

Other portrayals of room size suggest that small rooms were preferred by some autobiographers because, as I alluded to in the previous section, there were other attributes of houses that were more important to the dwellers than their size. Joyce Storey swapped her “barn” of a council house for a prefab.⁴⁴ She found the small rooms of the latter had distinct advantages at a time of post-war shortages: they were cheaper to heat and cheaper to furnish and had well equipped kitchens and built-in cupboards. Grace Foakes regretted her move to a larger house in the mid 1930s. The larger rooms did not compensate for the other defects of the house. It was next to a railway, gloomy and the kitchen was old-fashioned. She did not like the area it was in either, despite the fact it was supposedly a better area.⁴⁵ In the same period, Evelyn Cowan’s family moved to a flat that was much smaller because her sisters wanted to live in a more up-market area of Glasgow, while Richard Heaton and his wife moved to a smaller home because they had started up a shop.⁴⁶ In both Evelyn’s and Richard’s cases, renting smaller homes was compensated by the change in status. Evelyn’s family were not forced to move, and the flat they moved into cost as much as their previous flat but the status of the area was evidently more important. Richard’s change in status was occupational rather than to do with location of home and it was more important to be his own boss than to have home large enough for their

⁴² Maggie Newbery, *Reminiscences of a Bradford Mill Girl*, p. 24.

⁴³ Edith Evans, *Rough Diamonds*, pp. 29, 196, 229.

⁴⁴ Joyce Storey, *Joyce’s War*, p. 182.

⁴⁵ Grace Foakes, *My Life With Reuben*, p. 52.

⁴⁶ Evelyn Cowan, *Spring Remembered*, p. 153; Richard Heaton, *Salford: My Home Town*, p. 23.

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possessions. Therefore, the trend seems to have been that while people generally wanted more space, their housing needs were more complex and they were willing to exchange space in favour of improved facilities or status.

Furniture took up a great deal of space and this had consequences on movement and activity within rooms. Certain items of furniture in particular absorbed space, such as the couch, kitchen table, sideboard and beds, leaving little room to move around the room. Ernie Taberner's couch in his inter-war living room was only three feet from the fire so anyone sitting on it had to pull up their feet to let people pass. Catherine Cookson explained that their kitchen, although small, was crammed with furniture and for someone to get to the six foot long saddle (couch), either the table had to be pulled out or the person had to "scramble over the head."⁴⁷ There were several references to large tables occupying much of the room. Louis Heren's large living-room table - in combination with the other furniture - meant that "[i]t was impossible to take two or more steps in any direction except for the space between the shop and the kitchen. Movement in that room was a constant shuffle."⁴⁸ Bedrooms seemed to have been more crammed with furniture than most rooms. In the 1920s, Jim Hooley had a double bed in his family's back bedroom: "You had to be a contortionist to get into this bed because it filled the room."⁴⁹ Edith Evans' bedroom was filled by two bedsteads which she shared with her siblings and there was no room for any other furniture. Her experiences were the same as Josephine Gibney's two decades later in the 1930s: "[i]t was no easy task for us all to scramble in between the sheets each night. Our small room now housed three beds and a wardrobe and it was difficult not to scrape our skins as we shuffled about."⁵⁰ Lack of space in bedrooms continued to the end of the period, as Valerie Avery's description of the room she shared with her mother in the 1950s illustrated:

Our Bedroom yawned stifling and cramped; it was all bed. Once you opened the door there was just enough room to climb into the bed and, sitting on it you could open the big wardrobe, and the small wardrobe...you could even open the drawers of the dressing table, look out the window into the backyard and rock my doll's pram that stood in front of a broken fire-place hidden by a length of pink soothed curtain.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Ernie Taberner, *A Lancashire Upbringing*, p. 85; Catherine Cookson, *Our Kate*, p. 23.

⁴⁸ Louis Heren, *Growing-Up Poor In London*, p. 32.

⁴⁹ Jim Hooley, *A Hillgate Childhood*, p. 9.

⁵⁰ Josephine Gibney, *Joe McGarrigle's Daughter*, p. 77.

⁵¹ Valerie Avery, *London Morning*, p. 60. Valerie did not mention whether her next bedroom, which she also had to share with her mother, was any bigger but their new flat did not have enough room for their piano.

The difference between this room and the ones in the earlier part of the century was that it did at least have other items of furniture even if it felt like it was “all bed.” The difficulties of accommodating beds explains the popularity of folding beds such as desk beds, put-u-up suites and chair beds, which could at least be folded up during the day.

Storage space was important because it helped alleviate the pressures on space. Washing equipment was cumbersome and needed to be stored out of the way. Dick Beavis illustrated how awkward it was if there was nowhere to store these households items. In his home the mangle was kept in a recess in the wall under a cloth and “it looked like a prize piano covered up” with the dripping board sticking out.⁵² Joyce Skinner and Edna Purchase, growing up in a pre-1918 terraced house during the 1920s, explained that the wash house “[l]ike the cupboard under the stairs...was an important part of the house”; their cleaning equipment was kept in one and the washing equipment in the other.⁵³ Mass Observation noted that storage areas affected the level of satisfaction with the home: “[t]o a very large extent the home acts as a storage place for people’s belongings. More storage space is wanted (25% ask for it) in nearly all the areas surveyed.”⁵⁴ It found that complaints about cupboards in the survey were about thirty percent of the number of complaints about lack of bathroom, the latter being the “biggest single specific grievance” about housing.⁵⁵ Baths were also space-absorbing items and were usually kept in yards or wash houses. This was acceptable unless there was no yard or it was shared with others. The type of technology available to the families, such as zinc baths, meant that having somewhere to store these things was more crucial because they were items which families could not do without, and as a problem persisted until the end of the period.⁵⁶

Cramped rooms may have made living awkward or inconvenient but they did at least generate an air of cosiness and activity. An overcrowded room was more desirable than an empty one since the latter was generally an indication that the family

⁵² Dick Beavis, *What Price Happiness*, p. 8.

⁵³ Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Down Hill*, p. 18. Ruth was called Edna throughout the autobiography and hereafter is referred to as Edna.

⁵⁴ Mass Observation, *An Enquiry into People’s Homes*, p. xvii.

⁵⁵ Mass Observation, *An Enquiry into People’s Homes*, p. 67.

⁵⁶ Valerie Avery’s bath was kept under the kitchen table because the downstairs tenants in their sub-divided house complained when they kept it in the yard. This was in 1955: Valerie Avery, *London Morning*, p. 57 and *London Spring*, p. 36.

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could not afford to furnish it. Joyce and Edna Skinner's front room was empty for a few years for this reason, while Walt Palmer's and Archie Hill's remained like this all their childhood.⁵⁷ The contents of Helen Forrester's front room vanished periodically: it were repossessed three times.⁵⁸ However, it was only Archie who viewed his empty front room negatively because to him it was an indication of the thriftlessness of his parents. Helen would have preferred that their front room had remained empty and the money spent on furnishing the bedrooms and living room properly. As children, the Skinners and Walt probably cared less about the empty rooms than their parents. The majority of these experiences happened during the 1920s and 1930s, except Walt who was writing about his late 1940s childhood. While the Depression may have made it harder to fill rooms for unemployed families, the cases above are explained by other factors: Joyce and Edna's parents, being a young couple, did not fill the front room until the rest of the house was furnished; Archie's father spent the little he did manage to earn on drink; and Helen Forrester's parents, a middle-class couple fallen on bad times, had no idea how to budget for hire purchased goods. Walt's empty room was a reflection of income: his father was an unskilled labourer. Other rooms were sparse rather than totally empty. Jim Hooley's 1920s living room "was bare, to say the least." They had a table, two chairs, a dresser, a broken sofa and bits of linoleum. Later they got a "sort of lino" and a steel fender. Mrs Udell's front room was at first sparsely furnished but later her parents acquired a three-piece suite, a piano, a fender and fire dogs.⁵⁹ These examples indicate that rooms full of furniture were principally inhabited by couples at the mid-stage of their life-cycle because they had had a longer time to fill them, though this general trend was counteracted by low income and unemployment.

Activities had to take place in the empty spaces left by bulky furniture and certain activities took up more space than others. Not only was the washing equipment difficult to store but the task itself required a lot of space. When Daisy Noakes's mother did the washing in the scullery, no one was able to wash up the breakfast or dinner or even go into the scullery because the room was too full to move in.⁶⁰ Elsie Oman's aunt washed for a living and this meant the house was "like a

⁵⁷ Joyce and Edna Skinner, *Growing-Up Downhill*, p. 82; Walt Palmer, *Mother's Ruin*, p. 7; Archie Hill, *A Cage of Shadows*, p. 25.

⁵⁸ Helen Forrester, *Liverpool Miss*, p. 208.

⁵⁹ Jim Hooley, *A Hillgate Childhood*, p. 3; Joy Udell, "The Fire Place in the Front Room Held a Fire Only Twice a Year", p. 109.

⁶⁰ Daisy Noakes, *The Town Beehive*, p. 6.

laundry" with the washing in the back room and ironing in the living room.⁶¹ This experience would have been all too familiar to Alice Linton whose mother also took in washing and their two rooms were always full of drying clothes. Drying clothes especially monopolised space: Kathleen Dayus wrote that on wet days "every available space" was given up to damp clothes; Winifred Renshaw's family could not find anywhere to sit in the winter when the house was full of dripping washing.⁶² Depending on what method was employed, prodding rugs was another activity that took up space. George Hitchin remembers that the prodding frame was balanced between the table and sideboard and his relatives took up their seats around it to join in.⁶³ In Jim Bullock's home there could be as many as sixteen men, women and children all working on a section of one big rug.⁶⁴ The combination of small homes and space consuming activities meant that time management in working-class homes was an important issue and as a subject is addressed in Chapter Seven.

Like furnishings and activities, people took up space. This would have been especially problematic for large families living in small homes, and was related to the status of the family as well (Figure 3.3). Skilled and semi-skilled families in the autobiographies both peaked at four persons per household, while unskilled showed higher levels at three and six. Although the average skilled and semi-skilled family was smaller, some did have large families. Maggie Newbery's three-roomed back-to-back was overcrowded because there were ten people in the house and all the activities happened in one room. Alice Markham, although her home was larger than most, still considered it small for the number of people living in it.⁶⁵ Ralph Glasser was the only autobiographer who thought his home "too large" with an "air of desertion", but this was after his mother had died and his sisters had left home.⁶⁶ There were not many accounts of people filling space and this was perhaps because it was easier to send children out the home to play in the evenings and at weekends.

When the children were older, work and leisure kept them outside the home. In rural areas, where four-roomed dwellings were the common experience, the pressures of household size were alleviated by the employment of girls in domestic service.

⁶¹ Elsie Oman, *Salford Stepping Stones*, p. 14.

⁶² Alice Linton, *Not Expecting Miracles*, p. 51; Kathleen Dayus, *Her People*, p. 33; Winifred Renshaw, *An Ordinary Life*, Chapter 19.

⁶³ George Hitchin, *Pit-Yacker*, p. 13.

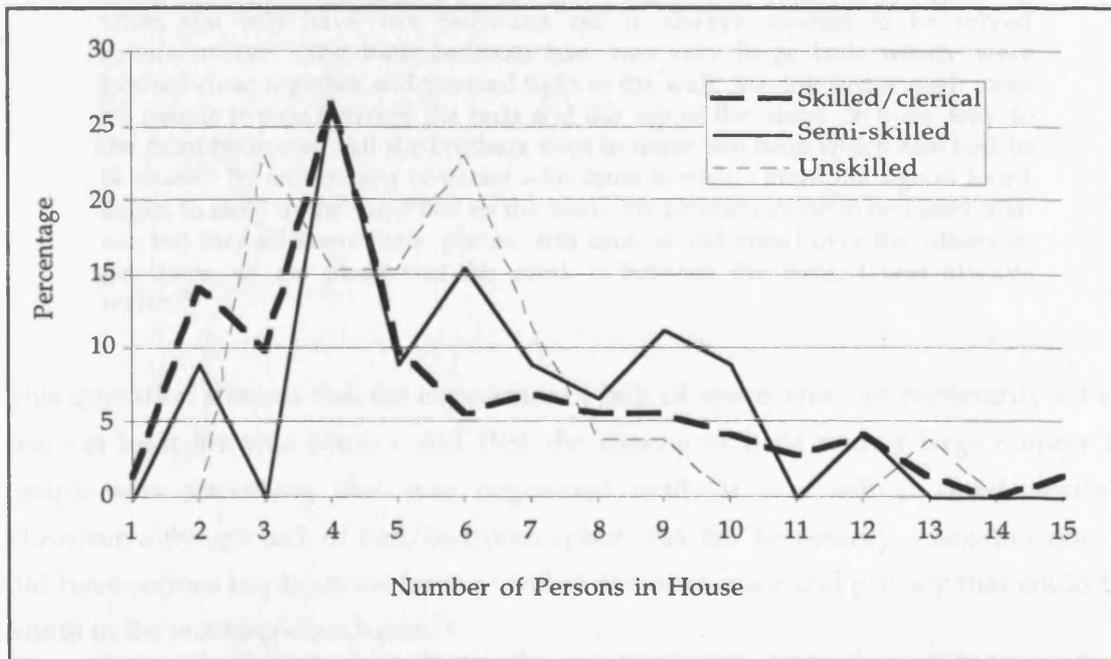
⁶⁴ Jim Bullock, *Bowers Row*, p. 13. Rug making continued to the 1950s.

⁶⁵ Alice Markham, *Back of Beyond*, p. 30.

⁶⁶ Ralph Glasser, *Growing Up in the Gorbals*, p. 171.

Mollie Harris remembers how they all cried when their eldest sister left home to go into service, but she commented that "one fourteen-year old out of the house left a bit more room for those that were left."⁶⁷ This was a side effect of lack of employment opportunities in villages for girls. Families in large towns, although they may have had fewer rooms in their homes, would generally keep their daughters at home. When Maggie Newbery was living in the "roomy" farmhouse her sisters were sent into service. When they moved into Bradford the sisters came home.

Figure 3.3: Status and Family Size



Children could not be sent outside all the time, especially in the winter, and they spent their evenings and weekends in the living room. The family would have also had to return home for bed, unless they were on shift work. It was at these times that space must have been especially congested. A comparison of the number of rooms with household size (used in the census to examine overcrowding) showed that a quarter of the autobiographers' homes had more than one room per person, one in seven had one person to a room, and one in ten had more than two persons to a room. The greatest number of persons to a room was seven - and this was a family who were living in only one room. The pressure of people in bedrooms was especially intense. One in three people who mentioned that they shared a bedroom, shared with one other person, while just over one in four shared with two others. Approximately one in five

⁶⁷ Mollie Harris, *A Kind Of Magic*, p. 185.

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had rooms to themselves.⁶⁸ People did not just share rooms, they also shared beds. About half the autobiographers or members of their households shared a bed with another person. One in three had a bed to themselves, while just over one in ten had to share a bed with two other people. In some cases there were four persons sharing one bed, and the most people in one bed was five.⁶⁹ Thus, space was especially lacking in bedrooms: not only were the rooms full of beds to accommodate the number of persons sleeping in the room but, in addition, space was lacking inside the beds, as Jim Bullock explained:

Another problem we had was sleeping. A large family takes some organising when you only have two bedrooms, but it always seemed to be solved satisfactorily. The back bedroom had two very large beds which were pushed close together and pressed tight to the wall, leaving just enough room for people to pass between the beds and the top of the stairs on their way to the front bedroom. All the brothers slept in these two beds which also had to be shared by any cousins or uncles who came to visit. From the age of four I began to sleep in the same bed as the men...my brothers came to bed later than me, but they all knew their places, and each would crawl over the others to get there...as my place was the crack in between the beds, I was always warm.⁷⁰

This quotation stresses that the experience of lack of space was not necessarily a bad one - at least Jim was warm - and that the sharing of beds with a large number of people was something that was negotiated until "it was solved satisfactorily". However, although lack of bed/bedroom space was not necessarily a negative one, it did have serious implications for the level of personal space and privacy that could be found in the working-class home.⁷¹

Two themes emerge from this chapter. The first is that the average sized working-class home was not large: it usually had four rooms. Some families had larger or smaller homes than this and while the level of domestic space was affected by income, other factors such as location of the home and life cycle were as likely to create diversity of experiences of home space. The second theme is that space was an important issue for working-class families because out 132 households, over half made references to the amount of space in the home. Three-quarters of these descriptions were mainly about space being confined rather than spacious, and the desire for more

⁶⁸These figures excluded parents except in cases where they shared a room with children.

⁶⁹ These figures included parents only when they shared a bed with their children.

⁷⁰ Jim Bullock, *Bowers Row*, p. 9.

⁷¹ See Chapter Four.

Physical Space

space was indicated by the fact that families moved to bigger houses if they could afford to and the extra space was appreciated, if not expected. Mass Observation found that room size and number of rooms were high on the list of satisfactions and dissatisfactions with the homes: ten percent complained about the number of rooms and three percent about the size of them.⁷² However, it should not automatically assumed that the experience of small homes was negative, any more than that of the large ones was positive. There was a difference between what people desired and what they got and generally they made the best of the situation, because it was home and the place over which they had control. Betty Dickinson summarised this attitude. "I know that many of my generation who waited years for their own home, will agree that however humble, however small, there is nothing like a hearth of one's own." She explained further that her first home of her own was "paradise after sharing a home first with relatives and then in lodgings."⁷³ The *People's Homes* survey found overall that "[a] great many people never think in terms of actively liking or disliking their home. They take them for granted."⁷⁴ One major reason why people were able to put up with their homes, was because they adopted particular strategies to deal with their deficiencies. One strategy, a response to limited space, was space management which created patterns of living and space usage that were particular to the working class. This space management is the subject of Chapter Four.

⁷² Mass Observation, *An Enquiry into People's Homes*, pp. 56, 63.

⁷³ Betty Dickinson, *Never Far From Wincobank Hill*, p. 35.

⁷⁴ Mass Observation, *An Enquiry into People's Homes*, p. 68.

Chapter Four

Social Space: There's No Space Like Home

Everything happened in that one room downstairs, it was a constant hive of activity. Mother washed, ironed and on rainy days, dried the clothes for the seven of us in this room...[and] would bake, cook and clean in this one place. It was our sitting room, kitchen, bathroom, playroom and sickroom, all rolled into one.¹

This chapter examines how people interacted with their domestic space to create modes of living that were a response to the confines of their homes. Korosec-Serfaty has argued that just as dwellings have an impact on the ways in which people live inside their homes, so dwellers invest their dwellings with their own meanings by appropriating, transforming and modifying them.² Historians and architects have concentrated on the patterns generated by the physical and material conditions of a dwelling, but have tended to ignore the inhabitants' use of space.³ As a social-psychologist, Korosec-Serfaty credits people with greater personal freedom than they actually possess in the use of their homes and, as Roderick Lawrence has pointed out, it is important to take into account the socio-historical context in which the space is being used and the demographic profile of the inhabitants.⁴ In the earlier part of the century, personal or family appropriation of space was especially tempered by class: income dictated the amount of space and therefore how space was used in the home. Robert MacDonald found this to be the case in his study of bye-law housing between 1918 and 1970. He argued that "particular tendencies" developed in relation to use of space and household expenditure.⁵ He questioned the extent to which the home was

¹ Edna Nockalls, *Another Time, Another Place*, pp. 4-5.

² Perla Korosec-Serfaty, "Experience and Use of the Dwelling" in I. Altman and C. Werner, eds., *Home Environments* (N.Y. & London: Plenum Press, 1985), pp. 73-76. Carol Werner, Irmin Altman and Diana Oxley also discuss this in "Temporal Aspects of Homes: A Transactional Perspective" in Altman and Werner, eds., *Home Environments*, pp. 5, 17.

³ See Chapter One, "the macro approach".

⁴ Roderick Lawrence, "Public Collective and Private Space: A Study of Urban Housing in Switzerland" in Susan Kent, ed., *Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space: An Interdisciplinary Cross Cultural Study* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1990), p. 74.

⁵ Robert MacDonald, "The Appropriation of Space Inside the Small English "Bye-Law" Terraced House, 1913-1979" (Liverpool: Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, 1983), p. 38.

actually a place of freedom, while at the same time appreciating that people were able to give meaning to their domestic space within these constraints.

The consequence of limited domestic space was that it either had a highly specialised (often time-specific) use or had multiple, non-specialised uses. The use of space, however, was never static and varied diachronically and synchronically in conjunction with seasons and weekly household rhythms. This use of space is analysed in the first part of the chapter. The second part assesses other consequences of limited space: the lack of privacy or personal space and the tensions within the household that arose from this. The third part of the chapter examines the strategies which were developed to try and ensure some privacy both between the household members and outsiders and between members of the household within the home. The final part assesses the meaning that certain rooms had for the autobiographers and how age and gender might affect the way that they experienced domestic space.

Part One: Using Space

There are three main ways in which I have analysed the use of space. The first way involves a linguistic approach, examining room usage by the names given to the rooms.⁶ The second examines the activities which happened in the rooms, yard or garden. This method has been advocated by Rapoport who argues that certain questions need to be asked: what activities were being done; in what spaces were they happening; and whom did the activities include or exclude?⁷ Stephen Tagg used activities ("behavioural" method) to understand the meaning that certain rooms have for people and divided activities into "single peaked" ones which were activities that only took place in one room and "multi-nodal" activities which occurred in every room.⁸ The third way assesses the room contents and its uses ('intended' or otherwise) in order to understand how that room was used. This material approach was used by Canter and Lee in the 1970s to assess the specialisation of Japanese room usage as a result of Westernisation.⁹ The move to greater specialisation of the rooms

⁶ Maria Guiliani, "Naming the Rooms: Implication of a Change in the Home Model", *Environment and Behavior* XIX 2 (1987), pp. 183, 194.

⁷ Amos Rapoport, "Systems of Activities and Systems of Settings" in Susan Kent, ed., *Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space*, p. 9.

⁸ Stephen Tagg, "The Subjective Meaning of Rooms: Some Analyses and Investigations" in D. Canter and T. Lee, eds., *Psychology and the Built Environment* (n.pl.: Architectural Press, 1974), p. 66.

⁹ David Canter and Kyung Hoi Lee, "A Non Reactive Study of Room Usage in Modern Japanese Apartments" in Canter and Lee, eds., *Psychology and the Built Environment*, pp. 48-55.

they described was not so different from that of the British working class, although the type of furniture studied was different.

The Linguistic Approach

Using the names of the rooms in order to examine their use, was hampered by the confusion over what the rooms should be called. Mass Observation explained this problem:

In the course of the present survey considerable difficulty was caused by the verbal confusion in connection with kitchens. Some people call the room where they cooked the kitchen and the room where they eat the living room. Others call the room where they cook, the scullery, and the room where they eat the back kitchen, and eat in a living room or a kitchen.¹⁰

This meant that rooms used for different activities were given the same name, while rooms used for the same activities were given different names. This was certainly the case in the autobiographers' homes. Furthermore, not only did different households employ different names, but members of the same household used different names, while others might give different names to the same rooms themselves: Joyce Storey referred to the room which contained the sink as either the "scullery" or the "kitchen" and the room that contained the range as either the "kitchen" or the "living room." In Vicky Massey's home the "living room" was also called the "lounge". Other autobiographers changed the names of their rooms as they moved from one house to another. Grace Foakes called the room they lived in the "sitting room" in one house and the "living room" in the next.¹¹

"Kitchen" as a name for a room was most frequently used by the authors and over one in two of the homes possessed a room which was called the kitchen. "Living room" was a term used far less by the authors; although approximately two thirds of the dwellings had a room which the inhabitants both lived and cooked in, only one in three referred to it as the "living room". "Parlour" was a far less popular term than "front room". Only two "parlours" and three "front rooms" were used more like the 'accepted' uses of sitting or living rooms; the remainder were used as a 'best room'. This would suggest that the terms parlour and front room commonly signified a room that was used for best. "Lounge", "sitting room" and "dining room" were all far less popular terms, as Table 4.1 demonstrates. The terms "bedroom" and "bathroom" did describe reasonably accurately the use of these rooms and so were uncontested. The

¹⁰ Mass Observation, *An Enquiry into People's Homes* (London: John Murray, 1943), p. 84.

¹¹ Joyce Storey, *Our Joyce*, pp. 24, 92 and *Joyce's War*, p. 22; Victoria Massey, *One Child's War*, pp. 107-109; Grace Foakes, *My Life With Reuben*, pp. 38, 57, 59.

exception to this were Scottish homes, some of which did not have a room called a bedroom at all, even though they all had more than one room.

Table 4.1: Names for Rooms¹²

Name given to room by autobiographers	total	%
total dwellings = 179		
Kitchen/front kitchen	100	56
Scullery	31	17
Back kitchen	14	8
Living-kitchen, dining-kit.	11	6
Living room	54	30
Backroom	3	2
Parlour	19	11
Front room	49	27
Lounge	8	4
Sitting room	3	2
Drawing room	2	1
Best room	1	1
Dining room	11	6
Middle room	3	2
"The room"	2	1

Guiliani has pointed out that the words used to describe rooms can give some indication of what that room signified to the inhabitants, how they felt about their homes and how they constructed their home environment. Thus, names given to rooms reflect more what the inhabitants want to think about them rather than what they are actually used for; they are aspirational rather than descriptive.¹³ Some authors indicated certain names were

selected in preference to others because of what they signified, such as modernity or status. Evelyn Cowan's sisters in the 1930s called their new front room a "lounge" because they thought it sounded better and reflected their move up the housing ladder. Two decades later Valerie Avery's mother had "gone all posh" and decided to call the 'living room' the "lounge" in their new flat. She evidently thought that the term implied a sense of modernity appropriate for their brand new flat.¹⁴ Valerie (like Evelyn) continued to call it the "living room" to annoy her mother and because she thought the term lounge sounded "posh". In this case the change in name reflected a change in use because the new lounge could not be used just for best. The sense of modernity was particularly connected to the word lounge: six out of eight households with "lounges" were from the 1940s and 1950s; the remaining two were applied to rooms in the 1930s.

However, names were not all symbolic. They could reflect regional differences such as "back house", "front place", or "the room" rather than how they were used. Daisy Rayson's family who lived in Suffolk referred to their scullery as the "baccus"

¹² This table counts the number of dwellings in which a room was given a particular name and represents this figure as a percentage of the total dwellings studied.

¹³ Maria Guiliani, "Naming the Rooms", p. 196.

¹⁴ Evelyn Cowan, *Spring Remembered*, p. 130; Valerie Avery, *London Spring*, p. 160.

which was traditional in Suffolk.¹⁵ Names could indicate location in terms of where they were found in the house, such as front room, back room, middle room, front kitchen, and back kitchen. These terms were especially suitable in bye-law housing which did have rooms at the front and back, but were less applicable to new houses where the 'front room' was at the back and there were no middle rooms at all. This was perhaps one reason why names changed during the period to indicate use more than location. Valerie Avery claimed that another reason why her mother decided to call their new front room the "lounge" was because it was not at the front of the house.

Behavioural and Material Approaches

Domestic activities and the rooms that they took place in are recorded in Table 4.2. There were few explicit references to events taking place in specific places; far more detail emerges through an examination of the type of objects which were found in the rooms. These activity-related objects are recorded in Table 4.2. This table assumes that items of furniture were used for their 'intended' use: as I will show in Chapter Five, certain objects were given a whole host of secondary uses that were not 'intended'. However, these objects were generally used for their primary function as well. The names of the rooms in both tables were those used by the autobiographers themselves and represent activities and objects as a percentage of the room type in which they were located.

The rooms with the greatest level of multi-functionality were the kitchen and living room. The kitchen was more often used for washing clothes and dishes than for sitting or listening to the radio, though it was used for these activities as well. Like the kitchen, the living room was used for cooking and for bathing but was rarely used for washing clothes or dishes. There were regional differences: kitchens in Scottish homes were nearly always used for sleeping. The front room or parlour was never used for washing or cooking, though it still had quite a wide variety of other uses: it could contain dining room and sitting room furniture and was a place for entertaining guests. In some homes it had bedroom furniture as well and was more often used for sleeping than either the kitchen or the living room.

¹⁵ George E. Evans, *Where Beards Wag All* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), p. 163.

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Table 4.2: Location of Activities

Activity	Kitchen or Front Kitchen	Living Kitchen Dining Kitchen	Back Kitchen or Scullery	Living Room	Sitting Room or Lounge	Front Room or Parlour	Main Bedroom	Other Bed- rooms
total number of each room =	100	11	49	54	11	68	126	109
% of the number of each room								
Eating	9	9	0	13	9	3	0	0
Cooking	7	0	2	7	0	0	0	0
Washing-up	1	0	4	2	0	0	0	0
Washing	8	9	14	4	0	0	0	0
Drying clothes	15	27	6	20	0	0	0	0
Ironing	7	0	0	6	0	0	0	0
Mangling	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bathing	20	27	18	22	9	0	0	1
Shaving	4	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
personal hygiene	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Reading	5	0	0	2	18	1	0	0
Knitting	2	0	0	0	9	0	0	0
Sewing	3	0	0	2	0	0	1	0
Sitting	1	9	0	4	9	4	0	1
Talking	1	0	0	6	0	0	0	0
Homework	5	9	0	9	9	4	0	4
Listening to radio	0	0	0	2	18	3	0	0
Playing/games	11	0	2	7	9	1	2	3
Play. instruments	1	0	0	2	9	7	0	0
Watching TV	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Giving birth	2	0	0	4	9	0	2	3
Sleeping	6	0	0	9	9	10	0	0
Sickroom	2	0	0	0	0	4	2	5
Dressing	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Laying out	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0
Entertaining	4	0	0	7	9	13	2	0
Courting	0	0	0	2	0	3	0	0
Wedding recept.	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0
All acts/living	11	9	0	2	18	3	0	0

Social Space

Table 4.3: Location of Activity-Related Objects

Activity	Kitchen or Front Kitchen	Living Kitchen Dining Kitchen	Back Kitchen or Scullery	Living Room	Sitting Room or Lounge	Front Room or Parlour	Main Bedroom	Other Bed- rooms
total number of each room =	100	11	49	54	11	68	126	109
% of the number of each room								
Table	40	100	8	6	27	27	1	1
Table & chairs	14	36	0	27	27	16	0	0
Sideboard	5	18	0	11	0	12	0	0
Bureau	0	0	0	0	18	0	0	0
Oven/range	31	36	4	41	9	0	0	0
Gas ring	5	0	2	2	0	0	0	0
Gas Stove/stove	15	0	18	2	0	0	0	0
Sink/slopstone	32	18	43	4	0	0	0	0
Copper/boiler	17	9	35	9	0	0	0	0
Wash. machine	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Tap	0	0	16	0	0	0	0	0
Bath	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shaving & washing equip.	3	0	6	2	0	0	6	7
Mirror	10	0	2	2	9	12	10	34
Armchair	14	46	0	33	9	31	0	0
Sofa/couch, etc.	12	55	0	39	64	3	0	0
Radio	5	18	0	20	18	2	2	0
Television	0	0	0	4	9	22	0	0
Easy chair	2	18	0	17	46	9	0	0
Gramophone	0	27	0	0	9	4	0	0
Piano	1	0	0	2	0	27	1	0
Sewing machine	7	27	0	9	0	0	2	0
Bed	4	0	0	2	9	4	36	44
Chest of drawers	2	18	0	7	0	4	11	9
Washstand	0	0	0	2	0	4	7	7
Folding bed	2	0	0	4	27	2	2	3
Palliasse/ mattress	0	0	0	0	0	7	4	0
Wardrobe	0	0	0	4	0	31	7	0
Chamber pot	1	0	0	0	0	13	6	0
Trunk	2	18	0	0	0	4	3	0
Dressing table	0	0	0	0	0	16	3	0

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Some rooms had more specialised uses than others. The sculleries, scullery-kitchens and back kitchens were used mainly for washing, washing-up, and to a lesser extent bathing. They were used less for cooking than kitchens and living rooms. Bedrooms were principally places to sleep and to store clothes.¹⁶ They also had some bathroom functions: people bathed or just washed in them and at night relied on bedroom chamber pots. The most mono-functional room was the bathroom. The bath was occasionally used for washing and Joan Booker's father in the 1930s turned their bathroom into a darkroom.¹⁷ It was the lack of a bathroom that particularly increased the diversity of the uses given to most rooms; the only rooms not used for bathing were front rooms. What is notable is that the rooms with the greatest variety of names were the ones which had the greatest variety of uses.

Although the front room had a variety of uses, and in this sense was non-specialised, the times at which it was used were frequently very specific: it was used on special occasions or/and on Sundays. This was partly because room usage was circumscribed to an extent by the expense of heat and light which meant that most activities happened in the living room or kitchen. Children would play or do their homework at the kitchen table because this was the warm room and the place where the light was. Thus, Mollie Harris's family did their washing-up in the back-kitchen but in the winter they did it in the main living room because it was warm.¹⁸ It was cheaper to heat one room; once the front room fire was lit the family made the most of it during the day which was why this room had non-specialised use in relation to activities if not time. Families were not just saving money by only using one room, they were also saving time.¹⁹ Setting, lighting and cleaning grates took time and coal fires generated a lot of dust which had to be cleaned up. Oil lamps had to be cleaned each day before use and this also consumed time. Once electric heaters and central heating became more widely available, it meant that it was easier to use front rooms for short periods of time. The Skinners used their front room more once they had had a gas fire installed, while Joyce Storey's 1947 council house had a drawing device from the grate in the lounge which heated all the rooms including bedrooms and meant that the family

¹⁶ In his late 1970s study, Lawrence found that bedrooms were still only used principally for sleeping. Children tended to play in the living room during the day: Roderick Lawrence, "The Social Classification of Domestic Space: A Cross-Cultural Case Study", *Anthropos* CXXVI (1981), p. 654.

¹⁷ Joan Booker, *A Newbury Childhood*, p. 28. In the late 1940s, Michael de Larrabeiti's best friend also turned his bathroom into a dark room: *A Rose Beyond the Thames*, p. 101.

¹⁸ Mollie Harris, *A Kind of Magic*, p. 39.

¹⁹ Martin Daunton, *House and Home in the Victorian City: Working-Class Housing 1850-1914* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), p. 280.

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could use them all.²⁰ Fuel-related restrictions on space usage continued longest in rural areas. Mass Observation's survey on an Exmoor village in the late 1940s found there was no gas or electricity and coal ranges were still used.²¹

Limitations on space usage were seasonally affected; it was only during the winter that living rooms and kitchens were used so intensively. In summer the need to economise on heat and light would not be a problem and meant that activities could then occur in a wider variety of rooms and the kitchen and living room's multi-functionality decreased. Front rooms and bedrooms, which may have been used only for Sunday activities and sleeping respectively, could be used for sitting, playing, reading and doing home-work everyday of the week. Margaret Penn, for example, did her home-work and read in the front room during the summer.²² The summer meant that some activities could shift to external domestic spaces. Washing was done in back yards while reading, playing and eating could happen outside domestic space altogether. Bathing might occur in the wash-house or in the river: Mollie Harris's family bathed in the living room in winter, the wash house in spring and autumn, and the river in summer.²³ The cooking facilities of the kitchen and living room were used seasonally as well. The unbearable heat from the range in the summer resulted in some families resorting to using the public bake-house.

Lizabeth Cohen has argued that this pattern of space usage was not just to do with ability to pay for heat and light but rather that the working class used space differently because they had different attitudes towards home living. Cohen found that people still continued to socialise in the kitchen once they had got a parlour and that they actually preferred to eat and live in kitchens.²⁴ While the expense of heat and light were important factors in using the "parlour", families still avoided using it on a daily basis in the summer even if they did not have to heat and light it.

²⁰ Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, p. 16; Joyce Storey, *Joyce's War*, p. 164.

²¹ W. J. Turner, *Exmoor Village* (London: George & Harrap & Co., 1947), pp. 38-9. However, the survey noted that "[t]he lack of gas is not felt seriously by housewives who have never used it."

²² Margaret Penn, *Manchester Fourteen Miles*, p. 19.

²³ Mollie Harris, *A Kind of Magic*, p. 112. See also Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, p. 36; Rose Gamble, *A Chelsea Child*, p. 70; Henry Hollis, *Farewell Leicester Square*, p. 29; Elsie Goodhead, *The West End Story*, p. 17.

²⁴ Lizabeth Cohen, "Embellishing a Life of Labor: An Interpretation of the Material Culture of American Working-Class Homes, 1885-1915" in Thomas Schlereth, *Material Culture in America* (Nashville, Tennessee: The American Association for State and Local History, 1982, 1989 reprint, article first published in 1980), p. 300.

Additional uses of the front room and the way that the autobiographers perceived them are discussed in more detail in the last two sections of this chapter.

Table 4.4: Typology of Rooms Based on Activity, Objects and People

Room Type (MO)	Names used by Autobiographers	Defining Characteristics
Living-kitchen	kitchen living room living room-kitchen front kitchen, house place back room kitchen-dining room	the room where all activities took place for eating, sitting and cooking, (in some cases washing-up, washing and ironing or even sleeping) contains range, table, sofa, armchairs and in some cases sink and/or copper
Kitchen	scullery back kitchen kitchen	a room for eating, cooking and washing up but not sitting, not described as the place where all activities happened contains sink, tap, bowl, boiler
Scullery	back kitchen kitchen backplace	washing, washing-up, small cooking tasks that do not make the living-room range defunct
Sitting room	lounge middle room	an everyday room for sitting
Sitting room-cum-dining room	middle room living room kitchen	for eating and sitting
Front room	parlour best room the room	not used for everyday living or only used by selected members of the family on an everyday basis

There were indications that other rooms changed their uses over the period. The lack of standard names made it difficult to assess these changes and for this reason I established a typology of room usage that was similar to room definitions used by Mass Observation (Table 4.4). I then compared the type of room found in the dwellings of three different periods: 1900s-1910s; 1920s-1930s; and 1940s-1950s. The comparison (Table 4.5) showed that living-kitchens were slowly replaced by kitchens which were used more for cooking and washing than for eating and sitting. This had an impact on the number of sculleries and the number of sitting room/dining rooms. Front rooms as best rooms, on the other hand, continued throughout the period. In 1942 Mass Observation's survey *People's Homes* found that people still wanted to differentiate between a front and back-room.²⁵ Valerie Avery and her mother lived in their kitchen in the mid-1950s and used their front room when they

²⁵ Mass Observation, *An Enquiry into People's Homes*, pp. 99-100.

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had guests and at weekends. They stopped this pattern of room usage when they moved to a council flat in which the kitchen was too small to live. Some elements of the former room differentiation remained: they ate their hot meals in the kitchen.²⁶ Judy Attfield's study of 1950s Harlow found that people tried to turn their living room into two rooms to recreate the living room-front room divide which they had lost.²⁷

Table 4.5: Change in Room Usage Between 1900-1955

How Room Used	1900-55	1900-20	1920-40	1940-55
total dwellings	179	34	117	28
% of dwellings in each period possessing a room used according to typology described in Table 5.4				
Kitchen	14	0	8	54
Scullery	20	41	38	18
Living kitchen	66	76	69	43
Sitting & dining room	6	0	4	18
Front room	36	32	37	36
Sitting room	8	0	8	18

Lawrence has stated that cooking was removed to the scullery "many years prior to the First World War".²⁸ Given that living-kitchens were prevalent in the inter-war period, this suggests that the removal of cooking to the scullery happened at a much later period. Better-off working-class families were making this change in the inter-war period: in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Joyce and Edna Skinner's family installed a stove in the kitchen and replaced the range in the living room with a grate; at the same time Evelyn Cowan's family moved to a flat where it is possible to cook in the scullery and this was considered to be a "big step up".²⁹ Overall, however, as Table 4.5 shows, the kitchen was used mainly as a place to live and cook throughout the inter-war period and only really began to change during and after the Second World War. Mass Observation noted in 1942 that there was a divide between people who wanted to eat and cook in the same room and those who wanted to have separate rooms for cooking and living.³⁰ Over half the dwellings lived in by

²⁶ Valerie Avery, *London Morning*, p. 62 and *London Spring*, p. 151.

²⁷ Judy Attfield, "Inside Pram Town: A Case Study of Harlow House Interiors 1951-61" in J. Attfield and P. Kirkham, eds., *A View From the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design* (London: The Women's Press, 1989), pp. 218-222.

²⁸ Roderick Lawrence, "The Social Classification of Domestic Space", p. 652. Dauntton claims that this happened between 1870-1914: Dauntton, *House and Home in Victorian City*, p. 281.

²⁹ Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, p. 13; Evelyn Cowan, *Spring Remembered*, p. 154.

³⁰ Mass Observation, *An Enquiry into People's Homes*, p. 99-101.

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autobiographers after 1940 had a kitchen which was used in the way recorded in Table 4.4; in the inter-war period, less than one in ten used them like this.

To summarise this section, the principal differences between middle-class and working-class uses of space were that the former had larger homes which enabled greater specialisation in room usage. Working-class homes often had only one principal room which was used for living or had two rooms, one for living and one for special occasions. Mass Observation noted this class difference:

The middle-class distinction of a scullery for washing-up, a kitchen for cooking, a dining room for eating, and a sitting, morning or drawing room for sitting in after meals is never found in working-class homes. The term "dining room" was rarely encountered in the working-class (C and D) interviews in this survey, and morning rooms and drawing rooms were not mentioned at all.³¹

Only working-class families who had six or more rooms to themselves could employ similar differentiation of room usage, and as I showed in the last chapter, it was the "intermediate classes" which had the largest homes. However, even those families who had two further rooms downstairs continued to live in the kitchen or living room and to use their dining or "middle" rooms on special days and their front rooms even less.³² This applied even to tenant farmer's son, Fred Archer, whose parents added a drawing room onto their home in the 1920s: "I did wonder why we needed another room, for the dining room was not used every day."³³ Thus, it was not only the extent of space that created differences between classes, but the expense of heat and light and a different attitude towards living.

Part Two: Privacy and Personal Space

"I'm going to wreck your draw"

An important consequence of over-crowded domestic space was the low level of personal space and restrictions on privacy. Hunt has described "personal territory" as a place where personal activities can happen undisturbed and as a place to keep personal things.³⁴ Sebba and Churchman have used "territory" as a way of

³¹ Mass Observation, *An Enquiry into People's Homes*, p. 84.

³² James Charlton, *More Sand in My Shoes*, p. 81; Elisabeth Fanshawe, *Penkhull Memories*, p. 9; Winifred Renshaw, *An Ordinary Life*, Chapter 20; Maggie Newbery, *Reminiscences of a Bradford Mill Girl*, p. 9.

³³ Fred Archer, *Fred Archer, Farmer's Son*, p. 123.

³⁴ Pauline Hunt, "Gender and the Construction of Home Life" in Graham Allan and Graham Crow, eds., *Home and Family: Creating the Domestic Sphere* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p.

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understanding physical and mental boundaries in the home: they defined territorial space as that which exists without the person, while personal space is different because it cannot exist without people. They also employed the term "jurisdictional space". This applies to space over which one person has control in terms of decision-making but others cannot be stopped from using that space. The example they give is the kitchen. In their study women had control over what happened in the kitchen, but it was not their personal space because others could use the room as well.³⁵ I therefore consider personal or territorial space to be that which was recognised as belonging to a particular individual. The amount of control they had over this space was dependant on their relationships and position within the household. Privacy was not the same as personal space: though they are similar, and privacy is often a by product of personal space, the former does not necessitate the latter and privacy can be found in non-personal space and in 'public' space.³⁶

Most personal space was confined to particular items of furniture such as beds, chairs, boxes or shelves. Having a bed to oneself related to age, gender, life cycle or seniority within the family; as children got older they were more likely to get a bed to themselves. Others got beds to themselves because older brothers and sisters left home or because they acquired their own bed: Kathleen Dayus's eldest sister had bought her own bed which she refused to share with anyone else.³⁷ The gender of the autobiographers' siblings affected whether they had their own bed; being the only boy or girl in the family generally meant that they were more likely to have their own bed. Spike Mays's little sister had a bed to herself because she was the only girl.³⁸ Grace Foakes' brother did not share a bed because there were three boys and only two girls: the girls shared one bed, two of the boys had another and this left the eldest brother with a bed to himself. Grace would have never had a bed to herself until her husband died, if he had not been called up in the Second World War.³⁹ Archie Hill summed up

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³⁵ Rachel Sebba and Arza Churchman, "Territories and Territoriality in the Home", *Environment and Behavior* XV 2 (1983), p. 192.

³⁶ Lawrence Klein, "Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions About Evidence and Analytical Procedure", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* XXIX 1 (1995), p. 105.

³⁷ Kathleen Dayus, *Her People*, p. 4; Marion Smith and Archie Hill also got their own beds: Marion Smith in Jean Faley, *Up Oor Close*, p. 46; Archie Hill, *A Cage of Shadows*, p. 157.

³⁸ Spike Mays, *Reuben's Corner*, p. 53.

³⁹ Grace Foakes, *My Part of the River*, p. 187.

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well this type of personal space by describing his bed as being "mine; it was private and personal."⁴⁰

Although they may have had to share a bed, most people at least had their own sleeping space. Again this was dependent on age and position within the family and changed as the autobiographers progressed up the family hierarchy. Edith Evans "always slept next to the wall" by her sister Daisy.⁴¹ Jim Bullock slept in part of the bed where the two beds the boys slept in joined: this was a position that was reserved for the youngest brother once he had stopped sleeping with his parents. It was altered with the departure and arrival of brothers and cousins.⁴² Even though people had an allotted sleeping place, however, it was difficult maintaining its boundaries, as Josephine Gibney explained: "I never slept undisturbed throughout the night as I would wake up with someone's feet pressing against my mouth..."⁴³ For a minority there was no guarantee that their personal space in the bed was territorial and they were moved around according to decisions made by others. Archie Hill, although he had a place to sleep, was accustomed to move beds several times a night as his father followed his mother from bed to bed. This explains his delight at having his own bed.⁴⁴ Catherine Cookson slept in all the rooms in the home at some point. When they had lodgers, her grandparents slept in the bedroom, the uncle in the kitchen, and Catherine and her mother stayed with an aunt. At other times the lodgers slept in the bedroom with the uncle, Catherine and her mother in the kitchen and grandparents in the front room. She also slept in the front room with her grandparents and in the bedroom with her mother.⁴⁵

Hunt described personal space as place in which to keep possessions.⁴⁶ If the autobiographers had such a place it was usually a box, shelf or drawer. The amount of space for storing possessions and clothing was directly affected by the number of rooms in the home and the size of the family. Each member of Rose Gamble's family had a box to store their possessions which was kept under the bed in their only room. When they got a larger home, their father made them each a shelf and locker.⁴⁷ Mollie

⁴⁰ Archie Hill, *A Cage of Shadows*, p. 157.

⁴¹ Edith Evans, *Rough Diamonds*, p. 33.

⁴² Jim Bullock, *Bowers Row*, p. 9.

⁴³ Josephine Gibney, *Joe McGarrigle's Daughter*, p. 19.

⁴⁴ Archie Hill, *A Cage of Shadows*, pp. 8-9.

⁴⁵ Catherine Cookson, *Our Kate*, pp. 39, 84, 95.

⁴⁶ Hunt, "Gender and the Construction of Home Life", p. 71.

⁴⁷ Rose Gamble, *A Chelsea Child*, pp. 16, 141.

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Harris had a cheese box which was replaced by a drawer when they moved house and bought a new chest of drawers. Like in Rose's home, this was a reflection that they had more space: in the first home Mollie shared a small cottage bedroom with her brothers and sisters; there was no room for a chest of drawers. In the second home, the girls had a room to themselves.⁴⁸ Others had a entire chest of drawers or trunk in which to keep their belongings. Joyce Storey shared a room with her aunt and had to keep all her possessions in "only one small chest of drawers". For Rose and Mollie this would have been quite a substantial amount of personal space, but Joyce had been used to having a room to herself.⁴⁹ John Linton shared a little boxroom with his three brothers which had no room for a cupboard and his personal space for clothes was limited to just a nail from which his clothes were constantly knocked to the floor by younger brothers.⁵⁰ Fathers were more likely to have a trunk which was exclusively theirs and some kept it locked.⁵¹ Only one author mentioned a mother who had somewhere to lock up her possessions, though girls might have a trunk in their room.⁵²

The item of furniture over which one member of the family was most likely to have control was a chair. Fathers more often had their own chair than mothers: one in six had one compared with only one in twelve mothers. A chair was either personal or territorial space. A chair that belonged to a father which others sat on while he was out of the house, would be personal space: when he was at home it was recognised as his and no one sat in it. A chair that no one dared use, whether the father was at home or not, fits more with Sebba and Churchman's concept of territorial space. The father, however, might think that it was his territory because he was unaware that anyone was sitting on it while he was out, especially if the children got off the chair when they heard him coming. Mothers were less likely to make their chair out of bounds for other family members, or may have only had a chair to themselves when their husband was out. Rose Gamble's mother did not have her own chair, but had a "little sit" in her husband's when he was out.⁵³ Usually the rest of the family would either only use parents' chairs when they were out or not at all. In Jim Bullock's home that latter was the case: "No one would ever have dreamed of sitting in my father's

⁴⁸ Mollie Harris, *A Kind of Magic*, p. 220.

⁴⁹ Joyce Storey, *Our Joyce*, p. 89.

⁵⁰ Alice Linton, *Not Expecting Miracles*, p. 78.

⁵¹ Alice Foley, *A Bolton Childhood*, p. 43; May Ayers, *Memoirs of a Shannock*, p. 5; Dolly Scannell, *Mother Knew Best*, p. 25; Alice Linton, *Not Expecting Miracles*, p. 6.

⁵² Ralph Glasser, *Growing Up in the Gorbals*, p. 145; Kathleen Dayus, *Where There's Life*, p. 129; Mary Hewins, "Mary, After the Queen", p. 281.

⁵³ Rose Gamble, *A Chelsea Child*, p. 192.

chair, whether he was in the house or not. Nor would any one sit in my mother's rocking chair."⁵⁴ Children rarely had their own chair, and if they did it was usually associated with a particular place at the table. Evelyn Haythorne and her brother always sat on the arms of an easy chair to eat their meals, while Spike Mays and his brother had specific seats at the table. In Kathleen Dayus's home each member of the family had a seat that related directly to their position in the family. Her mother and father had a chair each side of the fire, the upright chairs were for her elder siblings and the youngest three sat on the sofa which was furthest away from the fire.⁵⁵ Children with specific chairs did not have similar territorial rights over their own chairs as their parents, and this was especially the case for the youngest children. Their chairs were also less desirable being more uncomfortable and were located in the coldest part of the room.

Autobiographers who shared rooms with siblings might get part of the room as their personal space. The size of this space was affected by the number of people sleeping in the room. No one mentioned that they were excluded from their bedroom by other siblings with whom they shared it, though this may have happened. The boundaries of personal space within a room were often defined physically by screen or clothes horse. Henry Blacker shared a room with his sister which was divided by a heavy curtain that gave the "illusion" that they each had a room of their own.⁵⁶ Joyce Storey had a section of her aunt's room which was divided from the rest of the room by the a screen.⁵⁷ Victoria Massey had her own "den" in the living-kitchen: this was the space between the table and sofa, the back door on one side and cupboards on other and it was recognised as her space, not just by her but by other members of the household.⁵⁸ Others might have shelves in living rooms, but it was rare for children's space in these rooms to be greater than this.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Jim Bullock, *Bower's Row*, p. 16.

⁵⁵ Evelyn Haythorne, *On Earth to Keep the Numbers Up*, p. 45; Spike Mays, *Reuben's Corner*, p. 185; Kathleen Dayus, *Her People*, p. 76. Ernie Taberner commented that wives generally got the chair behind the door which was banged when anyone came in the room: Ernie Taberner, *A Lancashire Upbringing*, p. 51. Atkinson found that wives often got the chair next to the oven on the opposite side of the fire to the door: Frank Atkinson, "Yorkshire Miner's Cottages", *Folk Life* III (1963), p. 93.

⁵⁶ Henry Blacker, *Just Like It Was*, p. 88.

⁵⁷ Joyce Storey, *Our Joyce*, p. 89.

⁵⁸ Victoria Massey, *One Child's War*, p. 60.

⁵⁹ Rose Gamble, *A Chelsea Child*, p. 14.

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As Chapter Three explained, only one in five children had a room to themselves. Having a claim on a whole room was affected by similar factors as having a bed to oneself: if they were the last child to leave home; they were the eldest child; or they were the only girl or boy. Elizabeth Fanshawe as the youngest child eventually got the bedroom to herself and the fact that she was expected to keep it clean indicated that it was recognised as her territory.⁶⁰ Ralph Glasser shared a room with his younger sister while his elder sister had her own, but when they had left he had a bedroom to himself.⁶¹ Those who were married only had rooms to themselves if their spouse was absent. This was often a temporary measure, such as if the husband was working away from home, but during the World Wars, and particularly during the Second World War, 'temporary' became a long time. Moreover, since many of the female autobiographers outlived their husbands, some men never got a room of their own. In such circumstances women were more likely to get their own room; this suggests that the problems faced by women in getting their own room, as described by Virginia Woolf, were a working-class male experience as well.⁶²

Although husbands or fathers may have rarely had a room to themselves, some may have had a workshop or shed. There was one example from the autobiographies in which a shed was described as belonging to a particular person: Edna Nockall's father had shed which was his "private den".⁶³ There were other instances of sheds being described as father's workshops and therefore they were work as well as personal spaces. Although they may have had more privacy and control over this space than women may have had over the kitchen, its associations for them might not have been positive because it too was a place of work. May Ayers' father, for example, used his shed for baiting his lines for codling. Nor did fathers have complete jurisdiction over their sheds: Kathleen Dayus and her brother spent a lot of time with their father in the shed and used it as a place of refuge; Edna visited her father in his den and on Sundays the whole family would go to the allotment.⁶⁴ Generally, the yards of terraced housing were not big enough for a large shed or the sheds were filled with washing equipment. This was less of a problem on allotments and the fifteen fathers with allotment may have had sheds on them like Edna's. The allotment itself

⁶⁰ Elisabeth Fanshawe, *Penkhull Memories*, p. 21. However, her mother would check the room after she had cleaned it so her "jurisdictional" control was still limited.

⁶¹ Ralph Glasser, *Growing Up in the Gorbals*, p. 158.

⁶² "But for women...to have a room of her own, let alone a quiet room or a sound-proof room, was out of the question, unless her parents were exceptionally rich or very noble....": Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929, London: Grafton Books, 1988), p. 51.

⁶³ Edna Nockalls, *Another Time, Another Place*, p. 11.

⁶⁴ May Ayers, *Memoirs of a Shannock*, p. 21; Kathleen Dayus, *Where There's Life*, pp. 85-6.

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might have been father's space and the place where he could have peace and quiet. Women were less likely to have a shed or workshop, though children might refer to their parent's bedroom as their mother's and see the entire home as their mother's space. Kitchens used as living rooms were less associated with mothers than kitchens used just for cooking and washing. Fathers, who were described as masters of the house were viewed as having control over the entire home, although it was not their personal space any more than it was the mother's; it was jurisdictional rather than personal space.

Decreasing family size over the period increased the likelihood of autobiographers having a room to themselves and occupiers of council houses had to have separate rooms for boys and girls. Jo Barnes and her brother had rooms to themselves in their new 1940s council house, but when her Grandmother moved in, Jo shared a room with her.⁶⁵ Valerie Avery and her mother, possibly because they lived in London, were expected to share the one bedroom in their 1950s council flat because they were both female.⁶⁶ This did not seem to happen in other areas of England: Joyce Storey's daughters had rooms to themselves, as did Eric Fairclough and his brother.⁶⁷

Autobiographers were happy to have a room to themselves, but it was not necessarily something they expected and it did not mean that their experiences of sharing a room or having little personal space were automatically negative. As Anna Davin has argued "when expectations are different, so too is experience."⁶⁸ Sharing a bed had its positive side. For some it was a way of keeping warm in a room that was rarely heated. For others it meant company and sociability. Daisy Rayson liked sharing a bed with her older sister who would sing to her and the sisters discussed the day's events with each other: "we went through the tables, singing lessons, scripture, history, the lot and I am sure we learned from one another."⁶⁹ Joe Hind got his own room in his mid-teens after his brother had died. He viewed having a room to himself as a "luxury" but this "did not compensate me for the loss of my brother, and I longed for someone to talk to."⁷⁰ Betty Dickinson looked forward to having a bed to herself

⁶⁵ Jo Barnes, *Arthur and Me*, pp. 11, 15.

⁶⁶ Valerie Avery, *London Shadows*, p. 10.

⁶⁷ Joyce Storey, *Joyce's War*, p. 167; Eric Fairclough, *In a Lancashire Street*, p. 85.

⁶⁸ Anna Davin, *Growing Up Poor: Home, School, and Street in London 1870-1914* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1996), p. 56.

⁶⁹ D. C., "A Suffolk Childhood", pp. 3, 5.

⁷⁰ Joe Hind, *A Shieldfield Childhood*, p. 133.

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when she was in service, but found she was very lonely without her sisters.⁷¹ The closeness of family members in general could also be construed as a positive experience which outweighed the absence of personal space or privacy, as Mollie Harris explained. Her family moved to a larger home where there were less siblings to a room and more space for their belongings:

... I missed the cosiness of the cottage and the nearness of the big family, and I longed to return to the crowded living room at Wayside and the cheese box under the bed where I kept my few clothes.⁷²

Molly Weir remembered a family of fourteen who, in 1920s Glasgow, lived in two rooms and thought it felt empty after one sibling had left home.⁷³

Personal space did not guarantee privacy and the possession of personal space in an easily accessible place meant that it was easy to invade and was a potential source of tension between family members. Helen Forrester was angry when her mother and sister took her clothes without permission: she had only a shelf on which to store them and this made her clothes easily accessible and so took to hiding them under her mattress. Accessibility of personal space meant that it could also be used deliberately as a means of retaliation. When Josephine Gibney was angry at her stepfather for selling her dog she broke his chair on which he let no one else sit.⁷⁴ The ultimate threat in one 1950s family of four boys during a quarrel was to announce "I'm going to wreck your drawer." Unlike Josephine's case, the brothers were unable to target only the person who had annoyed them because they all shared the same chest of drawers. Thus when the drawer, which usually contained items such as model planes, bicycle parts and other 'treasures', was "wrecked" by being violently shaken, everyone else's drawer was wrecked too.⁷⁵ They may have had their own space but they could not always stop others from invading it. The problems with maintaining the boundaries of personal space meant that privacy was even harder to find than personal space and the difficulties of finding privacy was certainly an issue for the autobiographers.

⁷¹ Betty Dickinson, *Dahn't Village to Wincobank*, p. 18.

⁷² Mollie Harris, *A Kind of Magic*, p. 221.

⁷³ Molly Weir, *Shoes Were For Sunday*, p. 72.

⁷⁴ Josephine Gibney, *Joe McGarrigle's Daughter*, p. 135.

⁷⁵ Personal communication with Geoffrey Williams, the son of tile-factory worker who grew up in Hereford in the 1950s on a 1940s council estate.

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Bathing was especially remembered for its lack of privacy and both sexes seemed to suffer embarrassment to the same extent, though female autobiographers connected it more to growing up. In some senses the problem seemed more acute for children, partly because parents assumed that children would or should not be embarrassed to bathe in front of others, which they often were. Fred Archer bathed in the 'house place' in front of his parents and grandparents which he thought was a "bit public" while Spike Mays felt the "indignity" of having to bathe in front of his mother, sister and neighbour.⁷⁶ As the people got older they were theoretically able to have a bath without an audience, though maintaining this privacy was problematic, as Betty Dickinson explained:

...as I was growing up bathing in the kitchen became less and less convenient. There was never the right moment to take a bath...I remember vividly one Saturday afternoon...the trouble was with Mam on guard in the living-room to stop anyone coming in that way, I forgot to lock the back door. I had almost finished my bath and was about to get out when I heard my young brother Harry and his pal coming up the back steps. They were both in the kitchen before you could say "knife" and just walked through to the living-room without taking the slightest notice of me except to say, "Are yer 'aving a bath Bet?" No!!, at that particular moment I was having a fit.⁷⁷

The fact that her brother was undisturbed by seeing his eldest sister in the bath suggested that her worries and the indignities felt by Fred and Spike were not universal. As I explain below, most teenagers and adults tried to bathe in some sort of privacy. Bathing in shared houses, especially for sub-tenants who had less control over the adjacent domestic space, was even harder. Emily Glencross at first found that it was embarrassing going to wash in kitchen they shared with their landlady.⁷⁸ Bathing in front of others was more necessary in homes where baths happened on a daily basis; as William Bell explained "[e]xcept for sneak opportunities, miners bathed in the presence of the household and none had feelings of abashment."⁷⁹ Although more homes had bathrooms by the end of the period, those without one still had to cope with finding privacy to bathe.

The lack of (non-material) personal space due to shared rooms not only meant people had no control over this space but that they were unable to guarantee that they

⁷⁶ Fred Archer, *Fred Archer, Farmer's Son*, p. 9; Spike Mays, *Reuben's Corner*, p. 177.

⁷⁷ Betty Dickinson, *Dahn't village to Wincobank*, p. 29. Elsie Oman and Doreen Wildgoose found bathing at home difficult for similar reasons: Elsie Oman, *Salford Stepping Stones*, p. 51; Doreen Wildgoose, *What Did You Do in the War, Grandma?*, p. 78.

⁷⁸ Emily Glencross, *For Better or For Worse*, p. 3.

⁷⁹ William Bell, *The Road to Jericho*, p. 8.

could be alone here. One of the times when the authors wanted privacy was when they were undressing and this became more of a problem as the autobiographers got older. Elsie Gadsby, who shared a room with her brothers in the early 1920s, explained “[t]here was never, ever, any privacy, and when my figure had begun to develop around twelve years old, it was a work of art to try to undress under the bed clothes.”⁸⁰ The embarrassment of undressing was not just found in families where different genders shared rooms and Kathlyn Davenport’s sister would get dressed behind the cistern door in their shared room.⁸¹ Embarrassment existed not only between girls and boys, but between younger girls and teenagers and between adults and teenagers.

This section has shown that the lack of space in working-class dwellings meant that the absence of personal space, which Hunt attributed only to women (both middle and working class) in her present-day study, applied to all members of the working-class household in the period 1900-1955. There were three main levels of personal space in the working-class home: the first was an entire room, the second a section of a room and the third an item or part of an item of furniture. The type of personal space people had access to was affected not only by the number of rooms in the home and the size of the family, but also by daily and weekly rhythms, and by demographic factors such as age, gender, generation and seniority within the household. Of all family members, children had potentially the most space (a room of their own) or the have the least personal space (the gap between two beds). Lack of space meant that privacy was also hard to obtain. Sometimes personal space was accompanied by a degree of privacy, if it were an entire room or a locked trunk or desk, but personal space was not always private. This was because it was often located in a place that was open or accessible to all, such as a chair or shelf.

Part Three: Establishing Boundaries Space Management Strategies

The use of domestic space, is usually conceptualised in terms of oppositions of front/back, up/down, inside/outside, and public/private.⁸² These dichotomies, while useful, conceal the fluidity of space usage and over-generalise a diverse set of

⁸⁰ Elsie Gadsby, *Black Diamonds, Yellow Apples*, p. 38.

⁸¹ Kathlyn Davenport, *My Preston Yesterdays*, p. 28.

⁸² Lawrence, “The Social Classification of Domestic Space”, p. 665; Martin Daunton, *House and Home in the Victorian City*, p. 280; Alison Ravetz, *The Place of Home: English Domestic Environments, 1914-2000* (London: E.&F.N. Spon, 1995), p. 149.

experiences. As Chapter Three showed, just over a third of homes were described as having a front room in which non-family members could be entertained to maintain the privacy of the rest of the home. Moreover, privacy was not just about keeping non-family out, but also excluding other family members.⁸³ This part of the chapter, therefore, examines how space was managed by the inhabitants to allow for privacy within the home, and between the home and non-domestic space. It focuses principally on the creation of boundaries which Lawrence has argued "is fundamental for analyses of domestic space."⁸⁴ These boundaries were material and temporal and as a result could create the divisions of front/back and public/private all in the same room.

One of the main ways of dealing with lack of personal privacy was to resort to temporal and gendered territories. For example, when bathing happened, the kitchen or living room became a bathroom for a couple of hours. Sometimes it became the bather's territory during the time that it took him or her to have a bath. At other times these boundaries were gendered rather than individual. For example, while women or girls were having their bath, the boys and men were excluded and vice versa, and this resulted in the living room, kitchen or scullery, which was generally accessible to all, being out of bounds to everyone except the bathers. In Jim Bullock's family all the men were locked out of the house on a Saturday when the girls bathed and the girls had to leave the home while the boys had their bath. This was because the family bathed in the living room and all other rooms led off it.⁸⁵ Zena Marenbon and her sisters would put a chair against the kitchen door to stop their brother coming in while they had a bath.⁸⁶ Putting up temporary boundaries so that certain members of the household were excluded from a room or the whole house at certain times was more usually practised by the children. The parents' solution was to bathe late at night when everyone else was in bed.⁸⁷ Less substantial boundaries were created by turning away from the bather so that they had some privacy. Valerie Avery did this to her mother, while Edward Blishen had to face the other way while his sister bathed.⁸⁸

⁸³ Graham Allan, "Insiders and Outsiders: Boundaries Around the Home" in G. Allan and G. Crow, eds., *Home and Family*, p. 147.

⁸⁴ Roderick Lawrence, "Public Collective and Private Space", p. 76.

⁸⁵ Jim Bullock, *Bowers Row*, pp. 8-9.

⁸⁶ Zena Marenbon, *Don't Blow Out the Candles*, p. 39.

⁸⁷ Betty Dickinson, *Dahn't Village to Wincobank*, p. 29.

⁸⁸ Valerie Avery, *London Morning*, p. 58; Edward Blishen, *Sorry, Dad!*, p. 52.

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The embarrassment of changing in front of siblings and lack of privacy in bedrooms was dealt with by a variety of different methods which related to the number of bedrooms the dwelling possessed. If there were three bedrooms in the home, then usually one would be for the parents, one for the girls and one for the boys. If there were only two bedrooms then either all the female members of the home slept in one room - as was the case in Elsie Goodhead's and Alice Foley's home,⁸⁹ or the girls and boys slept in the same room but it was divided by a make shift screen or curtain.⁹⁰ If there was no screen then the different genders may have slept in different beds. A third option was for the girls or boys to sleep in the parents' room. In Jim Bullock's and Spike Mays's homes, the girls slept in the parents' bedroom, while Kathleen Dayus's elder brothers slept with the parents and the girls and the youngest boy slept in the second bedroom.⁹¹ In a sense, smaller children were perceived as being genderless so that Jim Bullock slept with his parents and sisters until he was four years.⁹² A final way of solving the two-bedroom only problem was to use one of the downstairs rooms for sleeping. William Bell explains that this was the usual practice in his youth, while Elinor Sanderson's parents slept in the downstairs room.⁹³ Families with just three rooms tended to use two rooms as bedrooms and therefore followed similar strategies as families in two-bedroom houses.

Since few people had a room to themselves, getting time to oneself had to be achieved in rooms or spaces to which all the family had access. This was not personal space, and there was no guarantee that privacy could be maintained. Privacy was also affected by temporal arrangements; parents may have got privacy in the living room in the evening when the children had gone to bed and their spouse was out. This would make private space impermanent and contingent on other members of the household. The closet was the most popular place where children attempted to spend some time alone. Its use was seasonally related and it was harder to remain undisturbed when it was shared by several families. Catherine Cookson explained: "The lavatory was the only place in our environment where you could lock yourself in and be alone...Here you were shut in and became lost in a world apart, a secret world."⁹⁴ The fact that the privy was a place where some autobiographers read indicated that they were least likely to be disturbed here. The front room or sitting

⁸⁹ Elsie Goodhead, *The West End Story*, p. 26; Alice Foley, *A Bolton Childhood*, p. 43.

⁹⁰ This method was used by the Blacker, Newbery, Foakes, Gibney and Glasser households.

⁹¹ Davin discusses these different sleeping arrangements: *Growing Up Poor*, p. 52.

⁹² Jim Bullock, *Bowers Row*, p. 9.

⁹³ William Bell, *The Road to Jericho*, p. 7; Elinor Sanderson, "Elinor Sanderson", p. 60.

⁹⁴ Catherine Cookson, *Our Kate*, p. 31.

room was occasionally used by children to read, but parents, and especially fathers, used them more often.

Privacy was often found outside the boundaries of home and adjacent home space: the irony was that privacy was achieved in 'public' (i.e. non-domestic) space. Helen Forrester did her homework under a lamp-post in the winter and in the park in the summer, so that she was not disturbed. Others did their homework in the local library, such as Ralph Glasser who spent most of his evenings there. The problem of lack of privacy when bathing in the home was most effectively alleviated by using the public baths: this was Betty Dickinson's solution after she had been disturbed by her brother and his friend. One in eight the autobiographers' households used the public baths and children began to go at a particular age, usually twelve years. However, although there was far greater privacy in the public baths, even this was not complete since additional hot water was added by the bath attendant.

Privacy in the home concerned not only the individual as part of the family, but the family as part of society. Boundaries were established to divide the family from those who did not dwell in the home or were unfamiliar with it. The parlour was a transition zone between the outside of the dwelling and the area in which the family lived.⁹⁵ Its intention was to make the home both visible and invisible, by allowing visitors to be able to enter domestic space while at the same time ensuring that they did not see the parts of the home where the family actually lived.⁹⁶ The desire to hide their poverty and ensure privacy was why Helen Forrester's parents had a best room: it was a room that visitors could enter without the family being embarrassed.⁹⁷ However, only one third of the autobiographers mentioned that they had a parlour or a front room. Those who had no front room at all indicated several strategies that were employed to alleviate the absence of the front room.

The first and simplest way was to use the main living room or kitchen for entertaining. Mollie Harris's neighbours were entertained in the living room because the only other room downstairs was a scullery.⁹⁸ The second way was to go to the

⁹⁵ Lawrence has examined transition zones in terms of outdoor space around the home and the hall: Roderick Lawrence, "Connotation of Transition Spaces Outside the Dwelling", *Design Studies* II 4 (1981), p. 204.

⁹⁶ Korosec-Serfaty described the dwelling as ensuring "secrecy" and "visibility": Korosec-Serfaty, "Experience and Use of the Dwelling", p. 73; Martin Daunt, *House and Home in the Victorian City*, p. 280.

⁹⁷ Helen Forrester, *Liverpool Miss*, p. 49.

⁹⁸ Mollie Harris, *A Kind of Magic*, p. 39.

opposite extreme by making the entire home family-only territory by never inviting anyone into it. This meant the home was always hidden, at least to relations and friends. Archie Hill wanted to conceal his poverty and so never let his friends into his home.⁹⁹ Ron Barnes' parents also refused to allow non-family into their home. This was definitely because they had no front room; they had had one in a previous home which his parents had used for parties on a Saturday night.¹⁰⁰ However, the working class had less autonomy over their domestic space: they could not keep out landlords, the means test man, health visitors or school attendance officers, some of whom were accustomed to walk into working-class homes without even knocking which was one reason why a front room had distinct advantages.

The third way was to alter the living room or kitchen materially at certain times to signify that the room had changed from family space into reception space. This could be done by cleaning the room and/or by altering the contents in some way so that it was 'fit' to be visible. In this sense the boundaries were created by a clean/dirty dichotomy and by best/everyday furnishings.¹⁰¹ Here 'dirty' and 'clean' were subjective; it was not that rooms were actually dirty but that they were extra clean and gleaming when visitors were expected. These changes to a room were often done on a Friday or Saturday morning before weekend visiting began, and therefore turned the living room into a reception room, analogous to a front room. Like the 'exclude all' strategy, it could not cope with weekday visitors. In Jack Straw's inter-war home, the table legs were covered with stockings during the week which were removed at weekends when they were polished. At the same time the floor, which had been hidden under newspapers all week, was exposed and a table cloth was put on the table.¹⁰² On Sundays, Winifred Albaya's aunt scrubbed the floor, shook the rag rugs, cleaned the grate, covered up the mangle, and put a clean cloth on the table "so that all was homely and decent." On Mondays, the table cloth was removed, the chairs lifted onto the table, the rugs rolled up and put in a corner and the clothes sorted and washed so that the kitchen became a "hot steamy workshop" and it remained like this until the following Sunday.¹⁰³ Changing or using table cloths was an important way of making the living room seem special or different on a Sunday when

⁹⁹ Archie Hill, *A Cage of Shadows*, p. 24.

¹⁰⁰ Ron Barnes, *Coronation Cups and Jam Jars*, p. 60.

¹⁰¹ Lawrence sees this dirty/clean dichotomy in relation to different rooms (and to the type of work done in them) and not to the same room: Lawrence, "The Social Classification of Domestic Space", p. 653.

¹⁰² Jack Straw, "Ashton-under-Lyne", pp. 76-77.

¹⁰³ Winifred Albaya, *A Sheffield Childhood*, p. 29.

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guests came. Others families prepared their living rooms or kitchens as reception rooms on an annual basis only. In Catherine Cookson's pre-Great War home, the kitchen was scrubbed and cleaned before their annual New Year's party.¹⁰⁴ While Catherine's home did have a front room it was used permanently as a bedroom and was so crammed with furniture that the entertaining happened in the kitchen.

There were other families who used their front room as a bedroom but, unlike Catherine's, also used it to entertain in. The events for which these front room-cum-bedrooms were used were generally infrequent and this was due to the amount of effort required to change the room from a bedroom into a reception room. This was practised in Henry Blacker's and Edith Evan's homes, just after the First World War. These rooms contained both front room and bedroom furniture. Edith explained how the room was turned into a parlour for parties:

The front room was then stripped of everything other than parlour furniture. The huge double bed with its feather mattress, plus a flock overlay, a chest of drawers, bedcovers etc., were all crammed into the back room....¹⁰⁵

Henry Blacker described a similar transformation of his front room at his bar mitzvah. All the unnecessary furniture was removed and a table was improvised.¹⁰⁶

Therefore, privacy between members of the family and between family and non-household members was generally achieved through temporal uses of space. This meant that to working-class families the connotations which rooms acquired from their use was time specific: the living room was a bathroom on a Friday or Saturday night and, in homes without front rooms, it became a reception room at weekends.

Part Four: Significant Spaces

Historians have stressed the importance of the parlour/front room in the working-class home. Muthesius noted that "[a]ttachment to the parlour was deeply rooted in English culture. Any amalgamation with the back kitchen or living room was prevented by the power of prejudice, for nothing in the world would persuade people to forgo a drawing room such as real "well-to-do people have."¹⁰⁷ This was echoed by

¹⁰⁴ Catherine Cookson, *Our Kate*, p. 104.

¹⁰⁵ Edith Evans, *Rough Diamonds*, p. 143.

¹⁰⁶ Henry Blacker, *Just Like It Was*, p. 142.

¹⁰⁷ Stefan Muthesius, *The English Terraced House* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 146; Alison Ravetz, *The Place of Home*, p. 156-7.

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Roderick Lawrence: "...it has been noted that the parlour (or front room) was an important space in the nineteenth century for low-income families. Furthermore, as the parlour is still evident in some English houses today, it is suggested that its meaning is not vestigial."¹⁰⁸ The previous section showed that the function of the front room was to 'protect' the family. The front room was undoubtedly important: this was indicated by the activities that took place within it; the people who were allowed into it; and the occasions in which it was used. It was something that people aspired to even if they did not have one.

However, there are several reasons why the importance of the parlour should not be over-estimated. The term "parlour" was far less popular than "front room", at least in the twentieth century (see Table 4.3). Although the parlour has been used by historians to symbolise working-class lifestyles and, paradoxically, working-class emulation of middle-class lifestyles, "front room" seems to have been a term that held greater significance for the autobiographers. Furthermore, while families may have desired a parlour because of the benefits it provided, many families had to forgo a front room and this calls into question how important it was in comparison to other rooms. The front room was generally the last room in the house that was furnished and was most likely to be left empty. If this room was filled while the rest of the home lacked basic comforts then this was an indication of bad management and considered worse than having no parlour. In times of crisis it was generally the luxuries in the front room that were pawned, unless their emotional significance outweighed their financial value.

Families could survive without their front rooms if they had to, but they had to have a living room. Everyone who had a home had a living room or living-kitchen. The importance of the living room/kitchen over the front room was indicated by the frequency with which it was mentioned by the autobiographers. The term "kitchen" was far more prevalent in people's memories, and as a room was described more often and in the most detail; far more detail than the parlour. Descriptions of parlours were often negative. W. R. Mitchell described his front room as "achiev[ing] the coldness of a tomb", Joyce and Edna Skinner found theirs a "bare, cold room" and Valerie Avery thought that her front room was a "severe, supercilious room".¹⁰⁹ Louis Heren was more positive: he thought that the "parlour" was a "nice room" and that it was cosy

¹⁰⁸ Lawrence, "The Social Classification of Domestic Space", p. 651.

¹⁰⁹ W. R. Mitchell, *By Gum, Life Were Sparse*, p. 110; Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, p. 15; Valerie Avery, *London Morning*, p. 62.

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but he also found it "airless".¹¹⁰ These descriptions contrasted with those of the kitchen/living room. Dolly Scannell's living-kitchen was "a room of great happiness and love", while Walt Palmer's living room was the place where they "lived, ate, argued and laughed." Catherine Cookson's kitchen was the "hub of my life; it was the centre of the universe from which all pain and pleasure sprang."¹¹¹ Therefore, the activities which took place in the living room/kitchen suggest that it was the centre of home life, a room of warmth and positive emotions.

The significance of certain rooms and their uses were linked to how different groups of people experienced domestic space. Tognoli, for example, has compared the responses of men and women's perceptions of the way that domestic space is used and found that women recall more activities than men. He concludes from this that the activities they recall reflects their experience of home and the kind of tasks they perform in it.¹¹² Gittins's study of the family in the 1930s, has extended this further by showing that the divide was not just based on gender. She found that women who spent most of their time away from home described domestic events and activities in far less detail than those who were at home most of the time.¹¹³ What was interesting about the female autobiographers was that they generally described their childhood home in far more detail than their adult ones, despite the fact they spent more time at home when adults and were principally responsible for the domestic environment. Men described their childhood homes in detail but less so than women.

This approach is important in understanding why the kitchen was so dominant in the autobiographers' memories and it was no doubt because the majority were recalling childhood experiences. The front room was an alien place to children; it was associated with boring Sundays, good behaviour and uncomfortable furniture. Moreover, it was often out of bounds: in Louis Heren's and Walt Palmer's homes, the children had to ask permission before they went into this room.¹¹⁴ "The room" in Molly Weir's home was "only for grown-ups" and she was "proud" when her mother

¹¹⁰ Louis Heren, *Growing Up Poor in London*, p. 34.

¹¹¹ Dolly Scannell, *Mother Knew Best*, p. 24; Walt Palmer, *Mother's Ruin*, p. 7; Catherine Cookson, *Our Kate*, p. 79.

¹¹² Jerome Tognoli, "Difference in Women's and Men's Responses to Domestic Space", *Sex Roles* VI 6 (1980), p. 833. MacDonald found that men had less detailed knowledge of the home than women: MacDonald, "The Appropriation of Space Inside the Small English "Bye-Law" Terraced House, 1913-1979", p. 45.

¹¹³ Diana Gittins, *Fair Sex: Family Size and Structure, 1900-39* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), p. 125.

¹¹⁴ Louis Heren, *Growing Up Poor in London*, p. 32; Walt Palmer, *Mother's Ruin*, p. 75.

let her take her Sunday school pupils in there.¹¹⁵ Younger children were expected to entertain their friends in the living room or kitchen, while older children and adults used the front room. The attributes of front rooms that made it appealing to adults were the very things that made it so hateful to children, as Paul Fletcher explained: “[t]hose stuffy, airless, dustless, mausoleums had only one redeeming feature - they were places of rest, of peace, of quiet. But there again, were those redeeming features?”¹¹⁶ The child’s perspective of the home is no less valid than that of an adult and Muthesius’s claim that “attachment to the parlour was deeply rooted in English culture” is appropriate more to adults than to children.¹¹⁷

Mothers and fathers spent more time in the front room, which might explain why contemporary records emphasised its importance. For parents it had quite different meanings. Front rooms were somewhere they could escape from the children and a place where they could get some peace. Parents used the front room or sitting room as an escape route from the family: Kathlyn Davenport’s father read the paper in their parlour [sic] on Sundays and Archie Hill’s parents used their front room to get some peace away from the children.¹¹⁸ The Women’s Committee for the Tudor Walters Report (1918) explained that housewives wanted a front room so that they could go and rest somewhere they did not spend their whole day.¹¹⁹ The front room as a transition or buffer zone between outside and inside was more likely to be appreciated by adults, since the boundaries that were established around the home often only applied to adults rather than children. Children, who went more freely in and out of others homes, were not affected by these restraints.

The size of working-class homes, together with the number of people in them, meant that working-class families did not have much home space. Because of this, they used the space they did have in an intensive manner: living-kitchens and living rooms had multiple uses, while bedrooms, although they had limited functions, were used intensively in the sense that they were filled with beds. Since space was used in a concentrated manner, this had repercussions on the level of personal space and privacy in the home. This meant that various strategies were adopted to try and achieve privacy both between family members and between family and non-family. Time was one of the main elements of space management. For example, both personal

¹¹⁵ Molly Weir, *Shoes Were For Sunday*, p. 129.

¹¹⁶ Paul Fletcher, *The Clatter of Clogs*, p. 27.

¹¹⁷ Muthesius, *The English Terraced House*, p. 146.

¹¹⁸ Kathlyn Davenport, *My Preston Yesterdays*, p. 16; Archie Hill, *A Cage of Shadows*, p. 105.

¹¹⁹ Attfield, “Inside Pram Town”, p. 221.

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privacy and family privacy could be achieved at certain times of the week; if a family did not have a bathroom or front room, they could recreate them within the living room. In the first half of this chapter, I analysed objects in order to understand how space was used in the home. However, while objects can inform the use of space, space can also inform what the objects themselves signified to families. The question of the uses and meaning of objects within the home is the concern of the following section on material culture.

3

**MATERIAL
CULTURE**

Chapter Five

Choosing and Using objects

This section of the thesis examines the acquisition, significance and uses of the household objects detailed by the autobiographers. These objects vary from the space-consuming kitchen dresser to a hair clip or propelling pencil. As Chapter One indicated, there have been few historical studies of material culture in the twentieth century: those who have written about domestic objects have generally done so from the perspectives of design history, museum studies, sociology and social psychology. For this reason, this section of the thesis utilises the methodology set out by Susan Pearce for the study of 'objects as meaning'.¹ She has developed the analysis of E. McClung Fleming to include spatial analysis and has argued that the properties of objects can be divided into four types: material, history, environment and significance.

The first type relates to the materials, design and construction of objects and enables them to be typologically classified. This aspect of Pearce's methodology has the least relevance for this study, because the objects analysed are present only as words and depend on the autobiographers' descriptions. The second way of looking at objects - that of "history" - is more practicable since it entails examining the functions given to objects and how these have changed over time. The history of objects also involves knowing from where they originated and I have interpreted this as the source from which the autobiographers and their families obtained certain items. The "environmental" aspects of objects are the factors that contextualise them temporally and spatially, seeing them in relation not only to the period in which they were made and used, but also to where they were used or kept within the home. The final way of studying objects assesses the "significance" or meaning that they had for

¹ Susan Pearce, "Objects As Meaning: or Narrating the Past" in Susan Pearce ed., *Interpreting Objects and Collections* (1986, London: Routledge, 1994), p. 129; E. McClung Fleming, "Artifact Study: a Proposed Model" in Thomas J. Schlereth, ed., *Material Culture Studies in America* (1982, Nashville: The American Association for State and Local History, 1989 reprint, original article published in 1974), pp. 162-173.

different people in the past (and present) and how this meaning was affected by time, space and place.

The first part of this present chapter begins by examining the contents of the autobiographers' homes and how they acquired their domestic goods. The second part of the chapter assesses how people obtained these items, drawing on the secondary sources on the psychological aspects of home contents, which have been viewed as a reflection of personality and social grouping. The third part examines what uses the autobiographers gave these objects and links to the debates over the relationship between user and producer. This chapter therefore forms the background for Chapter Six which assesses what objects the autobiographers specifically valued and why; it combines the "history", "environment" and "significance" categories of Pearce's methodology to understand the meaning the objects had for society and for the individual.

Part One: Acquiring Objects

The autobiographies provide only an impressionistic view of household contents. For some homes it was possible to compile detailed room by room inventories while for others there was only a sketchy idea of what the rooms contain and some autobiographies provide no descriptions of room contents at all. For example, Joyce and Edna Skinner not only gave detailed descriptions of the furnishings in every room in their home, but also described the hall and landing and even listed the contents of the living-room cupboards. Henry Blacker explained the actual layout of the furnishings in his living room: the sink was in a corner opposite the sewing machine which was under the window; left of the window was a sofa; the fireplace faced the sink; and a dresser "dominated the whole room..."² As Chapter Four showed (Tables 4.2-3) the items most often mentioned were beds and tables, followed by stoves or ranges, armchairs, sofas and table-chairs. Smaller objects were generally included less in descriptions of rooms: the items of this kind most referred to were pictures, clocks and vases. The reason why there were so many mentions of beds was that half, and in some cases all, the rooms in the dwellings had beds in them (and some rooms had two or three beds). Tables, on the other hand, were rarely found in the bedroom: three bedrooms had tables whereas fifteen rooms which were not primarily bedrooms had

² Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, p. 13; Henry Blacker, *Just Like It Was*, p. 89.

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beds in them.³ The majority of the tables were kitchen or dining-room tables, though sometimes there was a small table in the scullery and front room had tables as well.

Most families seemed to have furnished their own homes, starting off with a few items when they got married. These they had saved up for or acquired over a period of a few months or they had been given to them as wedding presents. Jim Bullock described how when his parents were first married in the 1870s, their furniture consisted of a bed, rocking chair, an old armchair and a small table. "They also had some blankets, sheets, towels, cutlery, and so on, given them as wedding presents by relatives and friends in the village that they had just left...."⁴ When Kay Pearson was married in 1915, her mother gave her a bed and she had the family piano. Her mother introduced her to a club agent who allowed her £10 worth of furniture which, after paying a 10/- deposit, Kay paid off at 1/6d a week. For this she acquired washing equipment including a mangle, canvas for two floors, two bedroom tables, a kitchen mirror, a seven piece suite, a bath and bucket, two kitchen chairs and two clipped rugs. Among other wedding presents that were mainly crockery or cutlery, she was given a kitchen table.⁵ Marion Watts was married in 1923 and her father gave her £10 to buy furniture. With this she got a bed, mattress, sideboard, overmantel, pictures, four chairs, linoleum, bucket and curtains. Everything was second-hand.⁶ Dolly Scannell, who married about the same time, fared better than Marion. She had a bedroom suite, an oak dining-room suite, two leather armchairs, linoleum, one large rug for the sitting room, a coffee table, a kitchen table and chairs, and two rugs for the bedroom, which together cost £56.⁷

Although couples started off with a small number of household durables, they added to them as time progressed. This was enabled by two main factors. The first related to rising income as a result of: rising real wages; increasing seniority at work; and contributions older children made to household income. These factors, which were not experienced by all families, explain why when Jim Bullock was young child, his home had radically altered from the day when his parents had moved in thirty years before:

Now the doors were painted and all the walls papered and hung with religious texts. Cupboards had been built by my father and elder brothers and

³ This figure does not include one-room dwellings.

⁴ Jim Bullock, *Bowers Row*, p. 1.

⁵ Kay Pearson, *Life in Hull*, p. 84.

⁶ Marion Watt, "Aberdeen", pp. 156-7.

⁷ Dolly Scannell, *Mother Knew Best*, p. 182.

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fitted into corners; shelves had been fixed around the walls. Home-made rugs covered the stone floors and we had stools and plain, strong chairs downstairs. There was a big set of drawers made of mahogany that they had bought at a second-hand sale somewhere, and we had photographs on the wall. The money that my brothers added to the family income from their work meant that we could afford a horsehair sofa, a piano and a big table that could be extended at meal times.⁸

Joyce and Edna Skinner's father was employed through out the 1920s and 1930s, a period when those in full-time employment benefited from fall in prices as a result of the Depression.⁹ Their parents had begun married life with an empty front room but after a few years they furnished it with a carpet, a three-piece suite, a bookcase with a glass front, a china cabinet and an up-right piano.¹⁰ The second reason why people had more goods was because they acquired more space: as I showed in Chapter Three, the first homes couples had when they were married were smaller than later ones and this provided them with the opportunity to add to their existing commodities. Thus when Dolly Scannell's family moved to a house with a front room her mother bought new furniture for it.¹¹

Dolly's mother only bought furniture for one room but other families who moved from one or two rooms to an entire house had several to fill. This often meant that these homes, like Jim Bullock's in the 1870s, were rather empty at first. Rose Gamble's family moved from one room into a five-room flat and her parents had to buy themselves a new bed, a kitchen table and chairs and an armchair. Her parent's room with its new gold taffeta bedspread gave Rose a "feeling of overwhelming embarrassment" but she commented that the other bedrooms felt "more like us" with the bare walls, floors and windows.¹² Joyce Storey moved from one room, which she had shared with her husband and two daughters, to a six-roomed council house in 1947. She and her husband had to buy furniture for all the rooms. Their new lounge had a three-piece suite, a bureau, oil cloth and some curtains: "There were no frills, such as pictures on the wall, or cushions for the chairs, but it was home, and everything else would come in time."¹³ Margaret Ward, who moved into a council house during the war like Joyce, acquired some furnishings for their bedroom, the

⁸ Jim Bullock, *Bowers Row*, pp. 3-4.

⁹ Dudley Baines, "Onset of Depression" in Paul Johnson, ed., *Twentieth-Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change* (London: Longman, 1994), p. 190.

¹⁰ Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, pp. 15-16.

¹¹ Dolly Scannell, *Mother Knew Best*, p. 70.

¹² Rose Gamble, *A Chelsea Child*, p. 141.

¹³ Joyce Storey, *Joyce's War*, p. 167.

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kitchen and dining room, but had only a camp chair in the living room.¹⁴ Both Joyce and Margaret had to cope with moving into larger homes during a period of post-war shortages and in many ways their difficulties in filling a house were similar to those faced by Rose's and other families in the 1930s. At least Rose's family only had one living room to fill, since their kitchen was very small and the only other rooms were bedrooms. The expense of domestic durables explains why Joyce was so pleased to exchange her six-room house for a four-room prefab. It had smaller rooms which needed less furnishings and some items came with the house.¹⁵ Ron Barnes faced the same problems in the mid 1950s when he and his wife moved from one room to a council flat. They had a put-up-suite, a table and chairs, and a cot. Therefore, the huge outlay needed to equip an entire house or flat continued to be an anxiety for couples throughout the period.

Most people furnished their own homes, and this was the case for those who moved into council houses.¹⁶ It also applied to autobiographers who lived in privately rented houses which were at the most part-furnished. The part-furnished homes were generally only rooms. Before Rose Gamble's family got their flat they rented one room which contained a folding wall bed and a single bed, while Marion Watt's landlady gave her some chairs and a cabinet. Ready-furnished homes seem to have been rarer, though Joyce Storey did live in a fully-furnished flat and house. This was probably the result of special circumstances rather than an indication that ready-furnished houses were common. The flat belonged to the daughter of the house who was in the Land Army, while the house was rented from a woman who had returned to her family after her husband had been killed. The drawbacks of furnished rooms were demonstrated well by the Forester family's experience. They rented three rooms containing various items of furniture in a dilapidated condition. For this they paid ten shillings a week more than they later paid for an entire unfurnished house; like most families they were happier to pay less rent and have their own household effects.¹⁷

This part of the chapter has demonstrated that people filled their homes with objects from a variety of sources: they were given items either as presents or as cast-offs; they bought second-hand goods; they made things; in some cases the furnishings came with the house; and they bought brand-new items, often on hire-purchase

¹⁴ Margaret Ward, *One Camp Chair in the Living Room*, p. 26.

¹⁵ Joyce Storey, *Joyce's Dream*, p. 50.

¹⁶ Under the 1936 Housing Act, local housing authorities were able to sell furniture to their tenants on hire purchase schemes: Alison Ravetz, *The Place of Home: English Domestic Environments, 1914-2000* (London: E.&F.N. Spon, 1995), p. 170.

¹⁷ Helen Forrester, *Twopence to Cross the Mersey*, pp. 44-45.

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schemes from club agents or local departments stores. Young couples started off with a few items which they had saved up for or had been given as wedding presents. As their homes increased in size or as children started to work, many families were able or were forced to increase their material goods. Until the 1950s this experience seemed to apply to all sections of the working class though in the inter-war period other factors, such as geographical location and hence employment patterns, had more impact than class: Dolly Scannell, whose husband was an employed, skilled worker from London, had more furnishings than Emily Glencross who married an unemployed, skilled worker from Salford. However, there was evidence that once wartime shortages and restrictions on buying household goods were removed, the upper sections of the working class were able to acquire more goods when they married than their parents had done.¹⁸ Therefore, the reasons why Ron Barnes was as badly (if not worse off) for furniture as Jim Bullock's parents were in 1870s were due to status and occupation. If Ron had not been an unemployed, unskilled labourer his experience of the 1950s would have quite different.

Part Two: Choosing Objects

It has been argued that material culture represents an individual's personality and values. Marie Jahoda began her article on "The Consumer's Attitude to Furniture" (1946) by stating that "[t]he material culture by which we are surrounded is supposed to be the expression of our spiritual culture."¹⁹ In a more recent study Tim Putman, in his discussion of "modern" furnishings argued that: "[f]or each individual, home designates that place which has been most effectively adapted to our needs and from which we can approach the wider world."²⁰ Jennifer Harris has applied this theory to clothes, which she sees as a representation of individual identity, while social-psychologists Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton maintain that "although one has little control over the things encountered outside the home, household objects are chosen and could be freely discarded if they produced too much conflict with the self."²¹ Therefore, many commentators argue that people actively select clothes or

¹⁸ Furniture rationing was removed in 1948, but the limitation on the amount that could be spent on furnishing and decorating when people moved into a new home was not removed until 1952.

¹⁹ Marie Jahoda, "The Consumer's Attitude to Furniture: a Market Research", *Sociological Review* XXXVIII (1946), p. 209.

²⁰ Tim Putman, "Between Taste and Tradition: Decorative Order in the Modern Home", *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* LXXVII 1 (1995), p. 93.

²¹ Jennifer Harris, "Costume History and Fashion Theory: Never the Twain Shall Meet", *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* LXXVII 1 (1995), p. 74; Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic*

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decorate their homes with things that they feel communicate their social affiliations and personality to the outside world.

Colin Campbell has questioned these conclusions because they assume that people have choices when they select clothes or household items. He argued that there is in fact very little choice. This was firstly because people's choices are limited by what they can afford, and secondly because the market does not provide the variety of goods that it is commonly assumed to do. People have to compromise and make do with what they can find, which is not necessarily what they want.²² This reasoning applies particularly to working-class homes and the lower the income of the family the less choices are available to them. Campbell points out that this was even more the case in the past than in the present day with which he is mainly concerned. Thus, as a group, working-class families from the first half of the twentieth century had less choice than those in the second half. The influence that income had on the ability to choose household items was noted by Jahoda:

In the present state of social organisation, however, the possibilities of expressing one's spiritual culture by one's material culture are severely limited. The amount of money which an individual can spend on his surroundings is prescribed by his social position in society and gives but small scope for individual variations.²³

Judy Attfield, who has examined home furnishings of the 1950s, pointed out that in a post-war situation people had little choice even after furniture rationing had ended in 1948. She suggested that most furniture was inherited or second-hand but stresses that even if items were acquired retail there was not much choice available there either.²⁴ Thus, what people had in their homes was not necessarily a reflection of personality, and this was particularly the case in the first half of this century.

In order to assess how and where the families in the autobiographies acquired their goods, and the level of choice that was involved in their selection, I have analysed all those items for which the autobiographers provided details of origin. From these 510 objects, I have identified five main ways in which they were obtained: present and prizes; free items; home-made items; second-hand goods; and goods that were new.

Symbols and the Self (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1981), p. 17.

²² Colin Campbell, "The Meaning of Objects and the Meaning of Actions: A Critical Note on the Sociology of Consumption and Theories of Clothing", *Journal of Material Culture* I (1996), pp. 97-99.

²³ Jahoda, "The Consumer's Attitude to Furniture", p. 209.

²⁴ Judy Attfield, "Inside Pram Town: A Case Study of Harlow House Interiors, 1951-61" in J. Attfield and P. Kirkham, eds., *A View From the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design* (London: The Women's Press, 1989), p. 223.

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Other ways goods were obtained were from coupons and offers or borrowing them from others. These were too few to justify creating a category of their own. Some items could not be classified because the autobiographers did not specify if they were new or second-hand. These objects included things which had been bought from the tallyman, the packman, by instalment plan or on the cheque system, goods from the village shop and off the market. The five main ways in which people obtained their material possessions is summarised in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1:
Summary of the Origins of Objects and the Level of Choice

Source of Object	Characteristics of Objects in Group
Prize/Present	This group comprised of objects received as wedding, Christmas or birthday presents, things that were left to the autobiographers and school prizes. ²⁵ They were mainly smaller items such as ornaments, crockery, linen or books. The level of choice involved was restricted more by that fact that it was someone else's choice than by income.
Free	This group consisted of those objects that were given and thus were 'free'. They included: items given by neighbours, friends or relatives; charitable handouts; and objects rescued from rubbish dumps or skips. The level of choice in this category was restricted both by income and by what was available, though those with more money were in a better positions to pick and choose what they wanted.
Home-made	These were objects which were home-made or involved 'DIY'. Materials were required to make these things and some people at least could have made them to their own requirements. The things that were produced in this way were mainly clothes, bedding and rugs.
Second-hand	These were household goods that were bought from second-hand shops and stalls, auctions, house sales, pawnshop or from the ragman. They were generally furniture, musical instruments or clothing. There was more variety on offer than "free" items.
New	The objects in this category were brand new. The majority were bought on hire-purchase schemes from places like the co-op or department stores. ²⁶ These items could have involved the most choice, especially if one was buying smaller objects. However, the things people bought new were often larger items of furniture.

The commonest way that people added to their domestic goods was by receiving presents or winning prizes. This accounted for about one in four of the items.

²⁵ Toys are not included in the following data.

²⁶ I have assumed that most items bought through hire purchase schemes were new goods unless it was specifically mentioned otherwise.

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It could be argued that these objects featured more prominently in the autobiographies because they were more memorable than items bought by the family. However, as I showed above, couples received many essential and utilitarian items as wedding presents and depended on these gifts when they started-up home. Home-made was the next most frequently mentioned way of acquiring goods and covered one in five objects while free, second-hand and new goods were almost equal and each accounted for around one in eight of the objects. These ways of acquiring domestic goods each have their own implications for the amount of choice people had in the selection of their goods. Presents and prizes involved the least amount of choice, followed by free, and then home-made items. The domestic objects which entailed greatest level of choice when acquired were second-hand and brand-new objects.

The things that were presents or prizes were restricted by what friends and relatives could afford to buy and by someone else's taste. Some presents were chosen on the basis that the person receiving it would like it. One Christmas Elinor Sanderson was given a propelling pencil which she thought "was the most fantastic of things."²⁷ Winifred Foley's mother bought her husband four science volumes because she knew he liked books. However, Winifred knew that they were not the books her father would have chosen for himself because they were "so out-of-date that the knowledge had become practically useless."²⁸ Other presents were not liked at all. Joyce Storey's father had made his wife several brass ornaments which she loathed and eventually threw out.²⁹ However, most people seemed to have appreciated their wedding presents and children valued their school prizes whether they were to their liking or not. Victoria Massey, for example, thought her prize book rather dull, but the "feel" of it made up for this.³⁰ This appreciation of presents and prizes is explored further in Chapter Six.

Commodities that were 'free' did not reflect individuals' or families' choices either. Items that were charitable handouts were usually what the organisers considered to be 'suitable' (hard-wearing and often uncomfortable and unattractive as a result), while objects that were given away or abandoned were things that someone else no longer wanted. Ron Barnes' council flat was filled principally with discarded furniture including a piano and child's bedroom suite from neighbours and an old

²⁷ Elinor Sanderson, "Elinor Sanderson", p. 64.

²⁸ Winifred Foley, *A Child in the Forest*, p. 32.

²⁹ Joyce Storey, *Our Joyce*, p. 126.

³⁰ Victoria Massey, *One Child's War*, p. 63.

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three-piece suite he had found on the street.³¹ Archie Hill's living room was furnished with bits and pieces people had thrown out: "old rag rugs, rickety chairs, an old horse hair sofa with its back broken, and an old table made from unvarnished planks and plywood...."³² Joyce Storey thought that the three-piece suite given to her by a friend was a "great monstrosity" which she never liked but neither she nor her husband could bring themselves to refuse such a "generous" offer.³³ This suggests that for this category of goods, lack of financial means was the main reason for lack of choice. Joyce had to accept the ugly three-piece suite because she had to furnish a whole house when there were furniture shortages and her husband was doing semi-skilled labour; Ron Barnes was unemployed. Archie Hill's home was furnished with cast-offs for a different financial reason: "the best pieces [were] always being sold by dad so's [sic] the man in the pub could live."³⁴ This was a question of choice in the sense that Archie's father chose to spend his money in the pub, but if he had been wealthier he could have drunk and had kept the best furniture. There was even less choice for the rest of Archie's family.

Other families were in a better position to select items which had been thrown out or were offered to them. When Bill Griffith's neighbours moved, his mother was invited to take anything she wanted from the items they left behind, but presumably did not take anything she did not want. This level of choice applied to the things that Jo Barnes's grandfather retrieved from the bins in a more middle-class area of Bristol. He was proud of a mirror in particular, though an advertisement for sanitary towels across the top made his daughter less impressed.³⁵ In this circumstance, free goods involved more choice than presents and had the added bonus of being more easily disposable than a present if they were no longer wanted; the act of giving imbued the present with extra significance made its disposal far harder.

Home-made furnishings and clothes could be considered to have the closest association with individual choice and personality because they were designed to fit a requirement of personal satisfaction. Joan Booker's father developed his photographs in their bathroom and had made a moveable work top to go on the bath at "a convenient working height."³⁶ He was a carpenter and had set up the shed as a work-

³¹ Ron Barnes, *Coronation Cups and Jam Jars*, p. 186.

³² Archie Hill, *A Cage Of Shadows*, p. 25.

³³ Joyce Storey, *Joyce's War*, p. 166.

³⁴ Archie Hill, *A Cage Of Shadows*, p. 25.

³⁵ Jo Barnes, *Arthur and Me*, p. 6.

³⁶ Joan Booker, *A Newbury Childhood*, p. 28.

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room with a bench, vice and rack for tools. Having the right skill and equipment made domestic production easier. Others had to make their furnishings from oddments that had been discarded. Richard Heaton's commented that it made his "heart ache" to see the attempts his wife made to make their home comfortable: "[o]ne day she came in with an orange box and I expected her to ask me to chop it up for firewood, but no that was to become the pot cupboard."³⁷ G. E. Miles pointed out that home-made items were often a case of "making do" and the result of lack of financial resources. He explained that few housewives, including his mother, ever got their dream of a carpet for the best room and instead had to make their own from worn-out clothes and an old sack.³⁸ Molly Weir maintained that people would rather have had new items:

When I was a wee girl if you said that something looked 'hand-made' it was the greatest insult you could hurl at the disparaged article. To be exactly the same as everyone else was the look that was coveted, and great was the anguish suffered by children whose mothers had to make do and mend from anything which came to hand.³⁹

However, it is likely that this antipathy was felt mainly by children towards their own clothes. Parents had a different view on the matter. They had the satisfaction of knowing that they had saved money, and because they generally made household items, had a sense of achievement as well. This would explain why the housewives who made the rugs which G. E. Miles thought were terrible "proudly pointed [them] out to every visitor the minute they walked in the house."⁴⁰

Like the 'free' items, second-hand goods had been disposed of by others. If they had been bought at house sales or auctions then there would have been a similar level of choice as that presented to Mrs. Griffiths when she went to her neighbour's house. If the goods had been bought from second-hand shops or stalls there would have been more choice in the style of the goods because they would have originated from a variety of sources. Grace Foakes's family bought hospital beds from Mile End Market, while Gladys Gibson helped the victim of a house fire to acquire "an extraordinary assortment of cheerful plates picked out here and there" on the same

³⁷ Richard Heaton, *Salford: My Home Town*, p. 16.

³⁸ Miles thought that the rugs reflected that lack of talent of the makers. However, Hostettler argued the making items such as rugs was, on the contrary, evidence of skill: Eve Hostettler, "Making Do"; Domestic Life Among East Anglian Labourers, 1890-1910" in Leonore Davidoff and Belinda Westover, eds., *Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words: Women's History and Women's Work* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 46-47.

³⁹ Molly Weir, *Shoes Were For Sunday*, p. 76.

⁴⁰ G. E. Miles, *Fragments From the Tapestry of Life*, p. 49.

market.⁴¹ The pawnshop lay somewhere between house sales and second-hand shops; it sold items which its customers had been unable to redeem. While the contents of pawnshops came from a large number of individuals, the type of people going to pawn things they were unable to redeem generally came from the poorer sections of the working class and this limited the type and style of goods available. Helen Forrester bought her "nondescript" coat from the pawnbroker's "which had suffered from being bundled up in his loft."⁴² On the other hand, the pawnbroker would not accept really poor quality items. When Helen tried to buy an iron with three pence from the pawnbroker, he directed her to the ragman's yard which was "piled high with rusting iron - all the domestic debris of the neighbourhood, from bedsteads to hip baths" and therefore offered the lowest quality goods.⁴³ Second-hand items were not always necessarily things that people no longer wanted but what they may have been forced to sell and therefore were potentially more desirable and of better quality. Richard Heaton's mother would have loved to have kept the china clock set that her husband had won but they ended up for good in the pawn shop "the same way as other things went".⁴⁴ Therefore, second-hand goods offered more choice than the goods in the previous categories, but the choice was still dependant on what others no longer wanted and on spending power.

New items did not have the limitation of being someone's cast-offs. Affordability and availability limited the choice in this group.⁴⁵ Architectural historian Ian Bentley, in his study of the inter-war semi, pointed out there were only a limited number of affordable designs or styles available in the local co-op or department store and as a consequence this dramatically reduced the "responsiveness" (or influence) people had on their homes.⁴⁶ He established categories of domestic goods based on "planes of choice" which took into account the price, quantity and quality of the different types of objects. He suggested that the larger the item was the smaller the number of designs. The first plane was the house itself. This was the most limited choice because there were only a few types of houses and plans and they were also

⁴¹ Grace Foakes, *My Part of the River*, p. 187; Gladys Gibson, "London", p. 68.

⁴² Helen Forrester, *Liverpool Miss*, p. 268.

⁴³ Helen Forrester, *Twopence to Cross the Mersey*, p. 101.

⁴⁴ Richard Heaton, *Salford, My Home Town*, p. 7; Grace Foakes, *My Life With Reuben*, p. 60.

⁴⁵ Availability limited the choices of other classes, too. However, as Mass Observation noted, women of a higher class were more likely to shop outside their home town and this increased their level of choice: Mass Observation, "Shopping at Department Stores", *Mass Observation Bulletin* XLIII January/February (1952), p. 2.

⁴⁶ Ian Bentley, "The Owner Makes His Mark. Choice and Adaptation" in P. Oliver, I. Davis, and I. Bentley, *Dunroamin: The Suburban Semi and Its Enemies* (1981, London: Pimlico, 1994), pp. 137-8.

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restricted by district and number of builders. The second plane was that of the exterior decorations to the house such as the type of window or porch. These were semi-permanent fixtures which could be changed but according to Bentley seldom were. The third plane were the interior fixtures such as the type of bathroom or fireplace. He suggests that ten to fifty variations of these were offered by the builder. The fourth plane entailed large items of furniture, for example, suites, stoves or carpets and the variation of these items ranged from about five to twenty and their availability affected by whether they were in stock. These would have been replaced more often than items in the previous three planes but not as often as those in planes five or six. Plane five consisted of commodities such as radios which were moveable and changeable and could be bought locally. The final plane allowed the inhabitants to have the greatest level of influence on their homes. It consisted of accessories such as ornaments or pictures for which there were hundreds of styles and designs available, and cost between two shillings and £2. Thus while there were between five and fifty variations in suites, stoves or carpet styles, there were hundreds of different types of pictures, vases or ornaments.⁴⁷ Bentley's argument is supported by Jahoda's findings from the 1930s. She explained that one of her respondents objected to the furniture in the store she was researching "because it was too uniform and allowed everyone to see at once that her furniture came from here."⁴⁸ Jahoda noted the lack of variation in the furnishings in people's homes, even among the income groups who had more than £600 a year:

In every house visited the open fire was inevitably the centre of the drawing room, round which the three-piece suite, almost inevitable to the same degree, was grouped: two easy chairs at each side of the fireplace, a settee in front of it...the type and number of pieces of furniture in a drawing room do not vary very much. The factors which thus remain to create the impression of individuality are: shape and size of pieces, colours, material, and arrangement to a limited degree.⁴⁹

Thus Johoda concurred with Bentley that it was the smallest details that enabled people to express difference or individuality.

These smallest details were important to the autobiographers, especially if they distinguished the home from those of friends or relatives. Spike Mays's mother was proud of her mahogany kitchen table which had a pedestal instead of legs and had lions' claws on the corners of the pedestal. She had a unusual bread board that was

⁴⁷ Bentley, "The Owner Makes His Mark", p. 139.

⁴⁸ Marie Jahoda, "The Consumer's Attitude to Furniture", p. 214. The interviews were carried out in 1938 and consisted largely of people who had income of £600 or more.

⁴⁹ Jahoda, "The Consumer's Attitude to Furniture", p. 215.

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hand-carved from exotic wood by a Boer War prisoner which she “prized” as well.⁵⁰ Winifred Renshaw commented that her mother “ever on the look out for anything new...was the first in our street to hang coloured curtains at the windows.”⁵¹ Furthermore, the Renshaws had one of the first synthetic rugs in the form of a “supa skin”. Elsie Balme’s mother considered colour important too and disliked her three-piece suite because was the wrong colour and looked cumbersome.⁵² Colour, style individualism, and difference were all important when creating the home.

Table 5.2: How Objects Were Obtained

Object Group	Number of items in group	Present or Prize	Free	Home made	Second hand	New
		%	%	%	%	%
Furniture	75	9	21	12	24	23
Clothes	77	4	12	44	22	64
Rugs/linoleum	43	0	2	40	4	21
Books	35	91	6	0	3	0
Chinaware	30	60	13	0	7	3
Beds	20	0	25	0	4	25
Bedding	19	21	13	32	11	11
Ornaments	17	70	12	18	0	0
Footwear	16	19	31	0	25	19
Kitchenware	15	66	0	0	3	0
Linen	11	45	9	27	0	0
Cleaning items	11	0	9	0	18	55

When the different sizes and types of objects are compared with the ways that people acquired them, the amount of choice people had when selecting their household contents is further illuminated (Table 5.2). The smallest things such as chinaware, ornaments or books, which Bentley showed were sold in a wide variety of styles, were more likely to be presents. This effectively meant that things the autobiographers’ families should have had the greatest choice in, were acquired by the method that had potentially the least choice. The largest items, the ones that Bentley argued had the least number of styles available when bought new, were often new or second-hand, though nearly as many were free.⁵³ The fact that many people had brand-new cleaning equipment was because these were generally used by families until they were worn out

⁵⁰ Spike Mays, *Reuben’s Corner*, p. 51.

⁵¹ Winifred Renshaw, *An Ordinary Life*, Chapter 20.

⁵² Elsie Balme, *Seagull Morning*, p. 19.

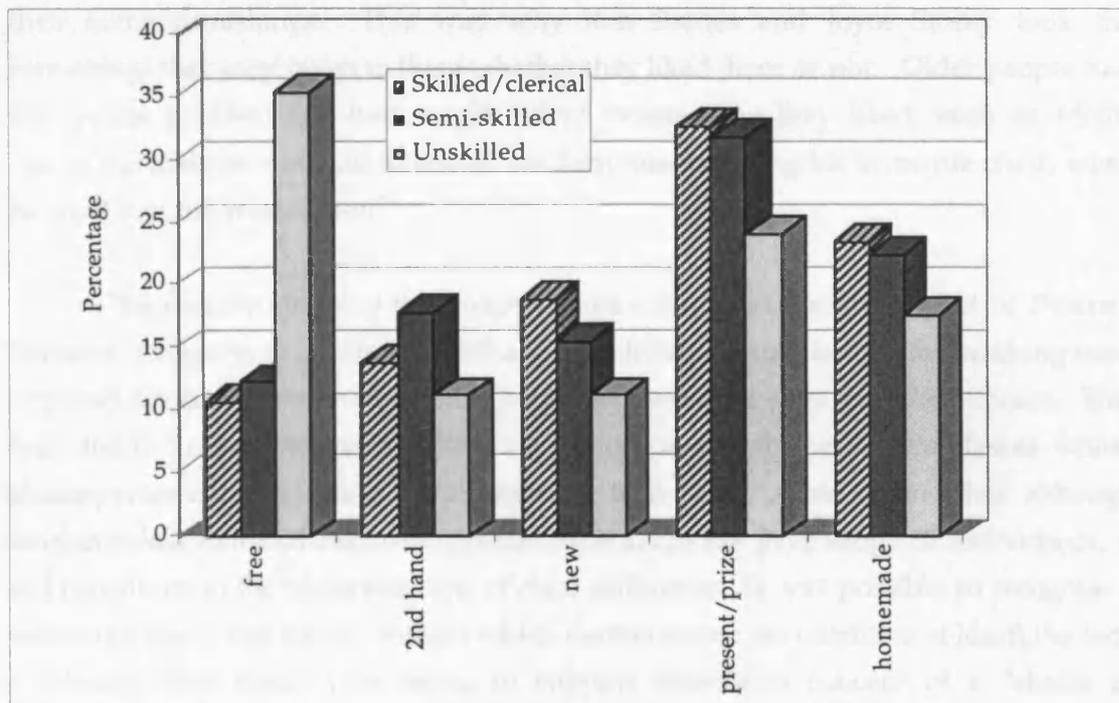
⁵³ A Mass Observation survey in the early 1950s found that 47% of items bought on hire purchase were furniture, a further 18% were furnishings, 28% other durables and only 7% on smaller things such as books and ornaments: Mass Observation, “Buying on Hire Purchase”, *Mass Observation Bulletin XLV* May/June (1952), p. 2.

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and therefore were infrequently cast-offs or second-hand goods. The household and personal goods that were most likely to be home-made were clothes, linen and rugs.

Since the purchasing power and choice of household goods was limited more by income, then it would be unsurprising if the status group with the least choice were the unskilled workers. This happened to a certain extent and Figure 5.1 shows that the group with the largest amount of free goods were the unskilled workers, and this was the means by which they acquired most of their goods. Many of these items (almost one in five) were charitable handouts which people explained were accepted only as a last resort. The skilled and semi-skilled were more likely to have brand-new items and the fact that they both received presents reflects the ability either of their relatives give them presents and of the autobiographer's own family's ability to buy them birthday and Christmas presents.

Figure 5.1: Acquisition of Objects: By Status



While it might be expected the higher income meant that skilled workers needed to make less things because they could afford to buy them, they were making commodities more often than the unskilled workers. This was presumably because, unlike Joan Booker's father, unskilled workers generally did not have access to the skill, tools and space or that a certain amount of initial outlay which was required to get the materials to make the item. In a Mass Observation survey in the 1950s, people were asked why they produced or made things for the home. It found that although

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the “need for economy” was important, “satisfaction of personal achievement ranked higher.” The survey also referred to the problems of doing house repairs when there was not enough space available and, as Chapter Three showed, it was the skilled workers who overall had the largest homes.⁵⁴

Children had the least control over their clothes and possessions. Clothes, books and shoes were chosen for them and they had little spending power. Beatrice Hamm was deeply disappointed when she got a pair of school shoes for her birthday. She had hoped to get something more interesting or at the very least a pair of best shoes.⁵⁵ Edward Blishen hated the dark-wood bookcase his mother had bought him; if he had been buying he would have bought a light-wood one because that was the fashion.⁵⁶ Life cycle affected the goods that people had too, as the previous part of the chapter demonstrated. When people first married they had smaller homes and less money and they had to start building a home from scratch. They were less likely to be choosy in these circumstances than in later life when they had already built-up their home furnishings. This was why Ron Barnes and Joyce Storey took the furnishings that were given to them whether they liked them or not. Older people had the reverse problem and had to get rid of possessions they liked, such as Mollie Harris’s neighbour who had to sell all his furniture including his favourite chair, when he went into the workhouse.⁵⁷

The first two parts of this chapter have considered the first aspect of Pearce’s “history” category, that of origin. What I have tried to show is that the working-class acquired the things they had in their homes in ways that gave them less choice. This was due to limited income, and this set them apart from the middle classes whose choices were confined more by availability than price. This means that although working-class material culture suggested little about the psychology of individuals, it did contribute to the understanding of class difference. It was possible to recognise a working-class home by its contents which demonstrated (to outsiders at least) the lack of choices they had. This seems to support Bourdieu’s concept of a “choice of necessity” and this is upheld further by the final part of this chapter which examines the multiple uses of objects.

⁵⁴ Mass Observation, “Back to the Home”, *Mass Observation Bulletin* XLVI July/August (1952), pp. 4, 10.

⁵⁵ Beatrice Hamm, “Beatrice Hamm”, p. 15.

⁵⁶ Edward Blishen, *Sorry, Dad!*, p. 78.

⁵⁷ Mollie Harris, *A Kind of Magic*, p. 182.

Part Three: Using Objects

This part of the chapter examines the uses that people gave the things which they had in their homes and assesses how these functions altered according to the class, status, gender and age of the individuals and families using them. It focuses on the second component of Pearce's category of analysis, that of "history", but due to the nature of the data concentrates more on the different uses within a period rather than between periods.⁵⁸

Historians, such as Alison Ravetz and Martin Daunton, have described the things that people had in their homes and their significance but do not discuss how they were used.⁵⁹ Bernard Herman, on the other hand, has argued that it is not only important to understand what objects people possessed but to show how the uses of the objects gave them meaning. In a study of probate inventories of artisans' houses in America, he described the tea tray and caddy as "emblems of particular categories of social knowledge." He claimed that it was not enough that these items were present but that as indicators of status they had to be used in front of an audience for them to have any significance. While such an approach recognises that use was important, it does not acknowledge that use of objects could change within an historical period. Therefore, although the artisan house may have had a tea caddy, the caddy may not have stored tea or indeed been used at all.⁶⁰ Colin Campbell has noted this tendency to assume that generally accepted meanings of objects "inform the actions of individuals when making use of those products." He suggests that this happens "because of the rather too easy assumption that individuals select and use the products they do because of the commonly agreed meanings that it is claimed they possess."⁶¹ Judy Attfield, in her study of Harlow interiors in the 1950s, also criticised the supposition that objects have fixed meaning. She attacked Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital" because it did not account for the way in which "artefacts or designed goods can be made to articulate meanings other than those intended by the designers."⁶² She added further that if one sees "meaning as not fixed but historically

⁵⁸ Pearce, "Objects as Meaning", p. 30.

⁵⁹ Ravetz, *The Place of Home*; Martin Daunton, *House and Home in the Victorian City: Working-Class Housing 1850-1914* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983).

⁶⁰ Bernard Herman, "The Poor Artisan's Lodging", Paper presented to the Urban History Conference, 1996.

⁶¹ Campbell, "The Meaning of Objects", p. 95.

⁶² Attfield, "Inside Pram Town", p. 226.

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determined, it is also possible to see that the same object can mean different things to different groups at different times.”⁶³

The changing uses of objects within a period and the tension between the way they were actually used and their ‘intended’ use, has been discussed by Angela Partington in her study of domestic consumption in the 1950s.⁶⁴ She argued that housewives gave their own meanings to objects by giving them uses which the male manufacturer or designer did not intend, and that these differences were particularly strong in the 1950s when the functionalist movement advocated that the function of an object should be reflected in its design. She took the fireplace as an example, showing how women used it to display ornaments, to dry clothes, to burn rubbish or to cook on: to them the fireplace was not just a means of heating a room. Partington saw these uses as “feminine meanings” which contrasted with “patriarchal ideologies for designers and manufacturers.” Likewise Attfield demonstrated the conflict between the way Harlow women decorated their homes and the way planners wanted them to be furnished. Partington and Attfield both stressed that consumption was not a passive activity for women because they actively created their own meanings. However, both have represented consumption and the use of objects in a binary fashion, that is placing male designers and manufacturers in opposition to housewife consumers. This viewpoint ignores the fact that male designers or manufacturers did not represent all men and that men of different classes and tastes would also give uses to objects that were in opposition to functionalist designers. Moreover, it is dangerous to assume that the women were the main domestic consumers. As John Benson had pointed out, the decision to buy consumer durables was made by both husband and wife. It was often the man who had to sign the hire-purchase form, as Joyce Storey found out when she wanted to buy a washing machine in 1952.⁶⁵ Until the Matrimonial Property Act of 1970, the household goods paid for by husbands were considered to be legally theirs. Bowden and Offer maintained that the desires of the whole family were taken into account particularly when it came to buying ‘brown goods’. They have argued that time-using goods (such as televisions or radios) were

⁶³ Attfield, “Inside Pram Town”, p. 234.

⁶⁴ Angela Partington, “The Designer Housewife in the 1950s” in Attfield and Kirkham, eds., *A View From the Interior*, pp. 209-210.

⁶⁵ John Benson, *The Rise of the Consumer Society in Britain 1880-1980* (London: Longman, 1994), p. 71. He suggested that women were more involved in choosing domestic items than in the more expensive, “less overtly ‘domestic’ products” such as motor cars which were more ‘masculine’; Joyce Storey, *Joyce’s Dream*, p. 39.

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bought first because they were wanted by men who had greater purchasing power within the home.⁶⁶

Most of the items described in the autobiographies were used for their 'intended' purpose. These intended uses were recognised by the majority of people. Thus, the autobiographers ate at their tables, slept in their beds and sat in their chairs. However, the autobiographers also detailed other uses given to objects that were less widely recognised. I have analysed these additional uses which people gave their objects, by asking the questions: how were the objects used; who was using them for additional uses; which objects were given additional functions; and why were they given extra uses. The latter is particularly relevant for understanding differences between middle-class and working-class use of material culture.

Over two thirds of the households described items which had alternative uses. However, while some referred to only one object others listed several. Two families both cited thirteen different objects with alternative uses, while twenty-two families gave only one item with another use. On average, each household usually had about three items to which they gave additional uses. The extent of multiple usage indicates that it is more appropriate to discuss use in terms of 'primary' and 'secondary' uses rather than "intended" and "non-intended" uses because for many the so-called non-intended functions were the accepted ones. In some cases the 'non-intended' uses were more important than the 'intended' uses. Edward Blishen, for example, listed the various uses of his family's piano:

It was first a piece of furniture, then a photographic gallery, then a showplace for mother's embroidered mats, then an indoor flower garden, then a monument to my father's skill as a polisher and [it was] also used for musical purposes.⁶⁷

The musical function of the piano was apparently the least important: it came last on the list almost as an afterthought. What seemed more important to the users was the piano's function as a means to display other items. The ornamental use of objects was one of the more common ways that the primary use was superseded by the actual use. Tea sets and dinner services were mainly on display and used on special occasions only. Other objects were never used for their commonly recognised function at all because their secondary use had ousted the primary use altogether, as Leslie Paul remembers:

⁶⁶ Sue Bowden and Avner Offer, "Household Appliances and the Use of Time: The United States and Britain Since the 1920s", *Economic History Review* XLVII 4 (1994), p. 739.

⁶⁷ Edward Blishen, *Sorry, Dad!*, p. 155.

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Above the fire was a high black shelf, with a clock at its centre and on either side [there was] a tea-caddy and several unused flower vases. Only one tea caddy housed tea, the other, and the flower vases, constituted mother's filling system. Into the spare tea caddy went receipts and papers important to keep...and into the flower vases went other less important documents...school reports...letters from grandma...black bordered letters... [and] envelopes which contained mother's savings bank.⁶⁸

So only one tea caddy was ever used for tea and none of the vases contained flowers. Likewise the dish covers and tea set in Marion Smith's kitchen were never used - they were only taken off the shelf to be washed.⁶⁹

While it was undoubtedly the case that all classes used certain objects in a multiplicity of alternative ways, the amount and way in which objects were given other uses sheds light on the autonomy of working-class culture since many of these uses would have been accepted by the working class but not by the middle class. For example, the use of the kitchen table as desk, ironing board or dining room table may have been normal and necessary uses in a working-class home, but not in a middle-class one where a desk, ironing board and dining table were likely to be available. However, within the working class there were differences in the accepted uses for items. Although no status group was more prone to give alternative uses to objects than others, there were certain items that were used in different ways.⁷⁰ All the references to coats being used as blankets were from the semi-skilled and unskilled households and it was in these homes that newspapers more often had multiple uses. Helen Forrester described what she considered the basic kit for the poorest families in which newspaper was given particular emphasis. She explained: "newspapers can be made into beds, handkerchiefs, toilet paper, warm padding under thin garments, draught excluders, make shift window-pane replacements, firing and a thousand other uses."⁷¹ Helen had certainly never needed to use newspaper in so many ways in her middle-class home.

Class was not the only factor that could influence the intended uses of objects. Certain items of furniture were viewed by children as playthings, a perspective their parents did not always share. Molly Weir could not understand people who banished their coal bunkers on to the landing:

⁶⁸ Leslie Paul, *The Boy Down Kitchener Street*, pp. 59-61.

⁶⁹ Marion Smith in Jean Faley, *Up Oor Close*, p. 27.

⁷⁰ The ratio of the number of objects described by each status was compared with each status group's ratio of the total households.

⁷¹ Helen Forrester, *Twopence to Cross the Mersey*, p. 221.

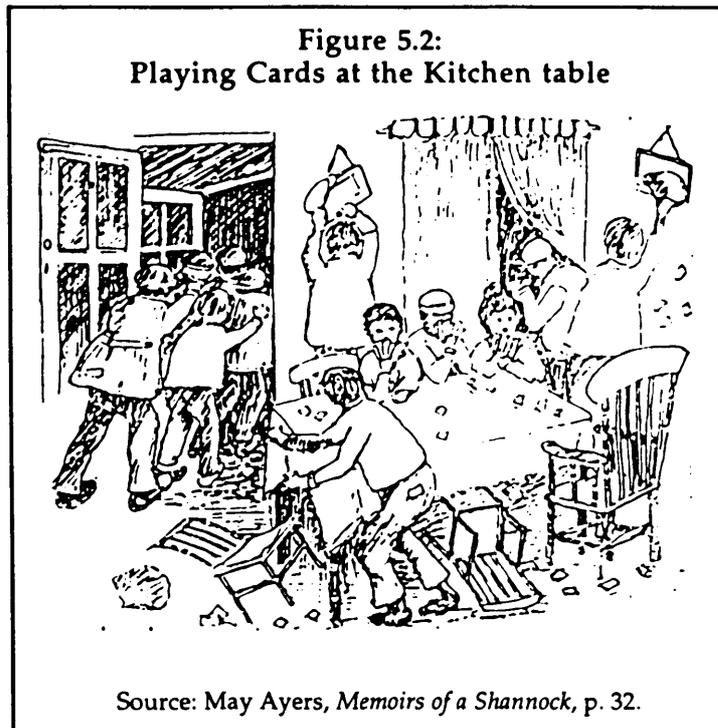
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Fancy removing such a treasure from the warmth of the kitchen, we thought, and we felt sorry for the children of such finicky folk, being deprived of such a splendid plaything. For that was how we saw our bunker. It was *much* more than a mere receptacle for coal. It was our toy. Our play-pen.⁷²

In the case of playthings, age could cut across class because children of different classes could use objects in the same way. In the 1930s, a tray and cork mat were stair toboggans for a doctor's and clerk's daughter respectively.⁷³ A gendered analysis of the use of objects is far harder than that of age. The best way to do this would be to examine the activity the item was used for then relate this to the person most likely to be doing the activity. For example, tables were used for ironing mainly by mothers and daughters. However, this is really a family usage because, in contrast with the playthings, it was not just these individuals who benefited from using the table in this way.

I have already mentioned some of the objects which were given multiple uses. The items with the most additional uses are listed in Table 5.2. As Chapter Four demonstrated, the most used room was the living room or living-kitchen and thus it is not surprising that the kitchen table was used for so many activities. Its most common usage other than for eating at was for playing games on, which reflects the fact that the majority of the

authors were describing their childhood. Edward Blishen explained that their kitchen table was the best item of furniture when he was young. It had a shelf running all the way round it underneath and he would sit under the table and run his toys along the "secret system of roadways."⁷⁴ May Ayres' brother and his friends would play cards



⁷² Molly Weir, *Shoes Were For Sunday*, p. 56.

⁷³ Winifred Renshaw, *An Ordinary Life*; Chapter 33; Jane Faire "Tell Us About", p. 4.

⁷⁴ Edward Blishen, *Sorry, Dad!*, p. 24.

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and dominoes around their large kitchen table and sometimes there would be as many as eighteen to nineteen people.⁷⁵ She illustrated this event (Figure 5.2) and showed how the boys would use the pictures to hang their hats. James Charlton and his brother would turn the kitchen table into a football pitch, using match boxes for goals, and the Skinners used theirs to play ping pong.⁷⁶ Adults used the table for playing games to a lesser extent. Catherine Cookson described her grandfather at the kitchen table “cheating himself at patience”.⁷⁷ Other frequent uses for the table were as an ironing board and as a desk for school children.

Table 5.3: Other Uses Given to Objects

OBJECT intended use	Uses Given to Object
Kitchen table eating at	cooking, baking, ironing, sewing, knitting, desk, washing-up, scrubbing clothes, air-raid shelter, skinning rabbits, playing at, hiding under, listening to radio, reading, talking and sitting at, operating on, drawing on, making things on, bathing baby, work surface, extracting splinters on
Newspaper reading	WC paper, table cloth, floor covering, cleaning windows, laying fires, mending boots, protecting items, curtains, cleaning ornaments, as handkerchiefs, packing, cleaning boots, as a mattress, padding under clothes, draft excluders, filling holes in windows,
Copper boiling clothes	work surface, making wine, cooking (Christmas pudding), drowning cats, storage, brewing, bathing in, making pig feed, boiling chitterlings
Chair sitting on	drying clothes, playing with or on, sleeping on, eating at, as a table, shoe cleaning, rising bread, to form a play pen, balancing bath or wash bowl on
Fireguard protection from fire	rising bread, reading on, sitting on, airing clothes, drying boots

One in five of the coppers mentioned by the autobiographer had uses other than for washing clothes. Cooking was the most frequent alternative use and the Christmas pudding was often boiled in it. Sometimes it was used to make soup or broth. If it had a lid then it could be used as a work surface or for storing things in when not being used to boil clothes. In Leslie Paul’s pre-First World War home the

⁷⁵ May Ayers, *Memoirs of a Shannock*, p. 32.

⁷⁶ James Charlton, *More Sand in My Shoes*, p. 82; Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, p. 14.

⁷⁷ Catherine Cookson, *Our Kate*, p. 64.

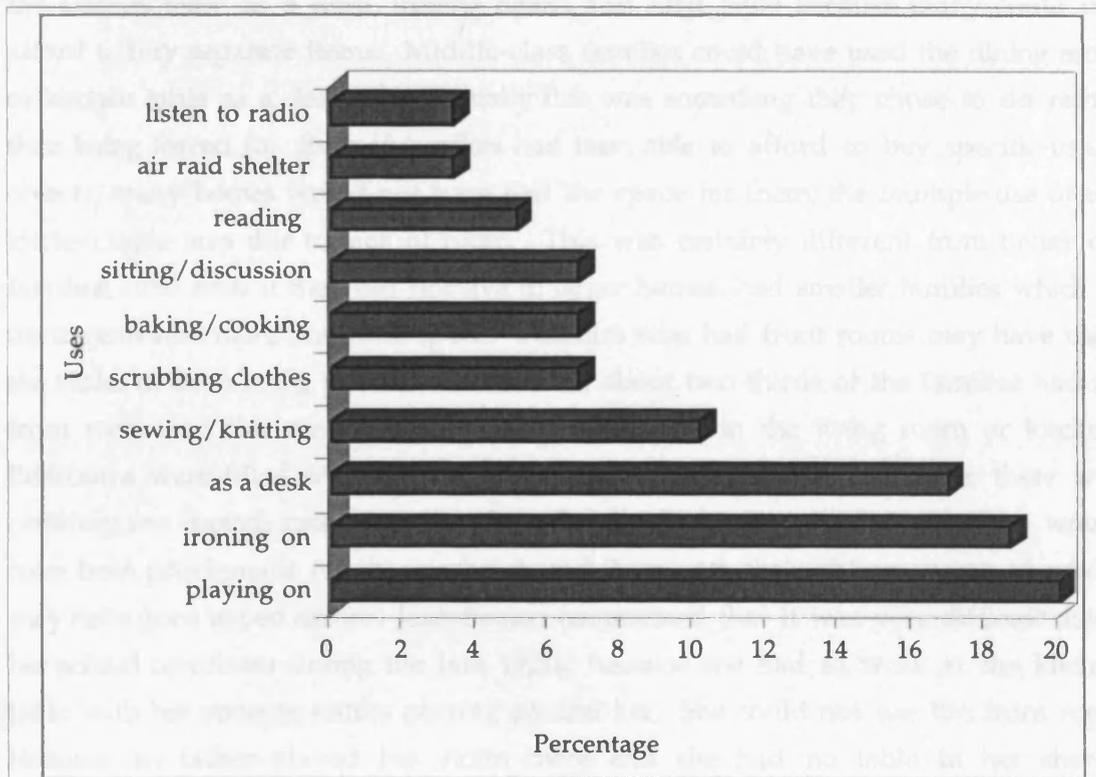
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candles for upstairs were kept in their boiler during the day and in the inter-war period Winifred Renshaw's family stored the "flotsam" of everyday life on top of theirs and kept a gas stove on its lid.⁷⁸ Given that the copper was used only once or twice a week, it was practical to use this space as much as possible. Although the intended use of copper was to boil clothes, in houses without bathrooms it often had the accepted use of boiling water for baths. However, only G. E. Miles described the copper itself being used as a bath, indicating why it was uncommon:

Younger kids...had to clamber into the cooled down copper. If the cast-iron lining held the heat longer than expected, bath time became a struggle to keep our tender feet away from the hot bottom, dancing up and down, waving our arms and yelling like "loonies" in the process.⁷⁹

Drowning cats was also an infrequent alternative use for the copper.⁸⁰

Figure 5.3: Uses Given to Tables



Vases and tea caddies were not often used for their 'intended' purpose but were accepted as containers for smaller items. In Joy Udell's childhood home two vases on the mantelpiece held "everything imaginable - shoe buttons, garment buttons,

⁷⁸ Winifred Renshaw, *An Ordinary Life*, Chapters 10 and 18.

⁷⁹ G. E. Miles, *Fragments From The Tapestry of Life*, p. 11.

⁸⁰ Grace Foakes, *My Part of the River*, p. 111.

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buckles, puncture-mending pieces, pipe cleaners, hair-grips, screws, tacks, knitting needles, crotchet hooks, chinks, pencils...."⁸¹ In Henry Blacker's home the vases on the mantelpiece stored money and various oddments, while in Eric Fairclough's house the vases contained the rent book, photos and bills and they had a teapot in which they kept money. Kathleen Dayus's mother kept the rent in the tea caddy on their mantelpiece.⁸² While middle-class households no doubt stored similar items in their vases, the use of the vase as the household bank account was more likely to be confined to the working class.

All people, whatever their status or gender, used objects in 'unintended' ways. However, in working-class homes of the period 1900-55, objects were used more intensely than in homes of other classes. There were three main factors, all inter-linked, which generated these differences: low income; lack of space; and lack of facilities. Low incomes meant that families had to 'make do' with less. Families used the kitchen table as a desk, ironing board and card table because many could not afford to buy separate items. Middle-class families could have used the dining room or kitchen table as a desk, but generally this was something they chose to do rather than being forced to. Even if families had been able to afford to buy specific-usage objects, many homes would not have had the space for them; the multiple-use of the kitchen table was due to lack of room. This was certainly different from better off families, who even if they did not live in larger homes, had smaller families which in itself generated more domestic space. Families who had front rooms may have used the tables in them in the summer months, but about two thirds of the families had no front room and this meant that the only table was in the living room or kitchen. Bedrooms were filled with beds and left little space for other furniture; there was certainly not enough room for a desk and doing homework in the bedrooms would have been problematic for those who shared them with their siblings, some of whom may have gone to bed earlier. Joan Booker commented that it was very difficult doing her school certificate during the late 1920s because she had to work at the kitchen table with her younger sisters playing around her. She could not use the front room because her father played his violin there and she had no table in her shared bedroom.⁸³ Children were still doing their homework in the kitchen or living room into the 1950s, which they found disruptive because other members of the family were

⁸¹ Mrs Udell, "The Fireplace in the Front Room Held a Fire only Twice a Year", p. 109.

⁸² Henry Blacker, *Just Like It Was*, p. 165; Eric Fairclough, *In a Lancashire Street*, p. 34; Kathleen Dayus, *The Best of Times*, p. 13.

⁸³ Joan Booker, *A Newbury Childhood*, p. 106.

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listening to the radio.⁸⁴ A Ministry of Works-sponsored survey in 1947-48 believed that children could have had somewhere to work alone “if their parents had taken the trouble to give them a suitable table, lamp, perhaps a bookshelf and some means of heating”; no mention is made as to whether the family could have afforded these extra items.⁸⁵ Joyce Skinner was the only autobiographer who mentioned having a desk in her bedroom which she did not have to share with anyone else.⁸⁶ The variety of objects used for drying clothes (as shown in Table 5.4) was a consequence of lack of space as well because the washing was done in one day and the families needed as many places to dry their clothes as possible. This would have been even more the case in the winter than in the summer.

Table 5.4: Objects Used for Activities

Activities	Objects Used for Activity
Drying clothes	chairs, fireguard, gas cooker, plate rack, pictures, oven
Storing money	sewing machine, mantelpiece, teapot, mattress, empty paint cans, behind picture, behind mirror, up back-kitchen chimney, on stairs, in privy, tea caddy
Storing clothes	banister, bed posts, mattress, chair, sideboard
Storing small items	vases, mantelpiece, canisters, ornament, tea caddy, copper
Plaything	chairs, stools, desk bed, picture, three-piece suite, lid of sewing machine, mangle, bunker, old furniture, colander
Sleeping	sofa, hard chairs, armchairs, wardrobe drawer

The latter example shows that the type of facilities available in the homes affected furniture usage for the same reasons they determined the patterns of space usage described in Chapter Four. Joyce only worked at her desk in summer because it was too cold to work in her room in winter; the Liverpool University survey did not recognise the expense of heating. The kitchen table was thus given many uses because it was in a heated room and its multiple usage was seasonal. The location of the light also influenced the uses of the kitchen table. Maggie Newbery’s family did not lack space or tables, but they still used the kitchen table for a number of activities because

⁸⁴ Phyllis Allen, “Evening Activities in the Home”, *Sociological Review XLV* (1951), pp. 138-139.

⁸⁵ Social Science Department, Liverpool University, “Inquiry into the Conditions in which School Children do their Homework” (1947-8) cited in Dennis Chapman, “People and Their Homes”, *Current Affairs CVIII* (n.d., c.1950s), p. 11.

⁸⁶ Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, p. 17.

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the oil lamp stood on it: "We sat up to the table if we wanted to read, sew, knit, or play games such as Ludo, Draughts and Snakes and Ladders."⁸⁷ Maggie lived on a tenant farm before the first World War and oil lamps were their main form of lighting. Mass Observation's study of an Exmoor Village suggested that rural homes were still relying on lamps (spirit) in the 1940s.⁸⁸ Even houses that had gas in the inter-war period only had it in certain rooms. Joyce's bedroom had no lighting which was an additional reason why she did not use her desk in the winter. The lack of bathrooms was one of the principle reasons for the alternative uses given to coppers.

Rose Gamble's experiences provide a good, though perhaps more extreme, example of the impact that lack of space, money and facilities had on the way that furniture was used in working-class homes. Rose lived with her parents and four siblings in one room during the 1920s. Her father was unemployed and her mother worked as a cleaner. There were two armchairs in their room that converted to beds at night, while the single bed which was shared by her two sisters was used for sitting during the day and for eating. Two table chairs were tied together in the evening with a washing board to make a bed for the youngest child and the parents slept in a folding bed which was attached to the wall. The youngest children ate at two stools. Space was not the only reason why their room contents were used in this manner: when Rose's family moved into a three-bedroom flat the same sleeping arrangements continued because the family could not afford to buy beds for the children as well as the parents. However, having the extra rooms meant that the chairs could be left as beds in the daytime and therefore reduced the number of uses they had.⁸⁹

The financial situation of the working class meant that they acquired objects by means with the least possible choice. The poorer the family became the less choice they had. However, working-class people did not passively consume the commodities they did possess. Rather they actively produced their own meanings for domestic goods by giving them uses that the manufacturer or designer did not intend. Moreover, from the autobiographers' viewpoints the 'alternative' uses were generally the accepted ones; what Attfield, Partington and Campbell have seen as 'non-intended uses' were the 'intended' uses to the working class. This was not necessarily a self-conscious rebellion against a dominant culture, as Partington has pointed out, but was a strategy

⁸⁷ Maggie Newbery, *Reminiscences of a Bradford Mill Girl*, p. 21.

⁸⁸ W. J. Turner, *Exmoor Village* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1947), p. 39.

⁸⁹ Rose Gamble, *A Chelsea Childhood*, pp. 9-18.

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to cope with limited material culture due to lack of money, space and facilities.⁹⁰ These conclusions, therefore, seem to concur with Bourdieu's "choice of necessity." However, the lack of choice did not mean that the people did not value the things they did possess - indeed it may have meant that they valued what they did own even more. The multiple uses of certain items would have also increased their value and significance to autobiographers. It is this value and significance which forms the subject of Chapter Six.

⁹⁰ Partington, "The Designer Housewife in the 1950s", p. 213.

Chapter Six

“ Mother’s Pride and Joy”

This chapter uses the last two properties of Pearce’s methodology for the study of objects, those of “environment” and “significance”, to examine the objects that the autobiographers considered were important to them and to members of their family.¹ It analyses the words they used to describe their special objects and looks at the kind of things which they valued. In addition, it assesses how the significance of objects was implied through their treatment, use and location within the home.

The methodology of this chapter is derived primarily from Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton’s *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (1980).² They interviewed 82 families in the late 1970s, asking different family members: what things they cherished; why these things were special; what would it mean to be without them; where they were kept; and how and when they were used. They divided the type of objects referred to into 41 categories and created eleven categories covering the reasons why things were special or valued. They then assessed the impact that age and gender had on the objects people valued. They concluded that: children valued items for visual reasons less than adults and they preferred objects that were active rather than contemplative; men liked objects that showed their achievements whereas women cherished objects that represented family connections; and elderly men and women valued objects that evoked memories.³

The approach used here, however, differs from that of Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton on two levels. Firstly, they were primarily concerned with showing personal development rather than understanding class culture, whereas I place greater

¹ Susan Pearce, “Objects As Meaning: or Narrating the Past” in Susan Pearce ed., *Interpreting Objects and Collections* (1986, London: Routledge, 1994), p. 129.

² Contemplative goods include photos, visual art, or books. Active goods include stereos, ‘fridges, or televisions. However, young people can use “contemplative” goods in an active way and adults can use “active” things in a contemplative way: M. Csikszentmihalyi and E. Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1981), pp. 96-7.

³ These conclusions reflect the structuralist concerns of the period with gender roles being conceived in terms of binary oppositions: women were associated with the passive and men with the active roles.

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emphasis on the class and status of the people valuing the objects. This is not to devalue the importance of age and gender, but the age analysis here is less sophisticated in the sense that it recognises only two generations; that of children/teenagers and adults. This is a reflection of the fact that the majority of the autobiographers' households consisted mainly of nuclear families and there are few references to the things that were cherished by grandparents. The second difference relates to the source: Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's work was based on interviews and they were able to ask directly what objects were special to the people concerned. While the autobiographers did refer to such objects and gave reasons why they found them important, I also have to depend on their descriptions and reasons for what they believed other members of their families thought were special to them. The first two sections of the chapter concentrate on the overt references to objects, and the final section examines those possessions whose worth was implied by the way they were used, where they were kept and how they were looked after.

Part One: Valuing Objects

This part of the chapter examines the reasons why objects were 'valued' (in both an emotional and a monetary sense) and how these reasons varied according to the age, status and gender of the person or people valuing the object. The last chapter showed that people had little choice in the selection of their household items but although people had to "make do", they still appreciated the things they did possess. This even applied to objects which had been thrown out by others: Jo Barnes and her grandfather considered the things they had found in other people's dustbins were "treasures", while Ron Barnes was pleased to have someone's cast off piano, even though it was old and out of tune. He also thought that the two arm-chairs he found in the street were "smashing".⁴ Home-made things were valued as well. Mary Lakeham's father made his desk and it was "as precious to him as the Ark of the Lord to the Israelites."⁵ Thus people could obtain a great deal of satisfaction and pleasure from the things they did possess, even it was not the "ideal" brand-new item that they desired. This was because household items were important in creating a "familiar environment" and they made a house homely and cosy.⁶ This sense of home was

⁴ Jo Barnes, *Arthur and Me*, p. 6; Ron Barnes, *Coronation Cups and Jam Jars*, p. 186.

⁵ Mary Lakeham, *Early Tide*, p. 100.

⁶ Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things*, p. 85; A. J. Schuurman, "Is Huiselijkheid Typisch Nederlands?", *Bijdragen en Mededelingen Betreffende de Geschiedenis Der Nederlanden*, CVII 4 (1992), p. 745.

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generally not conveyed by social investigators, because they concentrated on the material rather than the emotional aspects of household goods.

The autobiographers gave a variety of explanations as to why certain things were important to them or to members of their family.⁷ A small number, however, were items that were perceived as having a commonly recognised significance, though the family's own appreciation of an object may have differed from this general view. I have divided the reasons into eight "categories of value" some of which are similar to the eleven categories of Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton. These categories range from the aesthetic to necessity and are as follows: visual, display, treasured, sentiment, personal, monetary, entertainment and utilitarian. Some things appeared in more than one category because they were valued for a variety of different reasons but no object appeared in more than four different categories.

The *aesthetic* category consisted of reasons that concerned the way objects looked or felt and was expressed in terms such as "beautiful", "nice", "elegant", "grand", "lovely", "pretty", or "fine". Most of the descriptions in this category explained why the autobiographers themselves, rather than other members of their family, appreciated the look of an object. Maggie Newbery thought that their photo album was "beautiful", Mary Lakeham liked the "feel of that beautiful leather binding" on her books and Emily Glencross described the cot that her brother made for her daughter as "a marvellous job".⁸ Ralph Glasser described his mother's dowry table cloth as "beautifully" embroidered and since this was his description, it was he who found it beautiful.⁹ He did not mention what his mother thought about it, but a smaller number of people did describe items that the whole family appreciated for the way it looked. Henry Hollis explained that his family thought that their first real rug was "lovely" and Edith Evans's family was pleased with their "elegant" armchairs bought for a party.¹⁰ To a far lesser extent, some autobiographers described things that non-family thought were beautiful: Winifred Renshaw explained that matching bedroom washing sets were the "height of elegance" and Spike Mays noted that their visitors commented on his mother's breadboard, made of exotic wood, as a thing of "beauty".¹¹ Thus the *aesthetic* category consisted of those objects people found

⁷ There were 502 explanations.

⁸ Maggie Newbery, *Reminiscences of a Bradford Mill Girl*, p. 9; Mary Lakeham, *Early Tide*, p. 147; Emily Glencross, *For Better or For Worse*, p. 11.

⁹ Ralph Glasser, *Growing Up in the Gorbals*, p. 145.

¹⁰ Henry Hollis, *Farewell Leicester Square*, p. 33; Edith Evans, *Rough Diamonds*, p. 144.

¹¹ Winifred Renshaw, *An Ordinary Life*, Chapter Seven; Spike Mays, *Ruben's Corner*, p. 52.

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visually pleasing and in the majority of cases the autobiographers were expressing their own feelings about them.

Descriptions that indicated pride or status value were placed in the *display* category because, as cultural historian Bernard Herman pointed out, status symbols had to be seen in order to have any significance.¹² These status symbols were often luxuries in the sense that they were not used for their 'intended' purpose and were principally on display. Several families had china that was reserved for best occasions or was "never used". Marion Smith's mother was "so proud of" her hand-painted tea-set, it was only ever taken off the shelf to be washed.¹³ Conversely, Grace Foakes explained that in a poor community like her own, "best" tea-sets were "unknown": a family needed a surplus of income to have items that did not have to be used.¹⁴ The term luxury was also applied to things which the family had only recently acquired or things which they felt they were fortunate to have when others did not. Both Joyce Storey and Grace Foakes thought the bathrooms in their council houses were a "luxury" because they had never had one before, while Evelyn Cowan recognised that having a bathroom signified that they were a "step up" the social scale because others did not possess one.¹⁵ Luxuries and status symbols were often things which the autobiographer never expected to have because they were associated with a different class of person. Winifred Renshaw, for example, explained that private phones were "rare at our level of society".¹⁶ Thus, this category, included things which were valued because they were rare and also had to be seen by others in order for the rarity to be appreciated. Two examples of this were Winifred Renshaw's front-room gas fire, which her father showed to visitors, and Valerie Avery's television, which the neighbours were invited round to see.¹⁷ Other terms used in this category were: "lucky to have", "envied for", "novelty", "modern" and "magnificent" or it was explained that they were indicators of affluence.

Terms which suggested that an object provided personal satisfaction without requiring an audience to make it special were placed in the *treasured* category. The most frequently used adjectives in this category were: "cherished"; "treasured";

¹² Bernard Herman, "The Poor Artisan's Lodging", Paper presented to the Urban History Conference, 1996.

¹³ Marion Smith in Jean Faley, *Up Oor Close*, p. 27.

¹⁴ Grace Foakes, *My Part of the River*, p. 160.

¹⁵ Joyce Storey, *Joyce's War*, p. 164; Grace Foakes, *My Life With Reuben*, p. 38.

¹⁶ Winifred Renshaw, *An Ordinary Life*, Chapter 24.

¹⁷ Winifred Renshaw, *An Ordinary Life*, Chapter 20; Valerie Avery, *London Morning*, p. 61.

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"prized"; and "precious". Josephine Gibney had a crucifix which was one of her "most cherished possessions", Molly Weir described their china as being "precious" and Ruby Lee "prized" her books.¹⁸ Some autobiographers valued items which gave satisfaction and they were pleased with them. Bill Batten "revelled in" in his Meccano sets which he "carefully...looked after and checked the small bits and pieces" and it was "a continuing source of delight."¹⁹ Certain things were kept for long periods of time, by such as Elsie Gadsby who still "treasured" her childhood books.²⁰ Others showed how much they treasured objects through their dismay at losing or breaking them. Grace Foakes had kept her children's books "only to lose them" in the blitz. Betty Dickinson was distraught when she lost her engagement ring and Archie Hill was "numb" when a glass head made for him by a friend got broken.²¹ Objects were often valued both for reasons of *display* and as *treasures*; personal satisfaction was enhanced by another's appreciation. Daisy Noakes's mother had both "pride" and "joy" for her ornamental saucepan and kettle made by her son and Molly Weir's mother felt "pride and joy" for the chandelier in her best room.²² Other terms used to describe objects in this category included: "heaven", "appreciated", "beloved", "favourite", "important", "special", "wonderful", "important", "smashing", "marvel", "magic", "well used". This category, therefore, contained things which were cherished without requiring the approval of others, though the appreciation of others may have made an item that was already treasured even more so.

The fourth category related to *sentiment* and consisted of objects which people had kept because they reminded them of people and of events. Ralph Glasser, for example, saved the key to his dead mother's trunk which had contained all her dowry because it reminded him of her.²³ Valerie Avery had never known her father, but wanted to keep his piano because "over the years it had become a shrine to him and I intended to keep it at all costs. It was the only part of him I still possessed...."²⁴ This category includes those items which were inherited or family heirlooms, but because inherited items bring with them the idea of patina, it is important to distinguish

¹⁸ Josephine Gibney, *Joe McGarrigle's Daughter*, p. 148; Molly Weir, *Shoes Were For Sunday*, p. 105; Mary Bentley, *Born 1896*, p. 32; Ruby Lee, "A Tapestry of Country Life", p. 11.

¹⁹ Bill Batten, *Newlyn Boyhood*, p. 19.

²⁰ Elsie Gadsby, *Black Diamonds, Yellow Apples*, p. 25.

²¹ Grace Foakes, *My Part of the River*, p. 141; Betty Dickinson, *Never Far From Wincobank Hill*, p. 42; Archie Hill, *A Cage of Shadows*, p. 41.

²² Daisy Noakes, *The Town Beehive*, p. 14; Molly Weir, *Shoes Were For Sundays*, p. 74.

²³ Ralph Glasser, *Growing-Up in the Gorbals*, p. 145.

²⁴ Valerie Avery, *London Spring*, p. 112.

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between *sentimental* and *display* value. As Grant McCracken has explained, patina is the "signs of age" in an object which act as "proof of the family's longevity".²⁵ In the context of the autobiographies, inherited items showed that the family possessed things that were good enough to pass onto the next generation or indicated that the family may have been better off in the past. Certain pieces of furniture in Louis Heren's front room were reminders of "better days when [mother's] father was still doing well and our father was a printer on *The Times*."²⁶ William Bell suspected that the reason his family owned upholstered furniture, which he had explained was a sign of affluence, was because they originated from when his father had been in partnership with a bookmaker.²⁷ Of course it was possible that inherited items could signify both *sentiment* and *display*. Valerie Tedder's mother inherited a pair of candlesticks, which Valerie described as an "heirloom" and she eventually inherited them herself. They were kept in "in pride of place" in the living room through the Second World War. However, in this example, the fact that they were kept in the living room rather than the front room suggests that they also provided personal satisfaction which was best obtained by having them in the room in which they lived.²⁸

The *personal* category were expressions of value that were to do with the privacy objects gave or to do with sole ownership. Personal possessions objectified personal space and privacy which, as Chapter Four showed, was difficult to define and find in crowded homes. Betty Dickinson was pleased with the sponge bag she was given when she left service because it was the first time she had had a flannel and a sponge to herself and Kathleen Dayus appreciated her golliwog because it was "my own" and none of her siblings possessed one.²⁹ Edward Blishen thought that the kitchen table was the best item of furniture in his childhood because he could sit under it in a "private universe": "I think it was the perfect privacy of the world under the table that made it so marvellous."³⁰ Winifred Foley and Kathleen Dayus valued their privies because they could read in them undisturbed and this was probably one of the few homes spaces in which they were able to do this.³¹

²⁵ Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption. New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 32.

²⁶ Louis Heren, *Growing Up Poor in London*, p. 34.

²⁷ William Bell, *The Road to Jericho*, p. 13.

²⁸ Valerie Tedder, *The Pantry Under the Stairs*, p. 26.

²⁹ Betty Dickinson, *Never Far From Wincobank Hill*, p. 6; Kathleen Dayus, *Her People*, p. 53.

³⁰ Edward Blishen, *Sorry, Dad!*, p. 24.

³¹ Winifred Foley, *A Child in the Forest*, p. 52; Kathleen Dayus, *The Best of Times*, p. 191.

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The *monetary* category consisted of things valued for their financial worth which was usually indicated by the fact they were pawned or sold in order to supplement the family income. A small number were household goods that had a commonly recognised financial value such as those things that people were forced to sell under the means test. In the 1930s, Evelyn Haythorne's family sent not only their radio but also all their jam next door before their household contents were assessed to avoid having to sell them. As it was, they were instructed to sell their greenhouse despite the fact they grew food in it.³² Kathleen Dayus' harmonium was a "joy" to her but her father knew that to the means test man it had only monetary worth and tried to hide it.³³ This last example suggests that the family or individual, while acknowledging that objects may have had a monetary value, considered the other values were more important. The financial worth of some items was indicated by how expensive they were. It was not enough that the autobiographers gave a price of an object for it to be included in this category; they had to show that it was an extraordinary expenditure. This could be suggested by the fact that certain family members thought that the item cost too much. Catherine Cookson's mother bought a brand-new piano for £100 which Catherine thought was extravagant because her mother definitely could not afford it and second-hand ones were much cheaper.³⁴ For similar reasons, Joyce Storey's husband thought that she had been extravagant spending £20 on a new bedroom suite for their 1940s home.³⁵ Items which were saved up for, such as the engagement ring Betty Dickinson's husband had "worked hard and saved for", were also counted as expensive items.³⁶ Therefore, the reasons why things were valued in this category, were due to how much money they would raise if pawned or sold and how much they cost in relation to people's income.

A small number of things were special because they provided enjoyment or *entertainment*. Enjoyment was indicated by time spent with an object, but this time had to give pleasure and not be out of necessity and had to be overtly 'quality time'. Winifred Renshaw "spent many happy hours" with her doll, making clothes for it out of scraps of cloth and George Noakes spent "happy evenings" with his cousin making farm vehicles with his Meccano set during his 1910s rural childhood. In the 1920s, Joe

³² Evelyn Haythorne, *On Earth to Keep the Numbers Up*, pp. 57, 62.

³³ Kathleen Dayus, *Where There's Life*, pp. 77-78.

³⁴ Catherine was correct to think this since it was repossessed after her mother failed to keep up the payments: Catherine Cookson, *Our Kate*, p. 123.

³⁵ Joyce Storey, *Joyce's War*, p. 167.

³⁶ Betty Dickinson, *Never Far From Wincobank Hill*, p. 42.

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Loftus's family "revell[ed]" in their brother's gramophone feeling that they "privileged" to be "among the first ordinary folk ever to *enjoy* these new inventions." His family also read their encyclopaedia so much that the covers fell off and it was a "never failing source of *entertainment*."³⁷

The final, *utilitarian* category were descriptions that indicated the people appreciated objects for functional reasons, whether or not this use was the 'intended' one. Some of these objects were valuable because they were considered to be "essential" or necessities due to their function or they were just things which people could not do without. Edna Nockalls explained that their old tin bath was "worth it's [sic] weight in gold" while Winifred Renshaw believed that "[p]erhaps the ladling can was the most useful piece of equipment."³⁸ People had different ideas about what was a necessity: Edith Evans claimed that in spite of poverty "nobody would dream of selling [the piano]". Eric Fairclough believed that a sofa was a "must in all households" and families certainly had sofas even when they had sold the piano.³⁹ Objects appreciated for their time or labour saving qualities were included in this category. These were not always necessities but their function was appreciated. To Joyce Storey her prefab kitchen was a "labour saving luxury" implying that she valued the kitchen for functional, utilitarian reasons but that the things were not necessities to her.⁴⁰ Joe Hind's mother valued her new fireplace because it was time saving but it was not a necessity since the previous fireplace had still worked although it had taken some effort to clean.⁴¹

The most popular explanations for why objects were special covered those that were in the *treasured* and *display* categories. These two categories each contained one third of the total reasons recording why things were described as valued (Table 6.1). After these two the next most popular was the *monetary* category but this only consisted of one twelfth of the total descriptions. The smallest were the *personal* and *entertainment* categories.

The reasons given by the different status groups for valuing objects were generally the same: objects which were special because of their capacity for *display* or

³⁷ My italics in both: Joe Loftus, "Lee Side", pp. 33, 44.

³⁸ May Ayers, *Memoirs of a Shannock*, p. 5; Eric Fairclough, *In a Lancashire Street*, p. 85; Winifred Renshaw, *An Ordinary Life*, Chapter 7.

³⁹ Edith Evans, *Rough Diamonds*, pp. 143-44; Eric Fairclough, *In a Lancashire Street*, p. 34.

⁴⁰ Joyce Storey, *Joyce's Dream*, p. 41.

⁴¹ Joe Hind, *A Shieldfield Childhood*, p. 114.

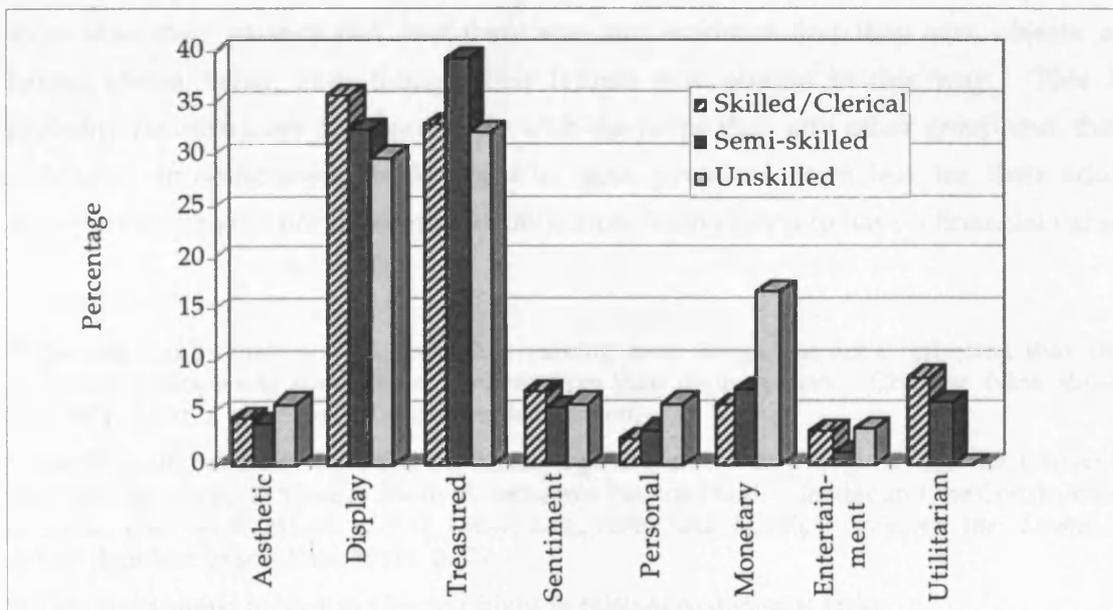
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because they were *treasured* were special to all three status groups. The only substantial difference between the three status groups was that the unskilled workers valued more items for their monetary worth. This is not surprising given that the unskilled workers earned the least and were more likely to need to pawn or sell things to supplement the family income. However, if this group was the poorest, then it is surprising that they did not mention any object that was valued for *utilitarian* reasons. In fact the skilled workers were the most likely to value objects for their function, but this may have been because they could afford to buy equipment whose function it was to be time and labour saving. Likewise, the fact that the unskilled workers were more likely to value things because they were *personal*, was probably not because this status group owned more personal items, but because it was more unusual for them to possess things of their own. The intermediate group hardly mentioned anything they valued at all and as a result are not included in the following analysis.

Table 6.1: Values for Objects 1900-1950

Category of value	Percentage of total values
Total number of reasons = 502	
Aesthetic	5.2
Display	33.1
Treasured	34.3
Sentiment	6.4
Personal	3.4
Monetary	8.4
Entertainment	2.6
Utilitarian	6.6

Figure 6.1: Categorising Objects



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Overall, women were more likely to value things than men, and girls more than boys: one third of the total reasons why things were significant were attributed to women; one fifth to girls; and one fifth to men and boys together.⁴² Because many of these values were attributed to mothers by their children, the large number of items was a reflection that people expected women to appreciate domestic goods more than men did and that girls were being brought up to meet these expectations.⁴³ Parents more often valued things for display than children and this was an indication that together they were both responsible for the condition of the home which reflected their 'choice' of goods rather than that of the children. However, women valued more things out of pride and status (*display*) than men and this again reflected the fact that the condition and comfort of the home was viewed as their responsibility (even if in fact it was not) and luxuries and non-necessary things in the home were an indication that they were good managers. Men more frequently valued objects with a monetary value and this was an indication of their expected role within the family: they generally financed large household expenditures and because of this were concerned about the amount of money spent on these things or were aware of the time it took to save up for them.

Girls were far more concerned about the display value of items, and this awareness increased once they spent more time helping their mothers; girls who were most aware of status were generally teenagers. However, girls valued things out of status proportionately less than their fathers and this was because the majority were describing their childhood before they were more aware of the wider significance of such items. Thus, (in the case of the categories outlined above) they *treasured* things more and appreciated items that were *personal*. Boys, like girls, treasured objects far more than their parents did, but there was less evidence that they saw objects as having status value, even though their fathers saw objects in this way. This is probably because boys had less to do with the home than any other group and their childhood domestic roles, unlike those of girls, prepared them less for their adult ones.⁴⁴ Neither girls nor boys individually considered objects to have a financial value.

⁴² The fact that mothers were described as valuing more things was not a reflection that the autobiographers wrote about their mothers more than their fathers. Chapter Nine shows that they wrote a great deal about their fathers too.

⁴³ Hunt found that women viewed the furnishings as theirs, even though it was the husbands who had the money to make household decisions: Pauline Hunt, "Gender and the Construction of Home Life" in G. Allan and G. Crow, eds., *Home and Family: Creating the Domestic Sphere* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 72.

⁴⁴ This is discussed further in Chapter Eight in relation to domestic tasks.

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This is mainly because objects with *monetary* value were viewed in relation to the household budget and were recorded as items valued by the whole family. While some autobiographers explained that they were unaware of their parents’ financial difficulties, others who made weekly trips to the pawnshop were only too well aware of the financial value certain items had for the family. In total about one fifth of the values were attached to items which were important to the whole family and almost half of these were to do with status or *display*.

Values for Objects

Figure 6.2: Men and Women

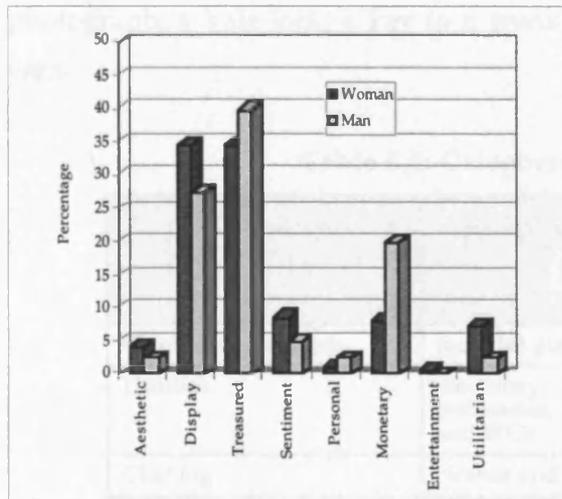
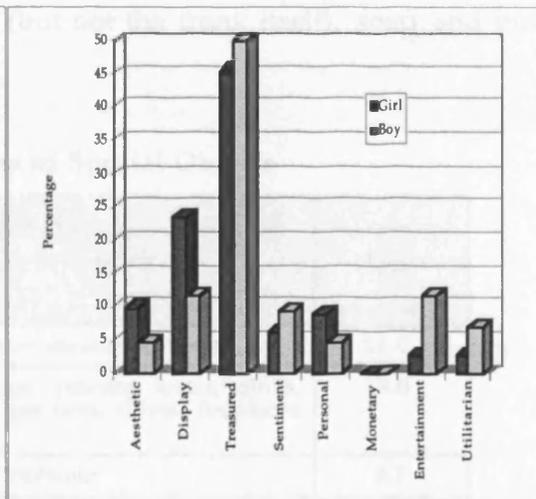


Figure 6.3: Girls and Boys



Part Two: The Meaning of Objects

This second section of the chapter examines the type of (rather than the reason for) things which people valued and draws on the data used in the previous section.⁴⁵ These things were generally objects but a few were entire rooms or less tangible ‘things’ such as gas or electricity. In the majority of cases the objects were the possessions of the person or family who thought them special. However, as mentioned above, certain objects were ‘commonly’ recognised as important (by street, region or nation) and thus the autobiographers did not necessarily have to own the things to consider them significant. For example, Alice Foley did not have a piano herself, but explained that it was a sign of status when she was young in the first decade of the century. Grace Foakes, who was a child at the same time as Alice, wrote that brown boots were a status symbol and that parlours were the “showpieces of the poor.” She had neither herself but still saw them as significant, admitting that she “envied” friends who had a

⁴⁵ The 502 ‘values’ in the eight categories described 390 items.

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front room.⁴⁶ However, the majority of the objects that were described as being important belonged to the people who valued them.

Due to the wide variety of objects, I classified them into object groups. The largest group of objects consisted of china and ornaments and this was followed by utilities, clothing, textiles and furniture. The percentage that each group was of the total objects (391) is recorded in Table 6.2. Other things that were too infrequently mentioned to include in the table contained items such as beds, bikes, documents (usually marriage licences or birth certificates), gardens, letters, and pictures. Several items did not fit into any group at all. The more obscure of these were an x-ray photograph, a Yale lock, a key to a trunk (but not the trunk itself), soap and birds’ eggs.

Table 6.2: Categories of Special Objects

Object Category	Examples of the type of objects in each category	% of total objects n = 391
China and ornaments	includes glassware such as vases	14.0
Utilities	electricity, gas, running water, sinks, bathrooms, gas fires, stoves, fireplaces and WCs	13.0
Clothing	clothes and footwear	8.7
Textiles	rugs, linen, bedding,	7.9
Furniture	all items of furniture except beds	7.7
Toys	games, dolls, Meccano, hoop, balloon	6.4
Books	books in general and specifically-named books	6.2
Audio/Visual	radios, gramophones and television	3.6
Musical instruments	piano, harmonium, violin	3.3
Washing equipment	washing machines, mangles, soap	3.1
Room	such as kitchen or front room, not bathroom or WC	3.1
Jewellery	including watches, hair-slides	3.1
Kitchenware	kettles, breadboard, cutlery, toasting fork, carving set	2.3
Plants	plants, aspidistra, specific flower beds but not the whole garden	2.3
Photos	includes photo albums	2.1

The different sort of objects were valued for different reasons. China and ornaments (Figure 6.4) were valued equally because people were proud of them or

⁴⁶ Grace Foakes, *My Part of the River*, pp. 106, 160.

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reserved them for special occasions and because they treasured them. The terms "best", "pride" and "joy" were frequently used to describe things in this group. Tea-sets and dinner services often signified status because families were more likely to afford to buy best tea-sets and dinner services or had been given them as wedding presents. Ornaments, unlike tea-sets, were 'intended' to be items for display and people evidently did get satisfaction from them for this reason: the brass ornaments that Joyce Storey's father had made in the 1920s and 1930s were his "pride and joy" and the ones that Daisy Noakes's brother had made his mother were her "pride and joy".⁴⁷ Ornaments on the other hand, despite being "intended" for show, gave pleasure without having to be seen by outsiders. Walt Palmer's mother "treasured" her ornaments and Archie Hill considered a glass head he was given as one of his "treasures". He kept this under the floorboards so it was certainly never seen by others.⁴⁸ China and ornaments had *sentimental* importance but were not generally explicitly valued for the way they looked, or for their *monetary* and *utilitarian* value. This was because the type of china that was for "best" was not a necessity.

The 'utilities' (Figure 6.4) consisted of things whose 'intended' use was to be functional. However, the items were described as being valued more as luxuries than as necessities. This was because to many of the autobiographers the reason why they appreciated their facilities was because they had never had them before and what seems a necessity to us now was often a luxury to previous generations.⁴⁹ When Maggie Newbery's family moved to Bradford just before the First World War, they thought that to have an indoor tap and WC was a "luxury" after living on a farm where they had had neither of these things. At the same time, Jim Bullock's family got tapped water and considered it a "a real luxury", too.⁵⁰ In the inter-war period, Elsie Balme thought that she was "among the lucky ones" to have an indoor tap and that to have an indoor WC was a "refinement".⁵¹ Utilities also gave people personal satisfaction, especially because it was something that they were not used to. When Jim's family got electricity in 1919 they thought it was "marvellous" and a "joy".⁵² Bill Griffiths thought that electricity installed in his home in 1931 was "wonderful" and

⁴⁷ Joyce Storey, *Our Joyce*, p. 125; Daisy Noakes, *The Town Beehive*, p. 14.

⁴⁸ Walt Palmer, *Mother's Ruin*, p. 87; Archie Hill, *A Cage of Shadows*, p. 46.

⁴⁹ See discussion in Young's article on when necessities become luxuries: Linda Young, "Material Life in South Australia", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* XXV 1 (1994), p. 65.

⁵⁰ Maggie Newbery, *Reminiscences of a Bradford Mill Girl*, p. 24; Jim Bullock, *Bower's Row*, p. 11.

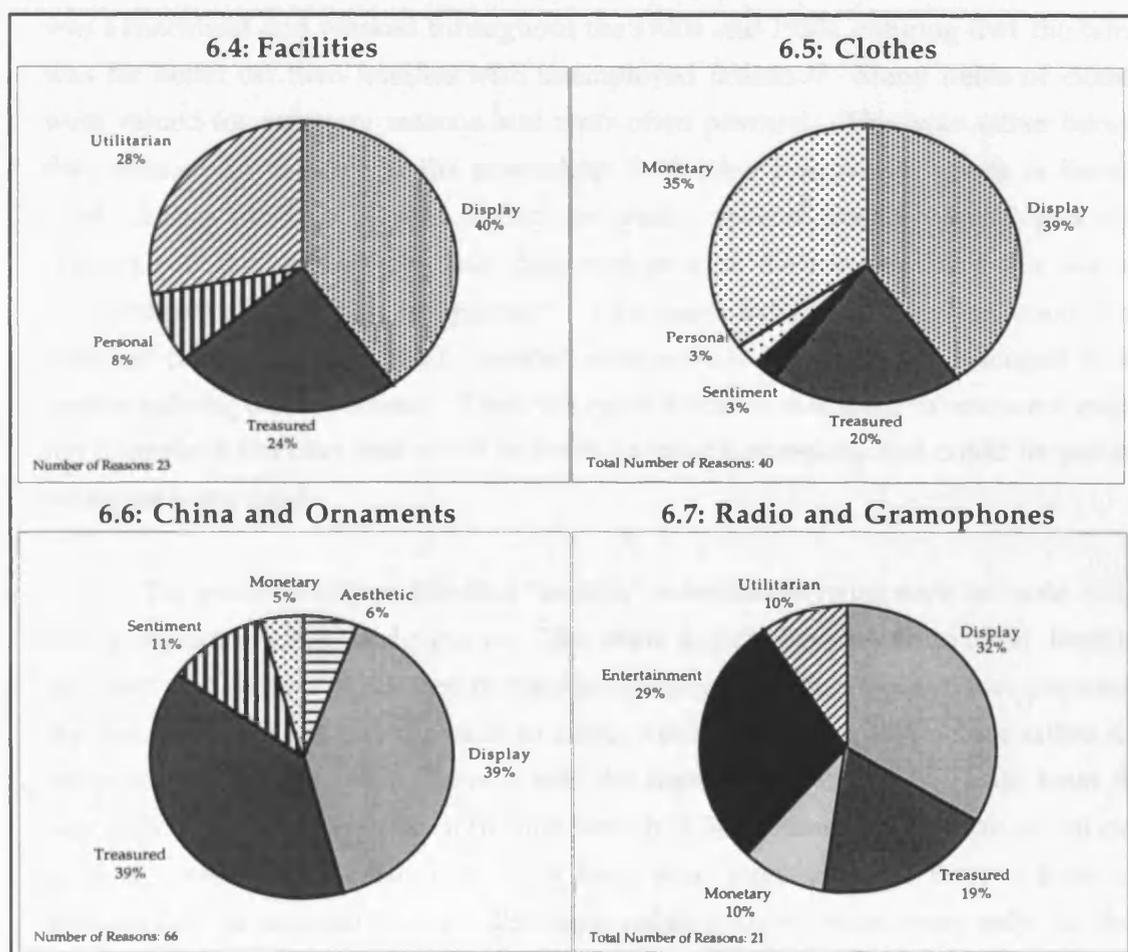
⁵¹ Elsie Balme, *Seagull Morning*, pp. 19, 20.

⁵² Jim Bullock, *Bower's Row*, p. 11.

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Eric Fairclough described his new bathroom as "marvellous".⁵³ Water closets (as opposed to privies) were seen as luxuries, but both privies and WCs were valued for the privacy they afforded. However, these facilities were definitely valued for their 'intended' function too: one of the reasons why Bill thought that electricity was so good was because it was much easier to use than gas and Jim was delighted that there were no more paraffin lamps to fill. Fireplaces were particularly valued for their use. Molly Weir wrote that her mother always made sure that they had a good range which worked properly: other faults in a home could be hidden but "you were stuck with a range." She also described it as a "centre of warmth and comfort".⁵⁴ Winifred Renshaw, too, emphasised that the range was the "most important thing in the house" because in her inter-war home it was used for heating, cooking and hot water.⁵⁵

Valued Objects



⁵³ Bill Griffiths, *Growing Up in Manchester*, p. 120; Eric Fairclough, *In a Lancashire Street*, p. 85.

⁵⁴ Molly Weir, *Shoes Were For Sunday*, p. 52.

⁵⁵ Winifred Renshaw, *An Ordinary Life*, Chapter 4.

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Clothes were valued principally for reasons of display and status and were often described as being reserved for 'best', for special occasions or for Sundays (Figure 6.3). One of the reasons why they were seen as having status value was because they were easier to show off than other domestic commodities, especially if the family had very few visitors, as Margaret Penn explained. Her autobiographical 'Hilda' was proud of her kid shoes: "she was even prouder of this pair of shoes than she had been of her "lady's companion", for this she could only show off in the house, whereas her shoes were visible to all when she walked to chapel."⁵⁶ Footwear was particularly associated with status. The status of brown boots has already been mentioned but there were regional and status variations to the significance of boots. Bill Griffiths, who lived in Manchester, explained that wearing clogs were a sign that a family was very poor; while in Lincoln it was a "blow to her pride" when Edna Skinner's mother made her wear boots because she thought that only poor girls wore boots. Her father was a machinist and worked throughout the 1920s and 1930s ensuring that the family was far better off than families with unemployed fathers.⁵⁷ Many items of clothing were valued for *monetary* reasons and were often pawned. This was either because they were easier to carry to the pawnshop than other household goods or because 'best' clothes were not missed during the week. Several families would pawn the father's suit during the week and then retrieve it at the weekend and this was an accepted part of household budgeting.⁵⁸ To a lesser extent clothes were found in the *treasured* category and a small number were special because they belonged to the person valuing them (*personal*). Thus, the type of clothes that were valued were mainly not necessities but ones that could be worn on special occasions and could be pawned when not being used.

The group of objects labelled "textiles" consisted of items such as table cloths, bed linen, carpets, rugs and curtains. Like china and clothes they were often described as "best" and as a result located in the *display* category. Sometimes it was possessing the item itself that suggested wealth or status, such as having a table cloth rather than using newspaper, while for others it was the material the item was made from that was important. A linen table cloth may have had been more special than an oil cloth while a chenille table cloth may have been even more valuable than a linen one. William Bell commented that woollen rugs, rather than rag rugs, were only for those

⁵⁶ Margaret Penn, *Manchester Fourteen Miles*, p. 59.

⁵⁷ Bill Griffiths, *Growing Up in Manchester*, p. 49; Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, p. 159.

⁵⁸ Edna Nockalls, *Another Time, Another Place*, p. 9; Dolly Scannell, *Mother Knew Best*, p. 44; Elsie Gadsby, *Black Diamonds, Yellow Apples*, p. 48; Ted Furniss, *The Walls of Jericho*, p. 21.

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who could afford them, but for some rag rugs were a step up from coconut matting.⁵⁹ Alice Foley explained that to have long curtains rather than short ones was an indicator of wealth.⁶⁰ Like clothes textiles also had pawnable value because they were easy to transport and were required only at weekends or on special occasions. A few were described as necessities. Kay Pearson mentioned that when she moved house she decided certain items were "essential" and "necessities" which she "needed" to acquire. These included bedding, floor and stair covering, and curtains.⁶¹

Nearly one third of the items of furniture mentioned were *treasured*, and the things which were only *treasured* were ones that were used the most or which the family felt they could not do without. Alice Foley's siblings "treasured" the dilapidated horse-hair sofa and her family had "a cheap, but much prized" red dresser.⁶² About a quarter of the items of furniture were special for their *display* value. As with textiles, the type of material which the furniture was made out of added to its value and increased the pride that people had in them. The items that were valued out of *display* tended not to be "dilapidated" or overtly "cheap". William Bell explained that in his mining community it was only the "well-to-do" who possessed upholstered furniture and it was rarely heard of when he was a child before the First World War.⁶³ Emily Glencross' mahogany bedroom suite was her "pride and joy" while Spike Mays and May Ayers mentioned mahogany items of furniture in their inter-war homes that were their mothers' "pride and joy": mahogany indicated a 'better' class of furniture because it had to be polished rather than scrubbed.⁶⁴ Furniture was considered to have greater *aesthetic* value than the groups of things discussed above. Winifred Foley, for example, described their chest of drawers as the "grandest piece of furniture in the cottage" and it had "fine" glass knobs.⁶⁵ A small number of items of furniture had *sentimental* value. Beds in particular acted as reminders of people and events: Catherine Cookson's mother refused to abandon a mattress because it "had supported countless births and a number of agonising deaths", while Valerie Avery's mother refused to sell her bed because she had bought it when she had got married. The sentimental value of Valerie's mother's bed was enhanced further because her husband

⁵⁹ William Bell, *The Road to Jericho*, p. 12.

⁶⁰ Alice Foley, *A Bolton Childhood*, p. 46.

⁶¹ Kay Pearson, *Life in Hull*, p. 103.

⁶² Alice Foley, *A Bolton Childhood*, pp. 6-7.

⁶³ William Bell, *The Road to Jericho*, p. 12.

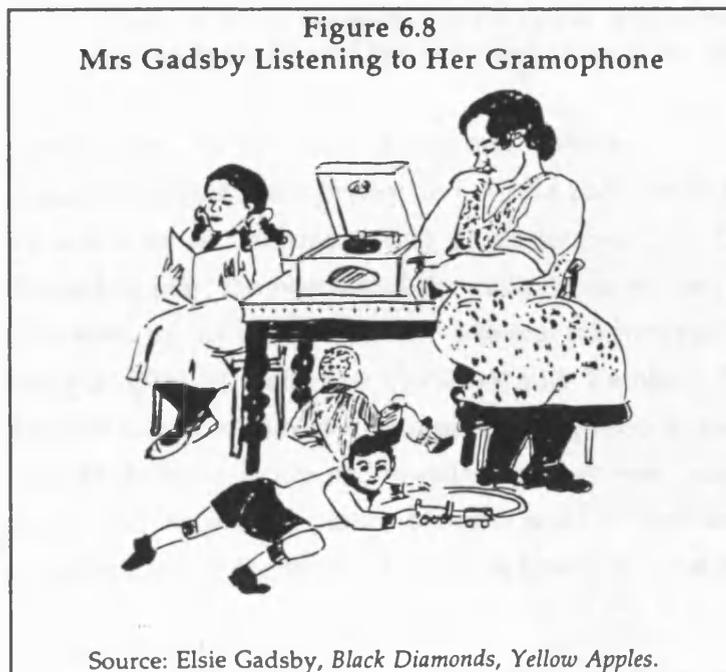
⁶⁴ Spike Mays, *Reuben's Corner*, p. 51 ; May Ayers, *Memoirs of a Shannock*, p. 5.

⁶⁵ See discussion on the aesthetic value in part one of this chapter; Alice Linton, *Not Expecting Miracles*, p. 74; Winifred Foley, *A Child in the Forest*, p. 72.

died in the Second World War and she preferred to continue to share a bed with her teenage daughter than to sell it.⁶⁶

Two thirds of books considered to be important were *treasured*, and were more likely to give personal satisfaction than any other item. They were not generally described as overtly entertaining, though the implication is that they were treasured because they were enjoyable. Some people just mentioned that they thought that books generally were special, while others mentioned particular books. To Mary Bentley's brother, *The Natural History of Selbourne* was his "bible" and Spike Mays's *Tales From Shakespeare* "never left me and was in my haversack at Dunkirk and Arromanches."⁶⁷ However, a small number of books were enjoyed not for their content, but for their *aesthetic* and *personal* worth. Victoria Massey did not care that her prized book was "a dull story" because she thought there was "magic in the book itself, the hard cover, the pages, the print, the pictures of little black boys inside. And most important, it was mine, my very own."⁶⁸

Radios, gramophones and televisions were valued principally for *display* (Figure 6.7). People were proud to have one and wanted others to see it. Because the



bulk of the autobiographies were about the 1920s and 1930s, there were far more references to the importance of radios and gramophones than televisions. Edward Blishen, whose parents could not afford a radio, explained that "it was the misery of my early school days that we did not possess a wireless. It left me particularly vulnerable in the matter of how many valves we might have." When they did eventually

⁶⁶ Catherine Cookson, *Our Kate*, p. 24; Valerie Avery, *London Spring*, p. 133.

⁶⁷ Mary Bentley, *Born 1896*, p. 20; Spike Mays, *Reuben's Corner*, p. 171.

⁶⁸ Victoria Massey, *One Child's War*, p. 63.

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get one, Edward described the "intolerable excitement" of being able to tell his friends how many valves it possessed.⁶⁹ However, people did value radios and gramophones because of their entertainment value. Elsie Gadsby's mother had "pride of possession" in her gramophone and would listen to it after tea. Elsie illustrated the enjoyment which her mother derived from listening to her gramophone by the expression on her face (Figure 6.8).⁷⁰ The authors who were children during the Second World War particularly stressed the importance of radios in their lives: Valerie Tedder described it as "our greatest company and amusement" and Edna Nockalls explained that "the little wooden box in the corner became the centre of attention."⁷¹ Families who had not been able to afford a radio in the decade before the Second World War bought one during it, partly because the war ensured full employment, and partly because the importance of radios increased as they became the prime source of information both on the home and war fronts.

Like gramophones and radios, musical instruments were also considered to be status symbols. Archie Hill thought that his father valued his piano so much because

it symbolised status to him; it was tangible, but out-of-this world. Our house was the only house in the street to have a piano. We hadn't got enough chairs to sit on, we hadn't got a carpet on the floor - we hadn't got a tin opener, but used a old pair of scissors to open cans with. But we'd got a piano.

Furthermore, he felt that his father thought it "a cube of hope that present circumstances were temporary and would pass away to better days." Archie himself viewed it as an "absurd luxury of uselessness".⁷² Evelyn Cowan and her family learned to play the piano and the violin because their mother thought that it would help them up the social ladder.⁷³ Musical instruments had financial value as well, as the examples of Catherine Cookson and Kathleen Dayus cited above indicate.⁷⁴ Musical instruments had a commonly recognised financial value and were among the first things that families had to sell when they were means tested. Eventually Archie's father had to sell his piano, because what it signified to him was not taken into consideration by the Public Assistance Board: to them it had only a financial value.

⁶⁹ Edward Blishen, *Sorry, Dad!*, pp. 40-41.

⁷⁰ Elsie Gadsby, *Black Diamonds ,Yellow Apples*, p. 11.

⁷¹ Valerie Tedder, *The Pantry Under the Stairs*, p. 85; Edna Nockalls, *Another Time, Another Place*, p. 37.

⁷² Archie Hill, *A Cage of Shadows*, pp. 52-3.

⁷³ Evelyn Cowan, *Spring Remembered*, p. 76.

⁷⁴ See paragraph above on the *monetary* category of value.

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Jewellery, which included watches, was frequently *treasured* but it was almost as equally important to people because it was easily pawnable. Edith Evans’s mother would often pawn her wedding ring (and eventually lost it), and the watch owned by Margaret Monkham’s father would be pawned each week and redeemed in time for him to wear on Sunday.⁷⁵ The occasional item had sentimental value but this could be superseded by financial value. Betty Dickinson’s father did not manage to redeem his watch which he had pawned while unemployed in the early 1930s. He told Betty that if he could live his life again he would have rather starved than pawn the watch his father left him.⁷⁶ The fact that he did pawn it indicates that at the time he would rather have not starved. His regrets were much later on in his life, just before he died, and this would compare with the findings of Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton who found that the elderly were more likely to value things for sentimental reasons.⁷⁷ This could also explain why Grace Foakes “regretted” pawning her “most valued possession” which was a watch given to her mother by her grandmother. However, at the time she pawned it, to put a deposit on a house, its monetary value evidently outweighed its sentimental significance. She was never able to redeem it.⁷⁸ In both these examples the fact the watches were lost may have made them more memorable and more precious than the things people managed to keep.

Table 6.3: Type of Object Valued: By Status

Object Category	Skilled & Clerical	Semi-skilled	Unskilled
Percentage of object category valued by each status group (intermediate class excluded)			
% of total households (132) =	52	24	18
China and ornaments	64	26	13
Clothing	38	20	35
Textiles	61	19	10
Furniture	56	33	3
Toys	44	40	16
Books	44	40	16
Utilities	59	32	8
Audio/Visual	71	7	21
Musical Instruments	54	23	15

⁷⁵ Edith Evans, *Rough Diamonds*, p. 123; Margaret Monkham, *As I Remember*, p. 14.

⁷⁶ Betty Dickinson, *Shanty Town*, p. 32.

⁷⁷ Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things*, p. 61.

⁷⁸ Grace Foakes, *My Life With Reuben*, p. 60.

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Status had more impact on the type of things that people found valuable, than on the reasons why they were special. The skilled workers' families valued textiles, utilities, china or ornaments and radios more than the other two status groups. Most of the china consisted of things such as dinner services, tea-sets, vases or what was termed as "best" china which referred to dinner services and plates as well. As the best paid of the three groups, they were more likely to have surplus income for items that were ornamental and as council tenants had access to facilities such as bathrooms and electric lighting.⁷⁹ The semi-skilled workers considered the items in the furniture, toys, books and utilities categories to be special or valuable. They rated radios and gramophones least out of all three status groups and this might have been because the group included the unemployed who had either had to sell their radios, or like Joseph Farrington's family in the 1930s, were simply unable to afford one.⁸⁰ The unskilled workers found ornaments and especially clothes to be important. This was because clothes were often pawned and were an important supplement to the household budget for this low income group. Unskilled workers rarely mentioned valuing items of furniture, china or textiles and, least of all, utilities. This reflected the fact that they were least likely to have access to things like bathrooms, because they lived in pre-1918 dwellings.⁸¹ When they did refer to china, these objects were mainly ornaments rather than things such as dinner services or tea-sets, which the skilled workers possessed and were more affordable than half or entire tea sets and dinner services. This indicates that within the working class there was a divide between those who could afford to have "luxury" items and those who only had "necessities". It would be interesting to compare skilled workers' use of best china with that of the middle class, since it was probable that it was the use of rather than mere ownership of dinner services that differentiated between the middle class and upper working class.

The gender and age of individuals influenced the things that the autobiographers found valuable. Women's favourite objects were ornaments or china, but they also valued utilities, furniture and textiles. To boys, toys were the most important followed by books and utilities, while men were most likely to value furniture and books. Girls valued books slightly more than toys and after these two their next most favoured things were clothes.⁸² Things that were valued by the entire

⁷⁹ Dauntton has linked this argument to pianos which he has described as a "symbol of spare resources": *House and Home in the Victorian City: Working-Class Housing 1850-1914* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), p. 279.

⁸⁰ Joseph Farrington, "Manchester", p. 21.

⁸¹ See the discussion in Chapter Three about which status groups possessed bathrooms.

⁸² It should not be assumed, however, that boys did not value clothes. There was evidence that boys took care of their first suits. Ralph Glasser was "gripped by fear and rage" when

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family, or recognised as being important by most family members, were utilities and china. Clothes were important to the whole family as well because the children and parents would have their Sunday best or that children understood that pawning father's suit was important for the family budget. Radios and gramophones were also special to all family members, because listening to the radio was something the family did together. Washing equipment - such as mangle, gas iron or bath tub - was appreciated by some families, but kitchen equipment was generally important only to women because they were the ones who used it.

Table 6.4: Type of Object Valued: Age and Gender

Object Category	Women	Men	Girls	Boys	Family
	% of total objects in each gender and age group				
number of objects =	126	28	86	30	91
China and ornaments	23.8	3.4	5.8	10.0	16.5
Clothing	5.5	7.1	10.5	6.7	13.2
Textiles	11.1	0.0	2.3	3.3	11.0
Furniture	10.3	21.4	3.5	3.3	6.6
Toys	0.8	0.0	16.3	30.0	1.1
Books	2.4	14.3	16.3	16.7	1.1
Utilities	7.1	7.1	10.5	10.0	14.3
Audio/Visual	0.2	3.4	1.2	10.0	7.8
Musical Instruments	4.0	3.4	4.7	6.7	2.2

The first two parts of this chapter have concentrated on textual analysis of object descriptions. They showed that objects were valued principally because they gave personal pleasure and were treasured, and also because people had pride in them and displayed them so that they would be seen by others. In contrast, objects that were useful or necessities were hardly mentioned at all and the type of things valued the most were china and ornaments. Girls and women were more often described as valuing things. This bias mirrors the fact that not only were there more female autobiographers but that autobiographers more often seem to recognise the things that their mothers valued rather than those things that were special to their fathers. This was possibly because the mothers were more often seen as the selectors and even the owners of domestic goods and reflected the ideals concerning women's domestic role.

he discovered that his father had pawned his suit. Ted Furniss was luckier and he managed to persuade his mother never to pawn his: Ralph Glasser, *Growing Up in the Gorbals*, p. 173; Ted Furniss, *The Walls of Jericho*, p. 22.

Part Three: Polishing The Aspidistra

The final part of this chapter examines ways in which it is possible to identify special and important objects (some of which were valued in the terms discussed in the previous section) by assessing how they were treated rather than how they were described. This treatment included activities such as how objects were obtained and used, where they were kept or used within the home and how they were cared for. By analysing these issues, the section not only illuminates those objects which were considered special in terms of their capacity for display and as treasures, but also highlights some of those things which were not special but still important because they provided entertainment or were necessities. This was de-emphasised by the quasi-quantitative analysis of the textual data.

There were several ways in which it was possible to identify important and special objects from the way that they were used. The first was the frequency and intensity with which an object was used, either because it was used a great deal for its 'intended' use or because it was given several other uses. For example, the things that were described in Chapter Five as having the highest number of alternative uses - kitchen tables, newspaper, coppers, chairs and fireguards - are hardly mentioned at all in the textual data above. There were only four tables, eight chairs and no references to newspaper, fireguards or coppers. However, the intensity with which these things were used, especially kitchen tables (as Figure 5.2 demonstrated) implied that they were important and significant to many families although the autobiographies did not explain this overtly.

Objects which provided entertainment or were enjoyable, such as books, wirelesses or musical instruments, did feature in the data discussed above but their entertainment function was infrequently referred to. However, from the amount of time that people spent listening to the radio or reading, it was evident that they did provide entertainment and as a consequence were important to people for this reason.⁸³ Several autobiographers wrote of their love of reading both as children and as adults and commented on the reading habits of family members. Furthermore, some of these people did not mention that they cherished their books because they had none of their own to treasure but did use the public library frequently and took great care of these books. The data above, therefore, underestimates the number of people for

⁸³ A report on the how children spent time out of school in the later 1940s found that 51% of girls and 43% of boys aged nine listened to *Children's Hour*: Central Advisory Council for Education, Ministry of Education, *Out of School: The Second Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England)* (1948, London: HMSO, 1963), p. 38.

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whom books were an important. Joseph Farrington's father read a great deal and Alice Foley described all her family as "avid" readers except her mother. Both Joseph's father and Alice's family did not seem to own any books, but it was Alice's job to go to the library once a week and borrow books for everyone. Although her mother did not read herself, she still enjoyed them because Alice read to her each day and their father read to them all on winter evenings.⁸⁴ Other women read the books themselves. Catherine Cookson's mother read novels to the family so that the kitchen "would ring with laughter", while Emily Glencross, who had loved reading as a child, re-joined the library when she married and continued to enjoy reading. Jo Barnes's mother enjoyed reading and belonged to a local book club and the adult Joyce Storey decided that she would read any books that came her way.⁸⁵ These examples show that although women were not referred to often as finding books special, reading and books by default could be important to them.

Musical instruments and radios were another example of objects which provided entertainment or were important to people. Joan Booker's father frequently played his violin in the sitting room in the evening (she wrote she was unable to do her homework there because of this).⁸⁶ Radios evidently kept people entertained from the amount of time they described listening to them, and while they started off as luxuries and as source of entertainment, they rapidly became an important part of people's lives. Edward Blishen would try to get out of sport lessons so that he could listen to classical music on the wireless while Tom Wakefield's mother liked to listen to plays on a Saturday evening. Joe Hind "learnt to appreciate" Ibsen, Chekov, Shaw and O'Casey by listening to radio plays with his mother.⁸⁷ Radios continued to be important to the end of the period: Valerie Avery and her mother continued to listen to the radio even when they got a television in 1955.⁸⁸ The amount something was used, therefore, suggested that it was functionally important, and the frequency with which things were used meant that they became necessities to the user.

The second way that use indicated importance was not how much something was used, but actually how little it was used. This differentiated those items that

⁸⁴ Joseph Farrington, "Manchester", p. 24; Alice Foley, *A Bolton Childhood*, pp. 25-12.

⁸⁵ Catherine Cookson, *Our Kate*, p. 65; Emily Glencross, *For Better or For Worse*, p. 5; Jo Barnes, *Arthur and Me*, p. 16; Joyce Storey, *Joyce's Dream*, p. 68.

⁸⁶ Joan Booker, *A Newbury Childhood*, p. 106.

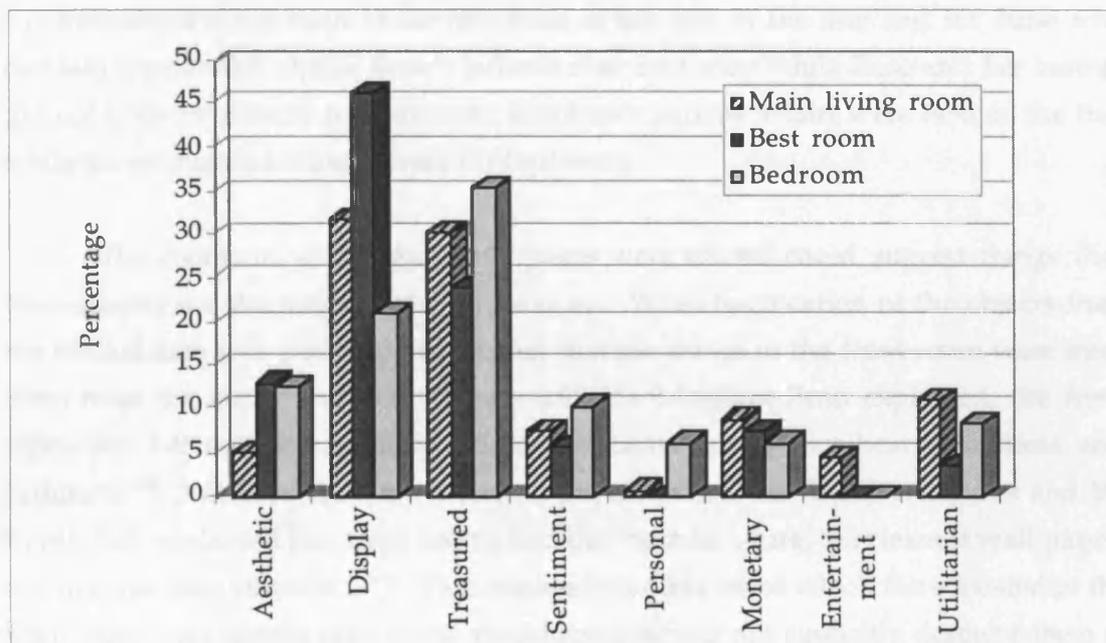
⁸⁷ Edward Blishen, *Sorry, Dad!*, p. 129; Tom Wakefield, *Forties Child*, p. 77; Joe Hind, *A Shieldfield Childhood*, p. 91.

⁸⁸ Valerie Avery, *London Morning*, p. 52.

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were 'special' from those that were important because they were necessary. The majority of these 'special' items featured in the textual data in the *treasured* or *display* categories. The less an object was used the more special it was likely to be, and this links to the third way that special objects could be identified: the times when these objects were used. Winifred Renshaw's father possessed a hat which he only used at weddings and funerals and Dolly Scannell noted that when her mother had a baby the best counterpane was used.⁸⁹ In Eric Fairclough's home it was the type of table cloth and when it was used that suggested it was significant: on Sundays only a heavy red table cloth with tassels was used at tea time.⁹⁰ These examples suggest that the occasion and the goods used invested each other with further significance. The use of the best dinner service only at Christmas indicated that it was special because it was used at a special time, while children in particular were aware that Christmas was important because of the things used only on this day. Therefore, lack of use and the times at which certain things were used indicated they were special, but this was due to reasons of display rather than function.

Figure 6.9: Valued Objects: Location Within the Home



The type of people who were permitted to use or even touch the objects imbued them with significance. The three best cups and saucers which were the "pride and

⁸⁹ Winifred Renshaw, *An Ordinary Life*, Chapter 31; Dolly Scannell, *Mother Knew Best*, p. 29.

⁹⁰ Jack Straw, "Ashton-under-Lyne", p. 77; Grace Foakes, *My Part of the River*, p. 123; Eric Fairclough, *In a Lancashire Street*, p. 36.

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joy” of Evelyn Haythorne’s mother were never used until her father was ill and the doctor, who came to see him each day, was given tea in them.⁹¹ Molly Weir’s mother’s best bedspread was only put on for the doctor’s visit and Molly was horrified when the doctor sat on it because: “*Nobody* was allowed to sit on this.” When Molly’s family moved house and were helped by neighbours’ wives and their children, only the women were allowed to “most tenderly” wrap up the china with newspaper which was then carried out in the clothes basket.⁹² Things that were only used when the families had visitors were thus special and since visitors often only called on special occasions this links to the temporal uses discussed above. Thus Mrs Scannell’s bedspread was in use not only because it was an important occasion but because this was one of the few times visitors would go into the bedroom. Other items were given meaning because only adults or elder family members were allowed to use them and as a consequence objectified family hierarchies and were sanctified by the users. In Kathleen Dayus’s home the mother and father had wooden armchairs, the older brother and sisters sat on ladder-back chairs and the youngest sat on the sofa.⁹³ Rose Gamble’s father sat on the wooden armchair, her mother and older brother and sisters sat on table chairs and Rose and her younger brother sat on boxes.⁹⁴ In these examples comfort added to the value of the item both in the eyes of the user and for those who had less comfortable chairs: Rose’s father’s chair had arms while Rose and her brother did not even have backs to their seats; Kathleen’s parents’ chairs were next to the fire, while the youngest children’s were furthest away.

The rooms in which household items were placed could suggest things that were special and the reasons why this was so. When the location of the objects from the textual data was analysed, it revealed that the things in the front room were more often from the *display* category (Figure 6.9). As Margaret Penn explained, the front room was her mother’s “special pride, and contained all her best ornaments and furniture.”⁹⁵ Winifred Renshaw’s front room contained the “best” armchairs and W. R. Mitchell explained that front rooms had the “best furniture, the cleanest wall paper, the smartest lace curtains....”⁹⁶ This implies that other items which were located in the front room were special even if the autobiographer did not explicitly describe them in

⁹¹ Evelyn Haythorn, *On Earth to Make the Numbers Up*, p. 47.

⁹² Molly Weir, *Shoes Were For Sunday*, pp. 64, 105.

⁹³ Kathleen Dayus, *Her People*, p. 76.

⁹⁴ Rose Gamble, *A Chelsea Childhood*, p. 141.

⁹⁵ Margaret Penn, *Manchester Fourteen Miles*, p. 18.

⁹⁶ Winifred Renshaw, *An Ordinary Life*, Chapter 20; W. R. Mitchell, *By Gum, Life Were Sparse*, p. 110.

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this way. Objects in the living room were valued for a wider variety of reasons: they were *treasured*, on *display* or were *functional*. However, although the living rooms contained less items from the *display* category, more valued objects were situated in the living room than the front room. One quarter of the objects were found here while only one tenth were in the best room. This was no doubt because many people did not have front rooms or parlours.⁹⁷ Bedrooms, to which non-household members rarely had access, were most likely to contain treasured things. The items that people were proud of which were kept in bedrooms were often in those bedrooms that were also used as front rooms. The armchairs that Edith Evans and her sisters were so proud of were kept in their parents' bedroom which was also the front room and used for parties. Henry Blacker's mother had her status symbol vases in her front room which was her bedroom as well and she "savour[ed] the envy of her vase deprived friends".⁹⁸ Therefore, the things that were found in the parlour were often things people were proud of and wanted others to envy. However, living rooms also had these sorts items as well as treasured objects because in homes where there was no front room families might chose to use it as a best and as a living room.⁹⁹

Special things were identifiable from their positioning within in a particular room. Joyce Storey and Margaret Penn both referred to their front-room bay windows as the "place of honour" and Joyce kept her "beloved" water carriers there.¹⁰⁰ Since Margaret was describing a pre-1914 home and Joyce a post-1945 home, it suggested that that the role of the bay window for displaying items remained important throughout the first half of the century. One of the reasons why it was "place of honour" was because anything displayed there could be seen by passers-by. This was certainly the case for Margaret's family bible which was kept here so that "all who passed by could admire it".¹⁰¹ Likewise, the Ayers family placed their aspidistra in a jardinière in the front-room bay window "for all to see".¹⁰² This indicates that Dolly Scannell's aspidistra and Fred Archer's grand piano must have been special because they not only stood in the front room, but in the bay window of the front room.¹⁰³ Other prominent locations were mantelpieces or shelves. The "only thing of value" that Jo Barnes's family possessed - apart from their bikes - was a clock which was

⁹⁷ This data does not include those who lived in only one room.

⁹⁸ Edith Evans, *Rough Diamonds*, p. 144; Henry Blacker, *Just like It Was*, p. 165.

⁹⁹ See Chapter Four on strategies for families without parlours.

¹⁰⁰ Joyce Storey, *Joyce's War*, p. 183.

¹⁰¹ Margaret Penn, *Manchester Fourteen Miles*, p. 7.

¹⁰² May Ayers, *Memoirs of a Shannock*, p. 5.

¹⁰³ Dolly Scannell, *Mother Knew Best*, p. 70; Fred Archer, *Fred Archer, Farmer's Boy*, p. 125.

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kept on the mantelpiece in the front room in their 1940s council house.¹⁰⁴ Henry Blacker's mother put the vases which she thought would make her the envy of her friends on the mantelpiece too. Similarly, the horseshoe which killed Winifred Renshaw's grandfather was made into an inkwell and was "proudly displayed" on her grandmother's mantelpiece and was "an object of awe and veneration to all."¹⁰⁵ Other "places of honour" were on top of items which were themselves special. Winifred Foley's aunt kept her family bible on a chest of drawers which was "the grandest piece of furniture" in the cottage.¹⁰⁶ The dark oak, "highly polished" sideboard in Valerie Tedder's living room was the location of the wireless which was her source of amusement and comfort during the war.¹⁰⁷ Certain items of furniture became special because of the things that were displayed on them. The plant stand in Joyce and Edna Skinner's living room gained significance from the things kept on it: the aspidistra, the Christmas tree and the wireless (which usurped the aspidistra in the late 1920s).¹⁰⁸ A chest of drawers owned by Jim Bullock's family in the 1900s gained importance because his father's three most treasured items were kept on it: these were his Bible, a sovereign and cigar.¹⁰⁹

The value of certain objects was demonstrated by the fact that, rather than being put on display, they were hidden away. These items were generally treasures or personal items and their value would have diminished if others had seen them. Josephine Gibney's mother kept the letters and postcards her husband sent her tied up with black ribbon in her box of "treasures" and Archie Hill kept all his "treasures" under the floorboards of his room.¹¹⁰ He did not want his family to see them, because he thought that the objects would be tainted by this and because he knew that his father would sell them. Michael De Larrabeiti implied that his mother valued her marriage certificate because she kept it in tissue paper in her underwear drawer.¹¹¹ These examples support the textual data which showed that treasures and personal things were kept in bedrooms (Figure 6.9). They also suggest that even when bedrooms

¹⁰⁴ Jo Barnes, *Arthur and Me*, pp. 15-16.

¹⁰⁵ Winifred Renshaw, *An Ordinary Life*, Chapter 1.

¹⁰⁶ Winifred Foley, *A Child In The Forest*, p. 72 and *No Pipe Dreams For Father*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁷ Valerie Tedder, *The Pantry Under the Stairs*, p. 85.

¹⁰⁸ Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, p. 15.

¹⁰⁹ The cigar and sovereign were special to Jim's father because they were "the first things that I have ever had given from a boss for nowt...": Jim Bullock, *Bowers Row*, p. 5.

¹¹⁰ Josephine Gibney, *Joe McGarrigle's Daughter*, p. 10; Archie Hill, *A Cage of Shadows*, p. 46.

¹¹¹ Michael de Larrabeiti, *A Rose Beyond the Thames*, p. 99; Louis Heren, *Growing Up Poor in London*, p. 139.

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were shared, they were better places to keep personal items than living rooms. However, special circumstances could alter this general pattern but it meant that the items were no less valued. In Valerie Tedder's home, their birth certificates, insurance policies, paying books, health cards and a photo of her father, who was in the navy, were in a tin box in their pantry under the stairs; this was also their air-raid shelter and the part of the house that was supposedly most likely to survive the blitz.¹¹²

Like the objects that acquired further meaning from the things that were kept on them, some items gained significance from the things that were stored in them. The vases and tea caddies in Leslie's Paul home acquired "mystery and sacredness" because of things they kept in them - such as the holiday and Christmas money - and taking them down before a "great occasion" was "a family ceremony".¹¹³ The "special tea caddy" in the Glasser family kept the pennies the mother was saving to pay for clothes to be altered.¹¹⁴ Locked chests or bureau's signalled to the rest of the household that the contents were special to the owner and gave importance to the things inside; the unknown had the power to intrigue but this was lost once the contents was revealed.

Special or important objects were recognisable from the way that they were kept and cared for; this use suggested that they were valued out of pride and because they were treasured. The Renshaw family took care of their black "supa skin" which was the "*pièce-de-resistance*" of the front room by walking "round [it] very carefully to avoid flattening it."¹¹⁵ Paul Fletcher's father always kept his bowler hat in a brown paper bag in the parlour during the week where it would be out of harm's way, while Molly Weir explained that the children in her tenement changed out of their school clothes when they got home so that they would not get damaged and their Sunday clothes were "guarded and cared for like mink."¹¹⁶ Certain things were kept covered for protection such as the sovereign and cigar belonging to Jim Bullock's father, which were kept under a glass case, while the fact that the china in Ronald Johnson's home was kept in a glass case implied that it was special.¹¹⁷ The protection of objects was sometimes done on a periodic basis: the wax fruit which was the "family pride" of the

¹¹² Valerie Tedder, *The Pantry Under the Stairs*, p. 47.

¹¹³ Leslie Paul, *The Boy Down Kitchener Street*, p. 60.

¹¹⁴ Ralph Glasser, *Growing Up in the Gorbals*, p. 46.

¹¹⁵ Winifred Renshaw, *An Ordinary Life*, Chapter 20.

¹¹⁶ Paul Fletcher, *The Clatter of Clogs*, p. 82; Molly Weir, *Shoes Were For Sunday*, pp. 80-81.

¹¹⁷ Jim Bullock, *Bowers Row*, p. 5; Ronald Johnson, "It's time I confessed my passion for trams", p. 80.

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Hitchin family was covered with a glass canopy on washing day, and Jack Straw's family put stockings on the legs of their table to protect them from children's boots on weekdays only.¹¹⁸ In Henry Hollis's home their first proper rug, which they thought was "lovely", was put down only in the evening to save it from wear and tear.¹¹⁹ These examples show that special items were also protected by under-usage and this refers back to the discussion above on the temporal uses of special objects.

The care of items in terms of cleaning and polishing was another way that significant items were identifiable. As with the examples just cited, this care showed that these things were treasured and that people were proud of them. Ralph Glasser's father not only kept his "prized" razor in a leather case with a velvet cushion but cleaned it in a special way with "a smooth rhythmic, hypnotic motion, intent, absorbed, almost tender, as if he caressed a loved one...."¹²⁰ Aspidistras received special attention: once a week during the 1900s Alice Foley's aspidistra was "carefully sponged with a wash leather" and then polished with milk afterwards; during the 1910s and early 1920s Dolly Scannell's mother wiped theirs with a milky cloth, while in Paul Fletcher's 1920s home the leaves of their aspidistra were polished.¹²¹ Clothes in particular would be carefully looked after. In Joe Loftus's family there was a hierarchy for drying clothes: the best clothes were dried in the yard, the next best in the back lane and the sheet and blankets were hung out on a piece of spare ground near the house.¹²² This must have been for security reasons, but also meant that better quality items were associated with the family while the remainder could be hung out anonymously. Henry Hollis pressed the trousers of his suit each time he wore them and, being accustomed to wearing plimsolls, took great care of the boots his uncle bought him:

Boy, I looked after those boots as if they were to be the only pair of boots I was ever going to wear. I polished them every time I went out and they shone like glass. When those boots wore out and they could be mended no longer it was as if I had lost a dear friend. The kicking I done with those boots was out of this world.¹²³

¹¹⁸ George Hitchin, *Pit-Yacker*, p. 21; Jack Straw, "Ashton-under-Lyne", pp. 76-77.

¹¹⁹ Henry Hollis, *Farewell Leicester Square*, p. 152

¹²⁰ Ralph Glasser, *Growing Up in the Gorbals*, pp. 31-32.

¹²¹ Alice Foley, *A Bolton Childhood*, p. 24; Dolly Scannell, *Mother Knew Best*, p. 70; Paul Fletcher, *The Clatter of Clogs*, p. 20.

¹²² Joe Loftus, "Lee Side", p. 68.

¹²³ Henry Hollis, *Farewell Leicester Square*, pp. 160, 33.

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Dorothy Wellington's family took care of their Sunday clothes, keeping them in a drawer after they had been worn until they were needed again, and their Sunday shoes were cleaned on Monday and put away.¹²⁴ This care and concern with clothes related to their alternative use - that of supplementing the family income. Best clothes were often pawned because they were in better condition and in order to keep their pawnable value they had to be kept in good repair.

The amount of a certain type of thing that a person or family possessed could indicate that these things were important if not special. This applied to objects which were not devalued by being one of many and were things that people only acquired if they wanted them, such as books or ornaments. This contrasted with items that were special (and different) because the family only had one or two of them. Several autobiographers mentioned that they collected books or had shelves of books: Valerie Avery had tea chests full of books when she and her mother moved house; Mary Bentley and Winifred Renshaw's fathers had shelves of books; and Mary Lakeham's brother collected the works of Dickens.¹²⁵ Mothers, who unlike other members of the household were generally not described as valuing books, did have collections of books acquired in their childhood. Joy Udell's mother had a collection of children's books, and Margaret Penn described the front room containing the books her parents had won at Sunday School.¹²⁶ Margaret Monkham's father seemed to collect instruments and had a violin, concertina, melodeon, and about a dozen tin whistles.¹²⁷ Others had collections of gramophone records or sheet music for the piano. The Griffiths family had music books delivered to their home every two weeks so that Bill's sister could play all the new tunes on their piano.¹²⁸ It could be argued that having a lot of certain items meant that they were less cherished. However, there are hardly any references to people having too many things; far more concerned having to make do with less.

Two examples draw together the variety of ways in which the significance of certain objects were demonstrated. The first was the treatment and use of Henry Blacker's family photograph album. Although this was not described overtly as special, the activities that surrounded it implied that this was the case. First of all this

¹²⁴ Dorothy Wellington, *A Present From the Past*, p. 54.

¹²⁵ Valerie Avery, *London Spring*, p. 143; Mary Bentley, *Born 1896*, p.15; Winifred Renshaw, *An Ordinary Life*, Chapter 7; Mary Lakeham, *Early Tide*, p. 91.

¹²⁶ Mrs Udell, "The Fireplace in the Front Room Held a Fire Only Twice a Year", p. 113; Margaret Penn, *Manchester Fourteen Miles*, p. 18.

¹²⁷ Margaret Monkham, *As I Remember*, p. 20.

¹²⁸ Bill Griffiths, *Growing Up in Manchester*, p. 7.

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album, with its padded covers, velvet lining, gilt-edged pages and brass clasp was kept in particular place on a shelf beneath the flowerpot stand. It was only looked at on a Sunday, which was a "day of indulgence" when visitors called. Because the family was Jewish, the album was more significant because it was filled with relatives who were in Russia, Poland and South Africa, some of whom they knew they would never see again. It was a connection to the past and Henry's mother would give "an informal lecture" on who was in each family portrait. When the album was brought out from its shelf the white teacloth on the table would be replaced by a green plush, bobble-edged cloth on which the album would be placed while the "lecture" took place. Once the guests (who seem to have been relatives too) had left, Henry's mother checked that all the photos were in the right place and then put it back on its shelf until the following Sunday when the ceremony would be repeated.¹²⁹ The album, therefore, had all the elements of importance that have been identified here: it was kept in a prominent position; it was looked at only on special days when visitors were there; it was taken care of by being placed on a special table cloth which was not likely to have crumbs on it; and the 'intended' use of the photo album invested it with sentimental significance. Another example was the "lovely old mahogany dressing table" owned by Alice Linton:

It had large oval mirror in the centre, with a little drawer each side with small carved posts at the side, the top all inlaid and with a curved front. Three narrow curved drawers fitted underneath and near the bottom of the curved elegant legs was an inlaid shelf. That cost thirty shillings, a whole week's wages, but how beautiful it looked when I polished it. It made the whole room glow with richness. I never tired of polishing it.¹³⁰

This description shows that Alice appreciated the dressing table for aesthetic reasons and because she remembered in great detail the way it looked with its oval mirror, carved posts on each side of the little drawers, the inlaid top and shelf, and the curved front and legs. The use of words such as "lovely", "elegant" and "beautiful" emphasised that she liked the way it looked and it was made of mahogany. The way that she treated it - polishing it often - indicated that she treasured it and had pride in it because it made the room "glow with richness", giving it a feeling of luxury and wealth. The fact that it was old and second-hand did not detract from the way she felt about it. She also gave it a monetary value and the use of term "whole" suggested that it seemed to cost a lot to her. However, there was a hierarchy in the reasons why she valued it and the financial value was less prominent in her memory because she only referred to its expense after she described how it looked.

¹²⁹ Henry Blacker, *Just Like It Was*, pp. 36-37.

¹³⁰ Alice Linton, *Not Expecting Miracles*, p. 74.

"Mother's Pride and Joy"

In conclusion, the main reasons why things were explicitly valued were because people had pride in and pleasure from them. The type of things referred to as valuable were not necessities but decorative, such as china, ornaments and best clothes; the functional items which were explicitly valued were appreciated as luxuries. This seems to contradict Bourdieu's idea of a culture of necessity, though in difficult times it was these goods that were pawned first. However, class did have an impact on the choice of furnishings and working-class families resisted attempts by designers to "improve the general level of taste [sic]."¹³¹ Hunt has argued that the working class choose things for their homes which give them warmth and Attfield noted this was the case in 1950s Harlow homes: the families did not want functional and sparse homes because this reminded them of their workplaces and factories.¹³² All the things that middle-class designers viewed as 'clutter', such as the ornaments and non-functional dinner services, made the homes 'cosy' to the inhabitants and enabled them to appropriate a space designed by someone else.¹³³ This explains why Mass Observation found in the "Register Your Choice" Exhibition, held by the Design and Industries Association, that unskilled and semi-skilled workers liked the traditional style room best. This was because it was "cosy", "comfortable" and "warm" and the 'modern' style room was viewed as a room for "higher class" people. The skilled workers ("artisans") were more likely than the unskilled to admire the 'modern' style room (about 57% compared to 79% of the middle class) because it was "airy", lacked clutter and was "modern". A more inviting working environment for skilled workers, especially 'white collar' workers, meant that cosiness at home was less desired.¹³⁴

The families in the autobiographies did appreciate things which they thought were 'modern' and they wanted to be 'fashionable' (which was not necessarily what designers considered to be 'progressive'), but surplus income was required to update furnishings. Most people stressed that they and their parents kept the same furniture

¹³¹ Dennis Chapman, "People and their Homes", *Current Affairs* CVIII (n.d., c. 1950s), p. 16.

¹³² Hunt, "Gender and the Construction of Home Life", p. 78; Angela Partington, "The Designer Housewife in the 1950s" in J. Attfield and P. Kirkham, eds., *A View From the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design* (London: The Women's Press, 1989), p. 210. Partington connects this only to women's work but Hunt takes male occupation into consideration as well.

¹³³ Perla Korosec-Serfaty, "Experience and Use of the Dwelling" in Irmin Altman and Carol Werner, eds., *Home Environments* (N.Y. & London: Plenum Press 1985), p. 75.

¹³⁴ Mass Observation, "Furnishing", *Mass Observation Bulletin* XLIX March/June (1953), pp. 12, 7.

"Mother's Pride and Joy"

they had when they were first married all their lives. The changes made to household contents were to facilities rather than furnishings because these could be justified in a way that a new bed for old, for example, could not be. This would explain why when Joe Hind's mother replaced her range in the late 1930s with a "modern" fireplace she "revelled in joy" because she could justify the change for functional reasons: it saved her time.

4

TIME

Chapter Seven

Tempers Fugit: Time Management and Domestic Routines

They that wash on Monday
Have all the week to dry
They that wash on Tuesday
Are not so much awry
They that wash on Wednesday
Are not so much to blame
They that wash on Thursday
Wash for very shame
They that wash on Friday
Wash in sorry need
They that wash on Saturday
Are lazy sluts indeed¹

In his essay "Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism", E. P. Thompson suggested that domestic time still followed a pre-industrial concept of time by being task, rather than clock orientated:

...the rhythms of women's work in the home are not wholly attuned to the measurement of the clock. The mother of young children has an imperfect sense of time and attends to other human tides. She has not yet moved out of the conventions of 'pre-industrial' society.²

This section takes issue with this statement on two accounts; first in the present chapter by examining the timing of domestic rhythms and second, in Chapter Eight, by assessing the allocation of tasks in the home. This chapter begins by examining measurements of time to which domestic life was attuned, looking at the role of clock time and the timing of domestic chores. It then analyses the persistency and negotiability of these rhythms in both a linear and a cyclical sense. Finally, it assesses the rationale, symbolism and significance which altered or inspired time management. While age, gender and status continue to be categories of analysis in both chapters,

¹ Cited in Leonore Davidoff, "The Rationalization of Housework" in D. Barker and S. Allen, eds., *Dependence and Exploitation in Work and Marriage* (London: Longman, 1976), p. 144.

² E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism" in E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), pp. 381-382.

this chapter places greater emphasis on the impact of occupation, religion and regional location on domestic time management.

Part One: Perceptions of Domestic Time

Thompson associated the stricter work-discipline with increasing use of clocks, which he considered indicated greater concern with precise timing.³ Clock ownership is viewed as a means of assessing this, though it is also recognised that clocks were significant as status symbols.⁴ Whitrow and Landes have argued that the possession of domestic clocks showed even greater awareness of time than the presence of public clocks: “[t]he public clock, whether installed in a church or in a town square, was only an intermittent reminder of the passage of time, but a domestic clock or a watch was a continually visible indicator” recording “time used, time spent, time wasted, time lost.”⁵ Although it is impossible to assess the extent of clock-ownership from the autobiographies, the location of the clocks suggested that they were valued for their function: three times as many clocks were mentioned in descriptions of living rooms than in front-room and bedroom descriptions respectively. Not only, therefore, were the clocks principally located in the room where most domestic activities occurred, but they were kept where they could be clearly seen: over three-quarters were situated on the mantelpiece which was the focus of the room and which held other important items such as rent cards and money. James Charlton illuminated all these issues. He described the alarm clock in their kitchen as thing “by which all events of the day were regulated.” It was kept in the kitchen which was the “hub of all our thoughts and activities” over the range, which was the “heart of the kitchen”, and was even in a “central position” on the mantelpiece among the vases and boxes “essential” for running of the home.⁶

About a third of the clocks in the living rooms were alarm-clocks and only one bedroom clock was not an alarm clock. Alarm-clocks seem to have been adopted by working-class families from the beginning of the century. Alice Foley, who was born at

³ E. P. Thompson, *Time, Work-Discipline*, p. 361.

⁴ In the eighteenth century, they were luxuries for the middle class and remained luxuries for the working class throughout most of the nineteenth century: E. P. Thompson, *Time, Work-Discipline*, p. 368; G. J. Whitrow, *Time in History* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1989), p. 112; Mark Smith, “Counting Clocks, Owning Time: Detailing and Interpreting Clock and Watch Ownership in the American South, 1739-1865”, *Time and Society* III 3 (1994), p. 330.

⁵ G. J. Whitrow, *Time in History*, p. 112; David Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 89.

⁶ James Charlton, *More Sand in My Shoes*, pp. 75, 77. As with the special objects in Chapter Six, the clock gained status from the other things kept on the mantelpiece and vice versa.

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the end of the nineteenth century, explained that one sister introduced “new-fangled gadgets” into their kitchen which included an egg timer. She tried to replace the old clock with an alarm-clock but her mother refused to abandon the knocker-up.⁷ Leslie Paul in his autobiographical novel set in the 1910s, described the family being woken up by an alarm clock. However, although the ‘popularity’ of the alarm clock was increasing, more traditional ways of waking up continued.⁸ John Smith, who was also a child in the same decade as Leslie, mentioned that they still used a knocker-up and the factory hooter which went off at five o’clock.⁹ In the 1920s, Molly Weir’s family only used their alarm clock on Sundays when the work hooters did not sound.¹⁰ In the case of Alice Foley’s sister, the desire for an alarm clock reflected her social aspirations and this probably applied to Leslie’s family: they lived in a suburb and the distance between them and the factory hooters mirrored their desire to “better” themselves.¹¹

One of the reasons why Alice’s sister wanted to replace the old clock was because it often went either too fast or too slow. This indicates that having a clock was not enough to prove that time was important because it was not necessarily accurate, as was the case with Thompson’s pre-industrial clocks. Although Valerie Tedder’s mother was obsessed with time, their family clock and that of their grandmother were both affected by the weather. In the winter the damp meant that they lost time and when it was very hot the clocks might stop altogether. Both clocks also objected to wartime double summer time and would either gain or lose time after they had been reset.¹² The clock in Joyce and Edna Skinner’s living room did not keep good time either and frequently went wrong.¹³ There were, however, other markers of domestic time which would have compensated for the deficiency of these clocks. These markers were not only used for telling the time but for ensuring that domestic clocks were keeping time. Betty Dickinson explained that the works’ buzzers were used tell the time and to set clocks and when Joe Loftus was young in the 1930s, the technical school sent up a rocket at ten each night so that everyone could set their

⁷ Alice Foley, *A Bolton Childhood*, p. 45.

⁸ Mass Observation noted that there were more clocks on mantelpieces after the Second World War than before: Mass Observation, “Mantelpieces”, *Mass Observation Bulletin* XLI March/April (1951), p. 14.

⁹ John Smith, “Water Under the Bridge”, p. 53.

¹⁰ Molly Weir, *Shoes Were For Sunday*, p. 123.

¹¹ It was possibly a regional difference too, with hooters and knockers-up being prevalent in industrial areas. All factory hooters mentioned were in northern towns.

¹² Valerie Tedder, *The Pantry Under the Stairs*, p. 16.

¹³ Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, p. 15.

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clocks. James Charlton's alarm clock was set by the church clock and the family used the church clock when they were catching a train (which indicated lack of faith in their own alarm clock).¹⁴ Eric Fairclough wrote of the factory buzzers announcing the start of work at six o'clock and they continued through out the day.¹⁵ Clock time had a growing impact on home life through the radio.¹⁶ Shaun Moores has argued that the radio brought "precise measurement of time into the home" because it was "standard national time" which was "relayed directly into the private sphere": this clock time had never been able to do.¹⁷ Television was to have a similar impact, though at the end of the period in 1955, it had only just begun to be important as a time-keeper. The significance that factory buzzers and radio and television time had on the timing of domestic routines is discussed in more detail in the final section of the chapter.

Thus, clock time was certainly important in some homes. However, even in those homes which may not have had clocks or had clocks which failed to keep time, alternative forms of precise timing - such as factory buzzers or the radio - were used instead.¹⁸ Even in rural areas, church clocks, trains or milk collections were used as ways of telling the time. Moreover, although the winding up of clocks might be traditionally viewed as a male task (as in the case of Tristram Shandy's father cited by Thompson¹⁹), women were often responsible for the care and accuracy of the clocks in the home. Leslie Paul refers to their alarm-clock as his mother's and she was the one who took it upstairs in the evening, while Dolly Scannell mentioned that the alarm-clock was kept in "Mother's room" (which was also her father's room), and her mother was responsible for waking everyone up.²⁰ When her mother went into hospital, Dolly's sister took over the job of waking everyone up each morning. The result was they all overslept and the mother had to discharge herself early to get the house back into a routine. This implies that not only did those women who worked at home worked to the clock on the mantelpiece, but they were also responsible for

¹⁴ James Charlton, *More Sand in My Shoes*, p. 94.

¹⁵ Eric Fairclough, *In a Lancashire Street*, p. 68.

¹⁶ The quote at the start of the chapter shows Thompson acknowledged that television time did affect timing of domestic work: Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline", p. 381.

¹⁷ Shaun Moores, "'The Box on the Dresser': Memories of Early Radio and Everyday Life", *Culture and Society* X (1988), p. 38.

¹⁸ Possessing a clock could have other meanings apart from being a time-keeper. As Chapters Five and Six demonstrated, the functional use of clocks might be less important than other values, such as their *aesthetic, display and sentimental* significance.

¹⁹ Thompson, "Time, Work -Discipline", p. 354. Moores cites a respondent who described his father winding the clocks up each evening: Moores, "'The Box on the Dresser'", p. 39.

²⁰ Leslie Paul, *The Boy Down Kitchener Street*, p. 83; Dolly Scannell, *Mother Knew Best*, p. 93.

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making sure that this clock told the correct time so that the other members of the household got to school and work on time.²¹ Therefore, despite being in charge of young children, women were very much “attuned to the measurement of the clock.”

Part Two: Routines

Nigel Thrift and Paul Glennie have criticised Thompson for focusing too much on clock time, maintaining that task-orientated time shows both a sense of time and a desire to save time. Furthermore, they commented “recent writing on the symbolism and meaning of time have tended to move away from clocks and clock time as a brute instrument of temporal conquest towards the consideration of other devices and metrics, like timetables.”²² Regarding the organisation of time in the home, what is evident from the autobiographies, is that domestic activities were heavily routinised and followed daily, weekly and yearly rhythms, and these added further depth to the awareness and measurement of time in the home.

Starting with daily routines, Valerie Tedder commented that “[t]ime was of the utmost importance to my mother and it ruled our lives. Getting up in the morning, listening to the radio broadcasts and arriving at school or work on time was paramount.”²³ Mrs Roberts emphasised that daily patterns were important, too: “Life was very much a pattern in those days - chores started early and as my Mum used to say ‘if the grate is done and the fire is lit, the room looks tidy.’”²⁴ Leslie Paul thought that it was possible to tell the time of day by the sounds and smells in his home.²⁵ The activities most likely to be given specific times in terms of hours and minutes included getting up, leaving the house for work or school, the time of the midday meal and teatime. George and Daisy Noakes’s day began when George left for work at six. Since he was a farm worker, he returned home for breakfast at 8.30 and for his mid-day meal at noon. After the meal he rested until 12.55 and then worked until five o’clock when he came home for tea.²⁶ Josephine Gibney’s stepfather, who was a carter during the 1930s, got up to clean the horses at four o’clock and came home at 5.30 to get one hour’s rest and to have a pot of tea. He next returned home

²¹ The knocker-up was not necessarily male, either. Eric Fairclough’s father was woken up at 4.30 a.m. by a female knocker-up: Eric Fairclough, *In a Lancashire Street*, p. 38.

²² Paul Glennie and Nigel Thrift, “Reworking E. P. Thompson’s ‘Time, Work-discipline and Industrial Capitalism’”, *Time and Society* V 3 (1996), pp. 290, 282-4.

²³ Valerie Tedder, *The Pantry Under the Stairs*, p. 16.

²⁴ Mrs Roberts, “Better Than Television”, p. 176.

²⁵ Leslie Paul, *The Boy Down Kitchener Street*, p. 68.

²⁶ Daisy Noakes, *Faded Rainbow*, p. 6.

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for tea at 6.30 in the evening and went back to feed the horses at ten o'clock at night.²⁷ Maggie Newbery's mother woke up at five to light the fire, pack the workers' sandwiches and make the tea. She then woke up the workers at 5.50 and returned to bed until 7.30 when she got the three youngest children off to school. When Maggie was a part-timer in the mills during the First World War, she came home for lunch at 12.30 and then went to school in the afternoon. After tea Maggie played outside until 7.30 but had to be in bed by eight o'clock.²⁸

For other activities the exact time is not known. There was a bias towards recording morning and evening activities when the autobiographers as children were not at school. The morning was the time for lighting the fire, cleaning the grate or doing other small cleaning jobs. Collecting water and making beds was also likely to happen before dinner time. Evening tasks consisted of boot polishing, wood collecting (in rural homes) or activities that could take place around the fire such as sewing, mending, reading, listening to the wireless or playing games. This obviously had a seasonal side to it, since playing in the street was popular in the summer although in some cases it was done in the winter too.

Margery Spring Rice's survey of women's health in the 1930s described in detail the average routine of the 1,250 women whom she had interviewed. The women's day started around 6.30 or earlier if they had sons or a husband on shift work. The housewife got her husband off to work, washed, dressed and fed the children and sent them to school. Her morning was then spent doing the washing-up (which might necessitate fetching water), cleaning, and cooking the midday meal for when the children returned from school at noon. Dinnertime sometimes lasted from twelve until three o'clock if school and work dinner times did not coincide. After washing up, the housewife might have had time to go out at around two or 2.30 to do the shopping or she may have done some mending or sewing. After this the children returned for tea and the husband had his tea when he came home from work. Ideally, children were in bed by eight o'clock, after which the husband may have read the paper while the wife did some sewing. The housewife was usually in bed between 10.30 and eleven o'clock.²⁹

²⁷ Josephine Gibney, *Joe McGarrigle's Daughter*, p. 28.

²⁸ Maggie Newbery, *Reminiscences of a Bradford Mill Girl*, pp. 35-39.

²⁹ Margery Spring Rice, *Working Wives: Their Health and Conditions*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1939), pp. 96-100.

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Despite the fact that daily routines happened more frequently, many more autobiographers detailed what Winifred Renshaw described as a “normal weekly routine”.³⁰ This indicated that the week as a measurement of time was important because it was dominant in people’s memories. The importance of weekly routines is supported by comments concerning the inflexibility of these routines. May Ayers explained that “there was a certain regularity about the week’s chores in those days; certain days called for the same procedure and hardly anything was allowed to interfere with the weekly routine.”³¹ Elizabeth Fanshawe too stressed that weekly routine was important: “Special days for doing things were strictly adhered to...Mother explained that it could not be otherwise.”³² Ben Batten also mentioned that “the routine of domestic arrangements was fairly rigid, with little departure from the set order of work and meals for the different days.”³³ Other autobiographers did not explicitly mention that a weekly routine was followed but cited the day of the week when particular activities occurred.³⁴

Washing *was* primarily done on a Monday, as Figure 7.1 shows. The timing of washing was referred to more than any other routine and people stressed the intractability of it. Joyce and Edna Skinner explained that unless it was a bank holiday, Monday was always washday. Paul Fletcher commented: “[a]s surely as Sunday was the Sabbath Day, Monday was washday.”³⁵ An extreme example of the adherence to Monday as washday was described by Doreen Wildgoose. When Sheffield was bombed on Sunday December 12th 1940, the Wildgoose family lost their water supply, and relatives, whose homes had been destroyed or damaged, descended upon them. Even under these adverse circumstances Doreen’s mother was determined to do her washing the following day:

Mondays meant only one thing to my mother. Mondays meant wash-days. Neither Hitler nor the fact that we still had some unexpected guests in the house was going to change a habit of a lifetime, and the Monday following the

³⁰ Winifred Renshaw, *An Ordinary Life*, Chapter 20. Leslie Paul claimed that it was possible to tell what day of the week it was from the smells in the home: Leslie Paul, *The Boy Down Kitchener Street*, p. 68. Elinor Sanderson noted that “[a]part from the various special occasions, we lived our lives very much to a routine”: Elinor Sanderson, “Elinor Sanderson”, p. 62;

³¹ May Ayers, *Memoirs of a Shannock*, p. 8.

³² Elizabeth Fanshawe, *Penkhull Memories*, p. 6.

³³ Ben Batten, *Newlyn Boyhood*, p. 4.

³⁴ Several autobiographers referred to tasks that happened on a weekly cycle, but because they did not give the day on which they were done, were not included in this data.

³⁵ Paul Fletcher, *The Clatter of Clogs*, p. 28; Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, p. 27.

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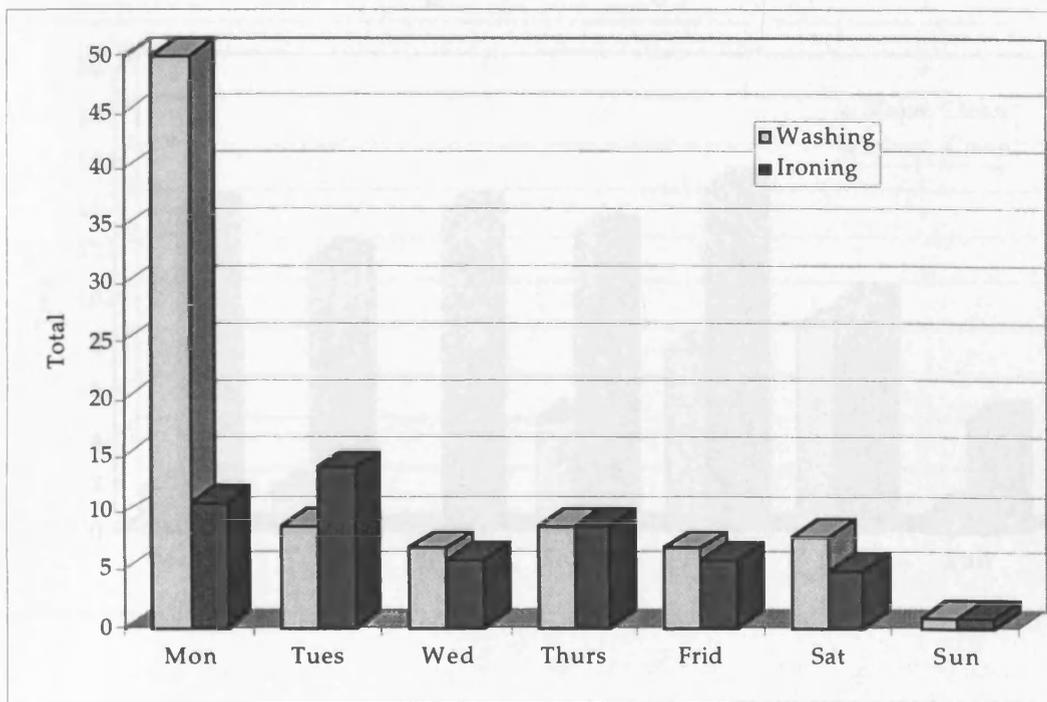
raids was no exception. Water was at a premium...and I don't think that the washing of clothes was one of the main priorities...Grandpa suggested fetching water from the river...³⁶

Although the clothes never looked the same again, the washing had been done on a Monday. Not everyone washed on Monday, but the other days of the week were far less popular and Sunday was the least favoured day of all, as Josephine Gibney explained:

There was one communal tap to serve the eight houses, and washing always seemed to be strung across the yard - *except* on Sundays. In those days, no-one would dream of washing on the Sabbath unless they were absolute heathens. Beat up the wife, get drunk or go whore-mongering on the Sabbath, but *never* do washing.³⁷

The one family who did wash on a Sunday was Jewish and were even more strict about washing on the Sabbath than 'Christian' families.

Figure 7.1: Washing and Ironing Days



A 'major' clean, which entailed cleaning the whole or a large part of the house, occurred towards the end of the week, often on a Friday evening or Saturday morning (Figure 7.2). As a rhythm it was mentioned less than washing. Grace Foakes did most

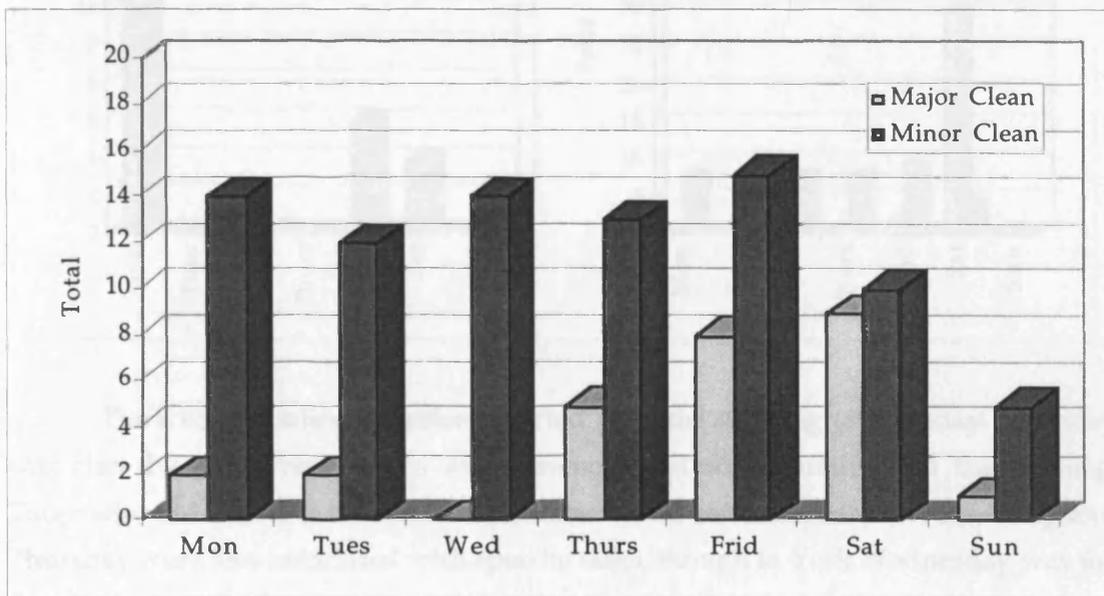
³⁶ Doreen Wildgoose, *What Did You Do in the War, Grandma?*, pp. 23-24.

³⁷ Her italics: Josephine Gibney, *Joe McGarrigle's Daughter*, p. 13.

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of the cleaning for her mother on Saturday morning: she scrubbed all the floors, the table, chairs and stools, cleaned the cooker, black-leaded the grate, whitened the hearth, cleaned the fire-irons and washed the windows.³⁸ Walt Palmer's mother also "cleaned the house thoroughly from top to bottom" on a Saturday morning.³⁹ A 'minor' clean had a more limited coverage, and involved cleaning one room or just performing one or two tasks. These tasks were generally evenly spread over the week suggesting that some families preferred to do a bit of cleaning each day. This was certainly the case in the Skinner household where the living room was cleaned on Wednesday, the bedrooms on Thursday, the kitchen on Friday, and the front room and side passage on a Saturday.⁴⁰ In May Ayers' home the kitchen floor and table was cleaned on a Monday, there was a "general clean through" on a Wednesday, and the bedrooms were usually done by Thursday. However May's home, as confirmation of the main weekly pattern, also had a "great clean" on Friday when everything was swept down and polished, including the range and brasses, and the linoleum and windows were cleaned.⁴¹

Figure 7.2: Cleaning



³⁸ Grace Foakes, *My Part of the River*, pp. 126-127.

³⁹ Walt Palmer, *Mother's Ruin*, p. 8.

⁴⁰ Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, pp. 33-37.

⁴¹ May Ayers, *Memoirs of A Shannock*, p. 8.

Figure 7.3: Baking

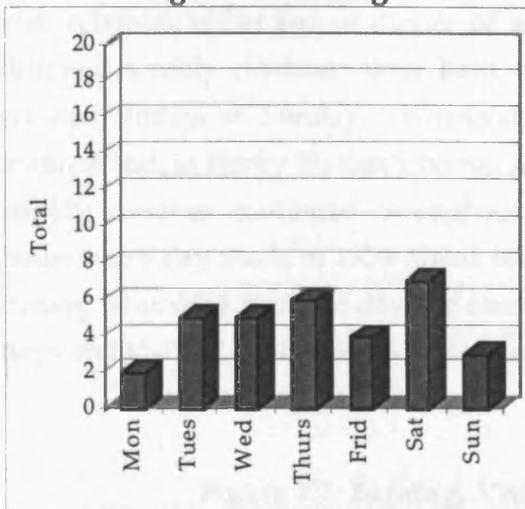


Figure 7.4: Pub Visits and Pay Day

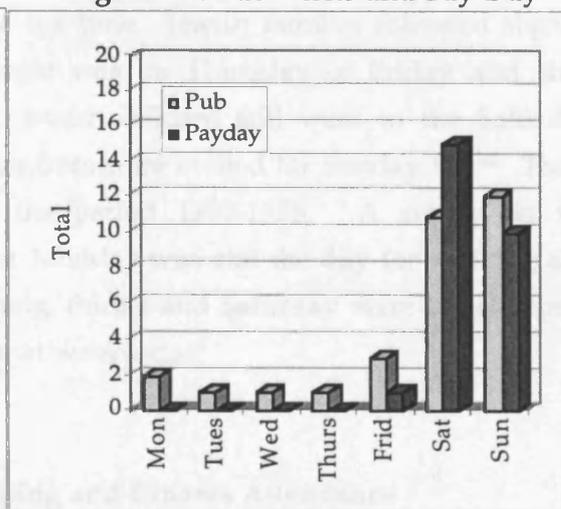


Figure 7.5: Trips to Pawnshop

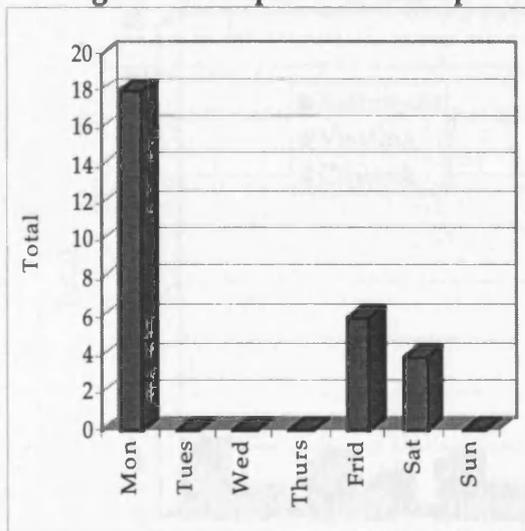
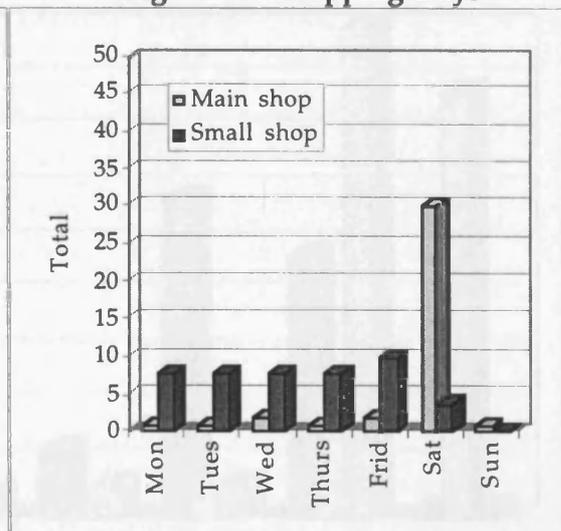


Figure 7.6: Shopping Days



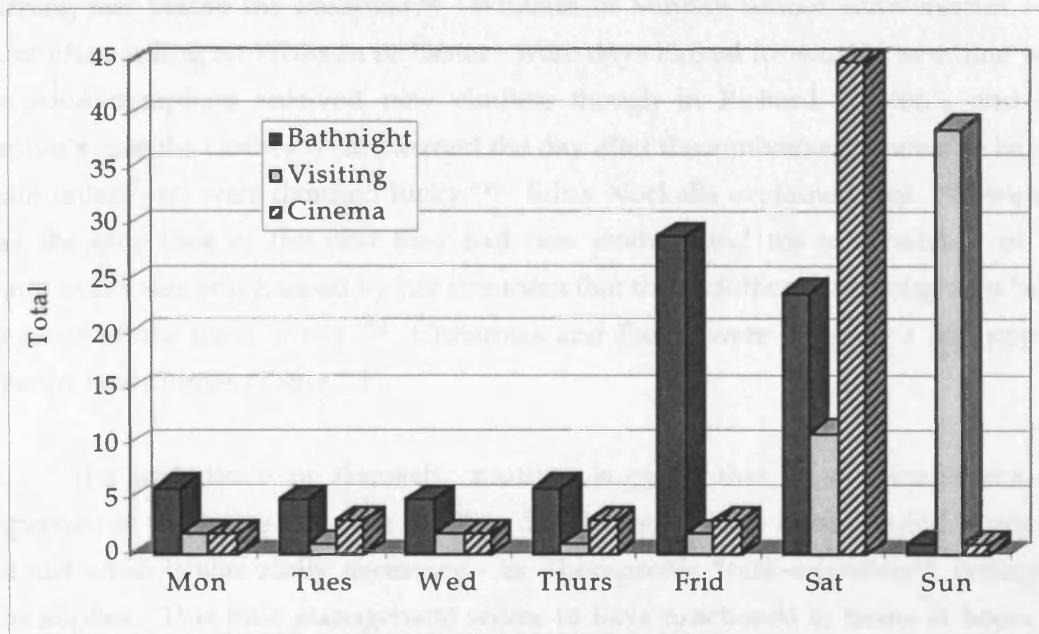
The weekly routine, therefore, started with the washing on Monday. Monday was also the day when clothes were pawned, and some families did their ironing. Those who did not have time to iron on Monday did so on Tuesday. Wednesday and Thursday were less associated with specific tasks, though in York Wednesday was the day for ironing.⁴² Friday was associated with a number of events: the 'major' clean, bath night, pay day and was the day when items were retrieved from the pawnshop. Saturday was also a busy day. It too was a popular day for bathing, cleaning, baking and was pay day for some. In the afternoon the children went to the cinema, while shopping was done in the afternoon or evening. Sunday was considered a rest day and in some families many domestic activities, such as sewing or knitting, were forbidden. Approximately half the households had members who attended church,

⁴² B. Seebom Rowntree, *Poverty and Progress: A Second Social Survey of York* (1941, London: Longman, Green and Co., 1946), pp. 429-441.

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and slightly fewer families sent children to Sunday school. Sunday was the day to visit relatives, either before dinner or at tea time. Jewish families followed slightly different weekly rhythms: their bath night was on Thursday or Friday and they washed clothes on Sunday. However, Jewish children still went to the Saturday matinee and, in Henry Blacker's home, relatives were invited for Sunday tea.⁴³ These weekly routines continued throughout the period 1900-1955. A survey on the housewife's day made in 1956 noted that Monday was still the day for washing and ironing, Thursday was the day for cleaning, Friday and Saturday were big shopping days and visiting continued to take place at weekends.⁴⁴

Figure 7.7: Bathing, Visiting and Cinema Attendance



Seasonal and yearly cycles were mentioned by the autobiographers the least, but certain days and periods of the year were associated with specific activities. Spring cleaning was a seasonal event, but the timing of it was not specific, and it did not necessarily happen in spring. Emily Glencross's family, for example, spring-cleaned during the summer holidays.⁴⁵ Winifred Renshaw described the spring cleaning in her home:

⁴³ Henry Blacker, *Just Like It Was*, p. 36.

⁴⁴ Mass Observation, "The Housewife's Day (2)", *Mass Observation Bulletin* LIV June (1957), pp. 6, 8, 16.

⁴⁵ Emily Glencross, *Memories of a Salford Childhood*, p. 35.

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When it came to spring-cleaning time, in addition to carpet beating, feather mattresses and pillows were taken outside on a sunny day and given a good shaking and airing. Furniture was washed and given an extra good polish, paint work was washed and wall rubbed down, and Mum usually re-papered one or more rooms....⁴⁶

In Joyce and Edna Skinner's home spring cleaning took six to eight weeks and was usually finished by late April or early May. It entailed preparing the house for summer: blankets were washed and put away and summer curtains replaced winter ones. The process was reversed at "back-end" cleaning which occurred in October when the summer curtains and cushions were put away.⁴⁷ Others associated the yearly clean with calendar events such as Christmas or New Year when a new rag rug, made during winter evenings, was laid. Evelyn Cowan's Jewish family did their spring cleaning just before the Passover.⁴⁸ Whitsun or Sunday School anniversaries - the latter often falling on Whitsun or Easter - were days looked forward to as a time when the autobiographers received new clothes, though in Richard Heaton's and Ted Furniss's case the clothes were pawned the day after the anniversary "never to be seen again unless you were damned lucky."⁴⁹ Edna Nockalls explained that Whitsuntide was the only time of the year they had new clothes, and the intractability of this yearly event was emphasised by her comment that these clothes were bought "whether we could afford them or not."⁵⁰ Christmas and Easter were generally a less popular time for new clothes (Table 7.1).

The prevalence of domestic routines suggests that time management was important in the home and that families did domestic tasks at appointed times and not just when it was really necessary - as Thompson's "task-orientated" concept of time implies. This time management seems to have functioned in terms of hours and minutes to a certain extent - as demonstrated by the location of the clock and daily routines. However, the management of time by weekly cycles seems to have had the greatest impact on people's memories.

⁴⁶ Winifred Renshaw, *An Ordinary Life*, Chapter 20.

⁴⁷ Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, pp. 87-88, 106.

⁴⁸ Evelyn Cowan, *Spring Remembered*, pp. 27-28

⁴⁹ Richard Heaton, *Salford: My Home Town*, p. 10; Ted Furniss, *The Walls of Jericho*, p. 14.

⁵⁰ Edna Nockalls, *Another Time, Another Place*, p. 18. Betty Dickinson also got new clothes even if her father was out of work and she thought that this applied to other families: Betty Dickinson, *Shanty Town*, p. 12.

Table 7.1: Yearly Activities

Activity	Households following yearly routines
Total Number of Households = 131	total
"Spring" cleaning	5
Backend/Martinmas Cleaning	2
Cleaning for Xmas, Passover and New Year	7
Rag rugs for Christmas	5
Rag Rugs for Easter	1
New Clothes at Christmas	1
New Clothes Easter	3
New Clothes Whitsun	7
Sunday school anniversary	3

Part Three: The negotiability of routines

Although the first two parts of the chapter demonstrated that domestic routines were standardised and people felt that they should endeavour to keep to them, there were certain factors which caused temporary or permanent disruptions to the rhythms. These included the impact of occupation and work patterns, life-cycle and family events, historical events and change over time, and changes in technology.

The lifestyles of certain occupations required alternative domestic rhythms to those described above, though to the families and communities concerned, they were the standard practice. Fishermen and agricultural labourers were used to routines that were continually changing in accordance with tide, season and weather. Although fisherman could be viewed as shift workers, the weather conditions were far less predictable than the tides, making the timing of domestic tasks far harder than in normal shift work. May Ayers, the daughter of a fisherman, remembers how "[o]ne's life was controlled by the sea":

Meals were not as regularly timed perhaps as in households where the breadwinner had set hours...sometimes father would come in unexpectedly and say, 'I'll have my dinner now. The weather's a bit better now and we are trying to get off.' Or she [her mother] might have his and my brother's meal ready to serve when he would surprise her by saying, 'Can't stop now, we'll have to eat it later.'⁵¹

Mary Lakeham, who was also from a fishing family, noted how domestic routines were driven by the tides as well:

⁵¹ May Ayers, *Memoirs of a Shannock*, pp. 20-21.

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The whole life hinged on the family lugger, everything subordinated to its movements, its departures and returns, and domestic routine for fisherman's families took on a shape as diverse, compelling, and inescapable as the elements themselves.⁵²

In both these cases, the tide tended to disrupt daily rather than weekly routines. The domestic routines of agricultural labourers changed on a more seasonal basis. Babs Hilton described how the whole village joined in at haymaking time, altering the evening routines.⁵³ Mass Observation's study of an Exmoor village also noted that season affected an agricultural worker's household: "[daily] routine scarcely ever varies from day to day, except in the summer time, when he [a carter] may be working overtime and may not get home until much later."⁵⁴ Other occupations had permanent, alternative routines which were the result of working conditions. The grime and wetness of the mine meant that many colliers had a daily bath (except on Sundays) and sometimes their clothes were washed each day. Miners were the only households whose members had a bath each day and this meant that they followed slightly different weekly routines (Figure 7.8). Evans and Jones pointed out that the 1908 Eight Hours Act, which introduced shift work, affected the timing of daily routines; it meant that meals and baths had to be provided at different times throughout the day.⁵⁵

It was not just male employment that necessitated certain families to have different routines because the employment of women in paid labour in or outside the home changed patterns of household time management. The timing of washing and cleaning was especially affected by women's paid labour because they were usually responsible for these tasks. When women who washed for a living and women who washed in the evening or on Saturday after paid work were removed from the washing data, it revealed that only one or two families who had someone at home as, theoretically, a full-time housewife, did not wash on a Monday (Figure 8.9). Thus, in order to keep 'standard' routines families needed someone at home who was not engaged in paid labour.

⁵² Mary Lakeham, *Early Tide*, p. 11.

⁵³ Babs Hilton, "A Whyteleafe Childhood", p. 45.

⁵⁴ W. J. Turner, *Exmoor Village: A General Account Based on Factual Information From Mass-Observation* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1947), p. 47.

⁵⁵ Neil Evans and Dot Jones, "'A Blessing For the Miner's Wife': The Campaign for Pit-head Baths in the South Wales Coal Field, 1908-1950", *Llafur* VI 4 (1994), p. 8.

Figure 7.8: Miners' Bath Times

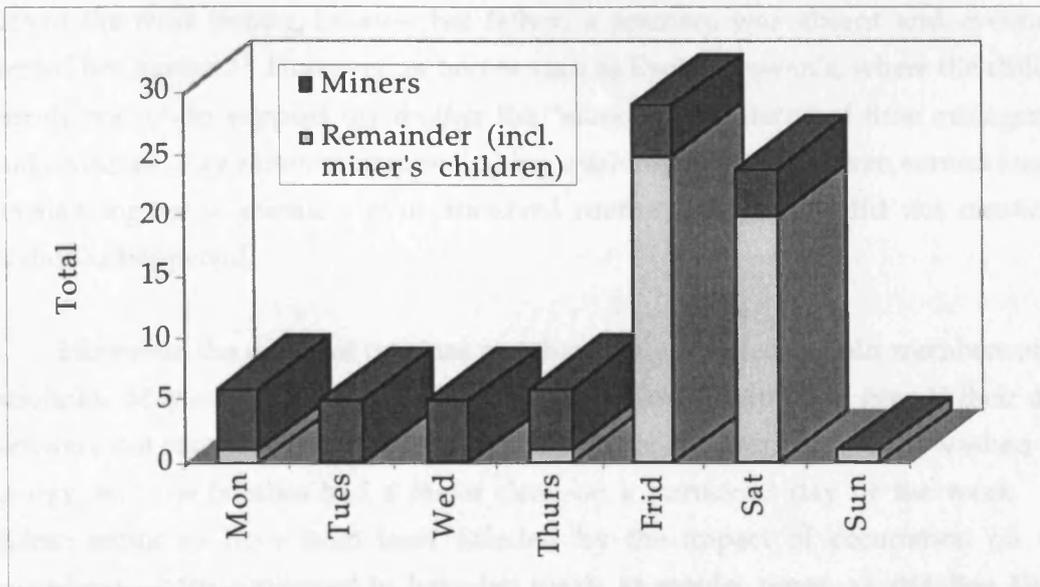
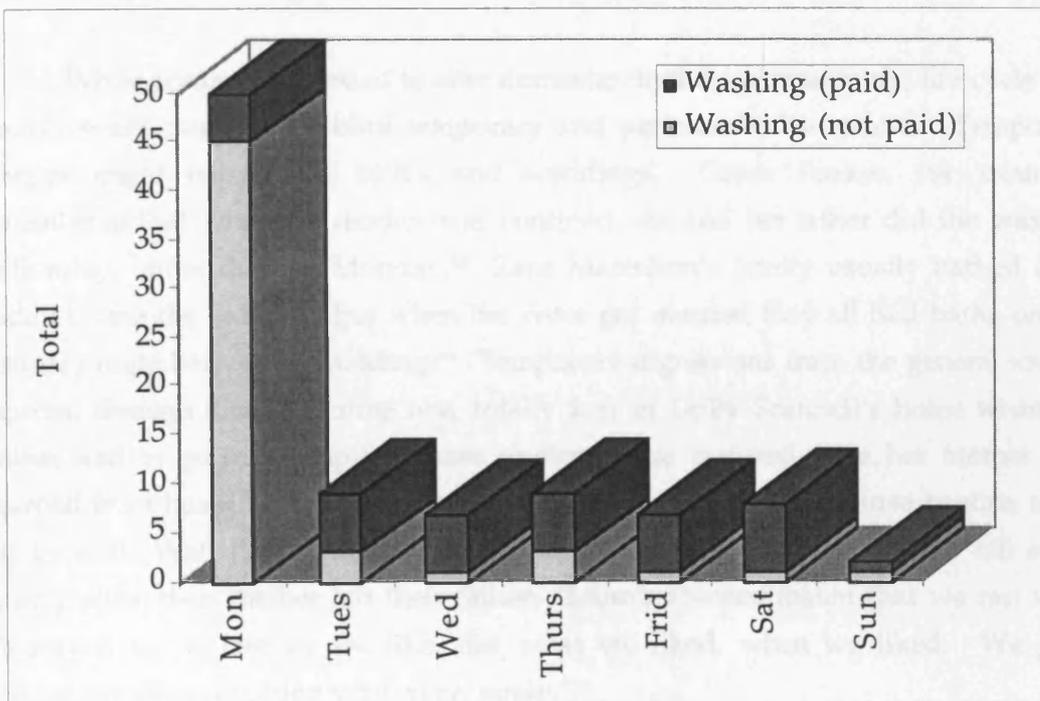


Figure 7.9: Washing Times for Housewives and 'Working' Women



Male unemployment or absence of a father resulted in the adoption of similar domestic rhythms to those in homes where the women were doing paid work. This was because the father's unemployment usually meant that women had to go out to work or do paid work in the home. Alice Foley's father was unemployed or absent for much of her pre-Great War childhood. Although she had working brothers and sisters, her mother took in washing and would starch and iron the clothes on weekday

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afternoons.⁵⁶ In the same period, Kay Pearson's mother took in washing and spent much of the week ironing, because her father, a seaman, was absent and eventually deserted her mother.⁵⁷ However, in homes such as Evelyn Cowan's, where the children were old enough to support the mother the "standard" patterns of time management could continue. Kay's mother stopped taking washing once her children earned enough thus allowing her to pursue a more standard routine, though Kay did not mention if this indeed happened.

However, the different routines may have only affected certain members of the household. May and Mary's mothers still followed weekly routines even if their daily tasks were not routinised in the same way as in other families. They both washed on a Monday, and the families had a major clean on a particular day of the week. The children seems to have been least affected by the impact of occupation on time management. May continued to have her meals at regular times, as did Ben Batten whose father was also a fisherman. Miners' children had a weekly bath on a Friday or Saturday, like non-mining families.

While occupation tended to alter domestic rhythms permanently, life cycle and family events could cause both temporary and permanent disruptions. Temporary changes might happen at births and weddings. Grace Foakes, for example, remembered that when her mother was confined, she and her father did the washing on Sunday, rather than on Monday.⁵⁸ Zena Marenbon's family usually bathed on a Friday before the Sabbath, but when her sister got married they all had baths on the Saturday night before the wedding.⁵⁹ Temporary digressions from the general routine occurred through illness: routine was totally lost in Dolly Scannell's home when her mother had to go into hospital; these routines were restored once her mother had returned from hospital.⁶⁰ Disagreements between parents might cause routine to be lost as well. Walt Palmer described how their weekly and daily patterns fell apart entirely when their mother left their father: "Mum's absence meant that we ran wild. We stayed up as late as we like, did what we liked, when we liked. We grew increasingly dirty, washing very, very, rarely."⁶¹

⁵⁶ Alice Foley, *A Bolton Childhood*, p. 7.

⁵⁷ Kay Pearson, *Life in Hull*, p. 23.

⁵⁸ Grace Foakes, *Between High Walls*, p. 7.

⁵⁹ Zena Marenbon, *Don't Blow Out the Candle*, p. 39.

⁶⁰ Dolly Scannell, *Mother Knew Best*, pp. 93-94.

⁶¹ Walt Palmer, *Mother's Ruin*, p. 18.

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To his relief, Walt's mother eventually returned, but this was not always the case for other families and the disruption became a permanent feature of domestic life. Illness, too, may have caused long-term changes in domestic rhythms, particularly if it resulted in the death of the individual who had maintained the routines. When Joan Booker's mother died the family's routines had to be re-negotiated since Joan was still at school and was unable to follow the same rhythms as her mother.⁶² This happened in Jimmy Buckley's home when his mother died; since he and his sister were both cotton-operatives they arranged to do the washing on Saturday afternoon which, apart from Sunday, was their only free afternoon.⁶³ Though routines were affected by the death of a mother, they were also changed when fathers died. This was because although mothers were generally responsible for household time management, they did paid work if their husbands were dead.

However, family and life cycle events did not always mean that routines were affected because family, friends or relatives might step into the breach and ensure that they were maintained. Kay Pearson did this for her sister-in-law while she recovered from childbirth. She did the housework for her brother's family between six in the morning and six at night ensuring that her brother got his 'lunch' at 1.30 and that his tea was ready for him when he came home.⁶⁴ When Marion Smith's brother was born at dinner time the neighbours stepped in to feed them all (about nine of them) at short notice:

the midwife just suddenly said we'd all need to get out, so the whole lot of us had to get out, and I hadn't had anything. But right up the stair, from the bottom to the top, somebody had said, 'Right, I'll take you two, I'll give them something and send them back to school, you two come in here...', and so we were all given a bite to eat by various neighbours.⁶⁵

Grace Foakes stayed at home once her mother became too ill to do the housework herself and continued at home after her mother had died, looking after the house for the rest of the family. In these cases the domestic rhythms were upheld because there was a support network available and it was the expected thing to do. If Grace's father had had contact with his neighbours or his family when his wife had given birth, he might not have had to do the washing on Sunday with only the help of the young child. The fact that he threatened to beat her if she told anyone that she had done the washing suggested that he believed that he had broken a code of conduct.

⁶² Joan Booker, *A Newbury Childhood*, p. 15.

⁶³ Jimmy Buckley, "Rochdale", p. 15.

⁶⁴ Kay Pearson, *Life in Hull*, pp. 61-65.

⁶⁵ Marion Smith in Jean Faley, *Up Oor Close*, p. 141.

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Changes in technology caused potentially permanent alterations in the standard weekly and daily rhythms. As will be demonstrated in the final part of this chapter, many of the domestic rhythms detailed above occurred as a result of the level and type of technology that the households possessed. Thus changes in certain types of technology changed routines: when a household got piped-water, there was no need to have a routine to collect water; if a house got a gas stove, the fire was no longer lit first thing in order to boil the kettle. Weekly routines were also altered in response to changes in technology. Possessing a bath could mean that people no longer had a special bath day. Thus, when Valerie Avery and her mother moved into a new council flat in 1955 they stopped having a bath on a Friday and Valerie had one every day.⁶⁶ In the case of the miners, the provision of pit-head baths altered the domestic routines of mining families: Evans and Jones claimed that by 1946 44% of the total work-force in South Wales coal-field had access to colliery baths, though they did not necessarily use them, and this figure was slightly lower in Wales than in other areas.⁶⁷

As with life-cycle and family events, the impact of changes in technology were neither linear or inevitable and people did not just move from homes without certain facilities to homes with them. In Grace Foakes's case she chose to move from a council house with a bathroom to a privately rented house without a bath so she would have had to return to a traditional routine.⁶⁸ People who acquired facilities did not, as Valerie Avery did, automatically change their routines. Although Joan Booker's family had a bathroom in the 1920s, they still only had one bath a week.⁶⁹ This may have been partly because their father had turned the bathroom in a darkroom, but it could have been because the water for the bath had to be carried upstairs making it too much effort to have more frequent baths. It was possibly because they could not afford to have more than one bath a week, or because only a minority of the working class had bathrooms at this time so there was little point in having a bath more often when everyone else had a weekly one.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ The reason given why she had so many baths was because there was too much hot water and she and her mother could not work out how to stop it continually heating up: Valerie Avery, *London Spring*, p. 152.

⁶⁷ In the early 1950s, 70% of the work-force had access to pit-head baths: Evans and Jones, "'A Blessing For the Miner's Wife'", pp. 19, 21.

⁶⁸ Grace Foakes, *My Life With Reuben*, p. 52. Roberts cites a woman whose family "rigidly" stuck to Friday as their bath night once they had a council house after 1936: Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and Families: An Oral History, 1940-1970* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 23.

⁶⁹ Joan Booker, *A Newbury Childhood*, p. 40.

⁷⁰ Fifty per cent of all households had exclusive use of baths in 1951: *Census 1951 England and Wales: General Report* (London: HMSO, 1958), p. 123.

Wartime disrupted and changed routines and the significance of certain days were changed by war: Doreen Wildgoose, who detailed her Second World War childhood, explained that Thursday became “the most important day of the week” because it was rations day.⁷¹ Not all the families were able to stick rigidly to their routines in the way her mother had done after the Sheffield Blitz, especially in families where the housewife did war-work.⁷² Margaret Monkham’s children were grown-up when the war began and she became an ambulance and lorry driver. After the war, she returned to housework, and commented that it was “lovely” to be able to look after the house “properly”.⁷³ However, she soon used her experience as a wartime driver to become a taxi-driver, indicating that war work, and especially that of the Second World War, did not have just a temporary impact on women’s employment and domestic routines. Some housewives were, of course, used to working outside the home already. Emily Glencross, for example, worked full-time throughout the Second World War, but she had been doing this in the 1930s while her husband was unemployed.⁷⁴

This part of the chapter has shown that distinctive routines were pursued by distinctive occupations. However, variation in the timing of daily and weekly events occurred within, as well as between households. Routines were interrupted by life-cycle events: in the case of births or marriage the interruption was generally on a temporary basis; in the case of death, the level of interruption depended on who it was who had died. The death of a father may have resulted in the mother going out to work, while the death of a mother meant that domestic tasks might have to be done in the evening. However, if there was a support network, family and friends could step in to ensure the household routine continued for both short and long-term changes in the home.

Part Four: ‘Rationalising’ Routines?

The logic behind the adoption of routines with specific days for specific activities, is not immediately apparent. Why wash on Monday? Why not wash on

⁷¹ Doreen Wildgoose, *What Did You Do in the War, Grandma?*, pp. 23-4, 3.

⁷² Lewis showed that the percentage of married women working rose from sixteen percent of the total female work-force to forty percent between 1931 and 1951: Jane Lewis, *Women in England, 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1984), p. 152.

⁷³ Margaret Monkham, *As I Remember*, p. 84.

⁷⁴ Emily Glencross, *For Better or For Worse*, p. 9.

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Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday (which some families did do)? Furthermore, if domestic time was task-orientated as Thompson argued, why not wash clothes when they were needed, as minority of families chose to do? There seemed to be both 'rational' and 'ritualistic' significance for these domestic rhythms. The 'rational' or functional reasons were responses to: institutional time and household budgeting; type of technology; the extent of domestic space; and time and energy taken to do tasks. The non-functional or ritual significance related to residual religious practices and the manifestation of respectability.

Sociologists Lewis and Weigert described institutional time as the timing of work and school hours.⁷⁵ Daily chores were timed around work and school hours, and since the hours of work were strict then so too was the timing of domestic events. People had to get up for work and this dictated when the fire had to be lit to make tea and when people ate breakfast. Even if the mother of the family was not going out to work herself, she would have her day set by work and school time. As the first part of the chapter showed, it was often the mothers who were responsible for ensuring that the workers got up. Winifred Foley wrote that her mother "acted as alarm-clock to get Dad out the house by five in the morning." This meant that she had to get up at 4.15 to make his breakfast.⁷⁶ Joyce Storey was only too well aware of her days being timed around her husband's working hours. He would put his double-bell alarm-clock in a biscuit tin when he had early morning shifts, which woke up everyone in the family except him and resulted in Joyce beginning her day just after dawn whether she intended to or not.⁷⁷ Since many workers and most school children went home for 'lunch', this also had to be timed in conjunction with institutional time. In addition, the evening meal was often eaten as soon as those who worked outside the home came home from work, as Catherine Cookson remembered: "Me granda came in at half past five and his tea, a heavy cooked meal, was always waiting ready for him." Someone had to wait on the corner of the street until he came into sight so that it was on table when he came in.⁷⁸ Some school children had their tea as soon as they came home from school and this meant another meal that was eaten at a time set by institutions.

Thus, domestic life was very much affected by clock time and the person left at home had to deal with two or three different schedules, while family members who

⁷⁵ J. David Lewis and Andrew J. Weigert, "The Structures and Meaning of Social Time", *Social Forces* LX 2 (1981), pp. 432-462.

⁷⁶ Winifred Foley, *A Child in The Forest*, p. 22.

⁷⁷ Eventually she threw it down the stairs but it was soon replaced: Joyce Storey, *Joyce's War*, pp. 173-174.

⁷⁸ Catherine Cookson, *Our Kate*, p. 46.

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were employed outside the home generally only had to deal with their own. Joyce and Edna Skinner's mother had to cope with a variety of different work times. When Edna and Joyce were at elementary school their dinner time was the same as their father's and they all had dinner together at 12.15. However, once they started attending high school, their mother had to cook their father's meal for midday and Joyce and Edna's for 1.15. When Edna went to technical college, Mrs Skinner had to produce cooked meals at 12.15, 1.15 and at five o'clock because Edna could not get home for 'lunch'.⁷⁹ Percy Ambrose described his family's daily routine being dominated by his father's work. As a passenger train guard he was on three different types of shifts. Percy believed that "it must have taxed the ingenuity of my mother to provide meals for my father and the rest of us which would fit in with this." He explained further that some weeks his father began working at 4.30 in the morning, other weeks he was on a later shift which meant that he did not get home until midnight and sometimes he left at "a more normal breakfast time."⁸⁰

The television and radio provided another method by which an institution could time domestic activities. Shaun Moores has argued that in the 1930s the BBC attempted to plan its radio schedule around everyday routines, so that there were children's programmes at lunch time and when they came home from school and the news was on at night after work.⁸¹ He noted that "children's hour" was scheduled to coincide with the preparation of the evening meal when housewives were less inclined to listen to the radio.⁸² From the consumers' viewpoint, it seems that they did arrange their domestic activities around radio programmes. Tom Wakefield started his homework when *The Archers* had finished, and in Valerie Avery's home her grandparents had a Sunday afternoon rest "which usually lasted for a couple of hours, until *Down Your Way* came on the wireless...."⁸³ Tim O'Sullivan argued that television "rapidly became a significant...part of household ritual" and it reflected or organised family schedules in a similar manner to the radio.⁸⁴ For example, there was no television between six and seven o'clock which was known as the "toddlers' truce"

⁷⁹ Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, pp. 27, 160.

⁸⁰ Percy Ambrose, *Reminiscences of a Loughton Life*, p. 55.

⁸¹ Moores, "The Box on the Dresser", p. 36.

⁸² Moores, "The Box on the Dresser", pp. 33-34, 37. Moores cites Crawford and Broadley's 1939 survey, *The People's Food*, in which they commented "a programme of special interest to housewives will not secure its maximum listening public if it clashes with the preparation of tea or the washing up."

⁸³ Valerie Avery, *London Morning*, p. 52.

⁸⁴ Tim O'Sullivan, "Television Memories and Cultures of Viewing, 1950-65" in John Corner, *Popular Television in Britain: Studies in Cultural History* (London: B.F.I., 1991), p. 171.

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because it was assumed that small children were being put to bed at this time.⁸⁵ Television also determined the timing of household activities, and this became increasingly the case with the abolition of the “toddler’s truce” in 1956 which further extended viewing times.

Institutional time not only dictated daily events but weekly routines as well. Sunday was a suitable day to visit people or go to the pub because it was an official day off, while the workplace determined the day of the week when people were paid and this had a significant impact on their routines because activities were structured according to how much money they had. Pay day was usually Friday or Saturday: this meant that items in the pawnshop could be redeemed on either of these days and the major shop could take place a Saturday when “luxury” foods were bought for Sunday dinner and tea. By Monday, a considerable part of the pay had been spent on Sunday dinner, pocket money, visits to the pub, and having family or friends to Sunday tea. The money spent over the weekend was one of the reasons why objects redeemed on Friday or Saturday were re-pledged on Monday (see Figure 7.10). They were also pawned on this day because they could be washed first. Not only did ‘uncle’ pay more for clothes in good condition, as explained in Chapter Six, but the clothes had to be clean as well. The autobiographies also gave a sense of children’s own budgeting. They had to do cleaning tasks on Saturday morning (when there was no school) to earn their pocket money which they spent at the cinema in the afternoon.⁸⁶ Yearly domestic events were affected by work-time to a lesser extent. Alice Markham, whose father was a foreman on a farm near Hull in the first two decades of the century, explained that the kitchen had its annual clean and coat of paint in the week around Martinmas. This was because they did not have to feed the farm servants this week since it was their annual week off.⁸⁷ In the Glencross

⁸⁵ John Corner, “Television and British Society in the 1950s” in Corner, ed., *Popular Television in Britain*, p. 7. This might reflect more a middle-class belief of the time children were put to bed, that was a reflection of not only the type of person who worked for the BBC but of the people watching it. Needleman showed that in 1956 50.5% of middle-class homes had televisions compared to 35.5% of working class. This was quite a different diffusion pattern to that in Connecticut where a study of class acceptance of innovation showed that “lower” classes were more likely to accept television than the upper and middle classes: L. Needleman, “Demand For Domestic Appliances”, *National Institute Economic Review* XII (1960), p. 27; Graham Saxon, “Class and Conservatism in the Adoption of Innovations”, *Human Relations* IX (1956), p. 94.

⁸⁶ The Ministry of Education found that children followed an “unvaried routine” of helping their mother on Saturday morning and going to the cinema in the afternoon or evening: Central Advisory Council for Education, Ministry of Education, *Out of School: The Second Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England)* (1948, London: HMSO, 1963), p. 36.

⁸⁷ Alice Markham, *Back of Beyond*, p. 42.

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household, the spring cleaning was done during the summer holiday so that Emily was able to help since she was not at school.⁸⁸ Therefore, domestic rhythms were strongly influenced by non-domestic events and institutions. Daily time seemed to be the most affected, with tasks being timed by work and school hours, while the timing of evening activities from the 1920s onward were increasingly dictated by radio schedules. Weekly routines were affected by pay day and days off which particularly determined weekend activities.

Institutional time only explained some of the daily, weekly and yearly routines and, as Straw and Elliot pointed out in their article on women's rhythms in the home, other factors need to be considered.⁸⁹ The type of technology and facilities available in the home were among the main factors behind the routinisation of the day. Fires were lit first thing to make a pot of tea and water was collected each day if there was no piped water. This routine of fetching water became increasingly a rural phenomenon, though homes in certain inner city areas still lacked water.⁹⁰ Winifred Foley, who lived in a village in the Forest of Dean during the 1920s, walked a quarter of a mile each day before school to get the water required for the day.⁹¹ External closets made chamber pots necessary and, for obvious reasons, it was preferable to empty them in the morning. Shopping happened on a daily basis and the food for Sunday was bought on a Saturday afternoon or evening because it was cheap and because few people had any form of refrigeration. Only one out of the 132 families possessed a refrigerator and this was because they lived in a prefab.⁹² "Time-saving" goods such as washing-machines and vacuum cleaners were more likely to be found in middle and upper-class homes in the 1930s; only two autobiographers mentioned having a washing machine,

⁸⁸ Emily Glencross, *Breakfast at Windsor*, p. 35.

⁸⁹ Pat Straw and Brian Elliot, "Hidden Rhythms: Hidden Powers? Women and Time in Working-Class Culture", *Life Stories/Recits de Vie II* (1986), p. 35.

⁹⁰ In 1938 *Growing up in Shoreditch* recorded that one in three houses had no indoor water supply, while Bournville Village Trust observed in 1941 that 13,650 homes in Birmingham had to share their water supply: cited in *Our Towns: A Close-Up: A Study Made During 1939-1942* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1943), p. 93. However, in 1939 a York home without a separate water supply was a "rare exception": Rowntree, *Poverty and Progress*, p. 285.

⁹¹ Winifred Foley, *A Child in the Forest*, p. 108. Not all households fetched their water at the same time each day. In Mary Lakeham's family a bucket was left by the back door and whoever passed it when it was empty was expected to walk down the hill and refill it at the town well.

⁹² In 1948 only two percent of total households had refrigerators. Although this had increased to ten percent by 1958, it "was still predominately an upper and middle-class possession" and only five percent of the "lower" class owned one. The "lower" class in this context was defined as classes D and E which composed 71% of households: Needleham, "The Demand for Domestic Appliances", pp. 36, 27.

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and two had a vacuum cleaner.⁹³ The equipment working-class homes did have was often used for several different purposes, so that coppers were used for boiling water for washing, cleaning and bathing and this meant that tasks had to be done consecutively.

Lack of space, as shown in Chapter Three, also necessitated that tasks be done consecutively or at times when the majority of the household were out of the way. Mending or sewing were done in the evening because, with everyone at home all in one or two small rooms, this sort of activity did not occupy too much space.⁹⁴ The space available also suggests why certain activities were done on the same day each week. Sunday was the day for some parents to have sex because this was the one day they could guarantee being alone. As Elsie Goodhead wrote:

As long as we were out of the way on Sunday afternoons - I could never understand why my parents were so tired on Sunday that they had to go to bed (not for years anyway) - we were given complete freedom of choice over which Sunday School to attend....⁹⁵

Edward Blishen also recorded this as one of the reasons why he and his sister went to Sunday school; it guaranteed his parents "a quiet, and perhaps fairly profane, Sunday afternoon of their own."⁹⁶ The domestic activities of the Gamble family related to their acute lack of space. They followed a daily routine of pulling down beds and setting up beds because they lived in only one room. Everyone, except the father who was generally in the pub, went to bed at the same time because there was no room left once the beds had been set up.⁹⁷ Washing required space too, especially when it

⁹³ In 1948 four percent of middle-class homes had a washing machine while only 1.6% of working-class homes possessed one. By 1956 13.1% of working-class and 28.6% of middle-class homes had washing machines. More homes had vacuum cleaners in 1948, so that 18% of working-class and 51.2% of middle-class households possessed one and this had increased to 39.9% and 73.6% respectively by 1956: Needleham, "The Demand for Domestic Appliances", p. 27. For discussion on the difference in diffusion between "time-saving" and "time-using" appliances see Sue Bowden and Avner Offer, "Household Appliances and the Use of Time: the United States and Britain since the 1920s", *Economic History Review* XLVII 4 (1994), p. 728. Ruth Cowan commented that the acquisition of washing machines meant that washing no longer had to be limited to one day a week: Ruth Schwartz Cowan, "The 'Industrial Revolution' in the Home, Household Technology and Social Change in the Twentieth Century", *Technology and Culture* XVII (1976), p. 6.

⁹⁴ Allen's study of evening activities found that the most popular activities between seven o'clock and nine o'clock were reading, resting, sleeping and sewing: Phyllis Allen "Evening Activities in the Home", *Sociological Review* XLV (1951), p. 134.

⁹⁵ Elsie Goodhead, *The West End Story*, p. 35.

⁹⁶ Edward Blishen, *Sorry, Dad!*, p. 130. Josephine Gibney claimed that on her street the men spent Sunday afternoons in bed with the "missus": Josephine Gibney, *Joe McGarrigle's Daughter*, p. 57.

⁹⁷ Rose Gamble, *A Chelsea Childhood*, pp. 15-16.

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rained. Winifred Albaya described wet washing days when the living room was filled with washing and they were limited to a small space on the hearth rug all evening while Joyce and Edna Skinner mentioned that in winter clothes were hung round the fire for the day following washday as well.⁹⁸ Betty Dickinson explained that in her inter-war home the washing was done on a Thursday so that it would be out of the way of the baking on Saturday and this would explain why it was done on a weekday.⁹⁹ However, this does not illuminate why Monday was by far the most popular day for washing. Arguably, other families thought that washing on a Thursday was cutting it fine if the house was to be free of damp clothes when school children and earners were around at the weekend.

The time and energy taken to do tasks is another explanation as to why domestic tasks were routinised. Jobs such as sewing and mending were done at the end of the day because they required less physical effort, while doing too much in one day was impracticable if schedules of institutional time were to be met. Dolly Scannell's sister learned this when she ignored her mother's routine and failed to provide tea when the rest of the family came home:

[Amy] had worked so hard all day attempting to do too much at once, washing, ironing, housework, cooking and going upstairs for a moment in the late afternoon, had only sat on her bed for a moment. Exhausted she had fallen into a deep sleep."¹⁰⁰

Of course, this does not explain why jobs were done on specific days but the energy factor could explain why Monday was such a popular washing day, as Edna and Joyce Skinner intimated:

We all enjoyed our Sundays, we because it was good to be all together, Father because it was his only really peaceful day in the week and Mother because she could be with him all day and rest enough to summon all her energies ready for the hard labour to come on Monday morning.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, p. 32; Winifred Albaya, *A Sheffield Childhood*, p. 6.

⁹⁹ Betty Dickinson, *Shanty Town*, p. 18. So did Margaret Monkham in *As I Remember*, p. 12.

¹⁰⁰ Dolly Scannell, *Mother Knew Best*, p. 93.

¹⁰¹ Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, p. 39. Rybczynski, in his explanation of the rise of the weekend, claims that after four or five days of work the body becomes weary and needs rest. After this break the body is able to return to work with renewed vigour. However, Donald Scott in *The Psychology of Work* argued that although output from work was lowest at the end of the week it was not high at the start of the week either: Witold Rybczynski, *Waiting For the Weekend* (New York: Viking, 1991), pp. 57-58.

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Mrs Skinner took from 6.30 in the morning to 3.45 to do her washing on a Monday, but only finished ironing and mangling the clothes by ten o'clock at night. In the Glencross household washing took from morning until nine or ten in the evening.¹⁰² In James Charlton's home the ironing was finished much earlier at six in the evening and this was because there were two members of the family doing the weekly washing and their father's occupation, that of railway clerk, meant that they did not have to wash heavily soiled overalls as Mrs Skinner had to do.¹⁰³ The amount of effort that it took was reflected in the fact that washday was frequently described as "the Devil's Birthday".¹⁰⁴ Elsie Goodhead explained that washday was awful because the houses were full of steam and mothers were bad tempered and Elsie Gadsby called it "nasty temper day."¹⁰⁵ Since washing took so much time, there was little time to cook and the washing on a Monday meant that the remains of Sunday lunch could be dished up. Like washing, baths took up a considerable amount of time and energy. Valerie Avery described the "palaver" that their mother and she had to go through to have a bath. The bath was kept outside which meant that it had to be carried upstairs and cleaned out before it was used. All the water was boiled on the stove and when they had finished bathing, the bath had to be emptied bucket by bucket in the drain outside the front door.¹⁰⁶ The amount of energy required, therefore, links back to the point made above concerning the type of technology in working-class homes, some of which generated more work. The soot from coal fires meant that cleaning had to be done on a regular basis and paraffin lamps (though preferable to candles) needed to be cleaned each day before use.¹⁰⁷

The environmental conditions outside the home created more labour within it and necessitated some domestic routines. The soot from industry and domestic fires indicated why people cleaned their windows on a weekly basis. Betty Dickinson, who lived in Sheffield in the 1920s, explained that living in an industrial area meant

¹⁰² Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, pp. 28-32; Emily Glencross, *Breakfast at Windsor*, p. 35.

¹⁰³ James Charlton, *More Sand in My Shoes*, p. 76.

¹⁰⁴ William Bell, *The Road to Jericho*, p. 10. Mass Observation found that cleaning grates, shopping and washing were the three most disliked tasks in the home, while Monday was the most unpopular day of the week: Mass Observation, "Moods and Days", and "Domestic Dislikes" both in *Mass Observation Bulletin* XLIII January/February (1952), pp. 10, 14.

¹⁰⁵ Elsie Goodhead, *The West End Story*, p. 27; Elsie Gadsby, *Black Diamonds, Yellow Apples*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁶ Valerie Avery, *London Shadows*, pp. 57-56. Evans and Jones, "'A Blessing For the Miner's Wife'", p. 8.

¹⁰⁷ Alison Ravetz, *The Place of Home: English Domestic Environments, 1914-2000* (London: E.&F.N. Spon, 1995), pp. 122-3, 131.

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housework seemed “never ending” and her mother washed the curtains once a week because they were purple and black from the fumes.¹⁰⁸ Winifred Albaya, growing-up in Sheffield at about the same time as Betty, explained that the first time they were able to see the whole of Sheffield was during the miners’ lockout of 1921 when all the steel furnaces were shut down and there was no smog.¹⁰⁹ Dusty roads explained the concern with cleaning the doorstep and Valerie Avery’s experiences might indicate why some scrubbed them each day. She cleaned the doorstep on a Friday: “I was proud of the step, but not for long. Though I shouted out of the window, “Step over the step,” Granddad and Steve would take no notice and put their big muddy feet on top of it, and my work was ruined.”¹¹⁰

Elizabeth Roberts has suggested that routines for cleaning the doorstep were as much about sociability as a desire for cleanliness; it was important to clean the doorstep at the same time as everyone else in order to be able to gossip and have company while working.¹¹¹ Although none of the autobiographers commented that this was the case, they did imply that washing on the same day created a sense of solidarity because washing was often a communal activity since clothes were hung outside and sometimes even washed in the yard. Joyce and Edna Skinner noted this, explaining that since everyone else washed on Monday, there was talking between the wash houses. They further mentioned that everyone did their spring cleaning at the same time.¹¹²

The non-functional rationale behind the rhythms appear to relate to religious days and festivals since events revolved around days that once had (and for some still did have) religious significance: Sunday, Easter, Whitsun, and Christmas for the ‘Christian’ families and Passover and Saturday for the Jewish families. Thus the cleaning of house and body could be symbolic; it was to ‘purify’ them for religious days or festivals. Leslie Paul described the front doorstep to the street as being cleaned on Saturday “for Sunday”.¹¹³ Edna and Joyce Skinner explained that the house was cleaned so that “all was bright and shining for the weekend”, while Margaret Monkham commented that washing was done on a Thursday so that they

¹⁰⁸ Betty Dickinson, *Shanty Town*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁹ Winifred Albaya, *A Sheffield Childhood*, p. 45.

¹¹⁰ Valerie Avery, *London Morning*, p. 87.

¹¹¹ Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 210.

¹¹² Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, pp. 31, 87.

¹¹³ Leslie Paul, *The Boy Down Kitchener Street*, p. 66.

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would have clean clothes for the weekend.¹¹⁴ Evelyn Cowan's Jewish family, cleaned their house for the weekend as well. The significance and symbolism of these activities were openly recognised in Jewish families and for some 'Christian' families the religious significance remained. Evelyn commented that her mother was strict about every religious law. The year that her mother decided to be an agent for Passover groceries, the front room, where they were to be stored, was scrubbed out to ensure there were no bread crumbs.¹¹⁵ As mentioned above, over sixty of the families had one or more members who attended church on a seemingly regular basis on a Sunday. This meant that people were mainly aware of the religious significance of Sunday even if they had no belief themselves.

However, it was often only the children who attended church and the reasons why they did were not necessarily religious. Not only did it guarantee parents peace and quiet, but also signified that the family was 'respectable'. This was why Edward Blishen was sent to Sunday school: "I rather guess many children were sent as my sister and I were sent [to Sunday school]. It was part of general respectability, my father thought, to go to Sunday school."¹¹⁶ The desire for respectability explains the existence of the other routines and why they "couldn't be otherwise".¹¹⁷ Elizabeth Fanshawe explained this further:

Every house around the 'backs' seemed to do the same things on the same days, forever working. They were always 'mithering' about each other too, hence the saying, 'What will the neighbours think.'¹¹⁸

Therefore, washing had to be done on a Monday because it showed the neighbours the family could afford to keep someone at home to do the washing. An empty washing line on other days signalled that this family did not have to take in washing, while the widespread adherence to Monday meant that even a stranger to the street would understand what washing on a Wednesday signified. This did not mean that those who washed clothes for a living were not 'respectable' or did not see themselves as respectable. The timing and frequency of domestic activities as means of communicating respectability continued for some families until the end of the period;

¹¹⁴ Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, p. 35; Margaret Monkham, *As I Remember*, p. 12.

¹¹⁵ Evelyn Cowan, *Spring Remembered*, pp. 27-28.

¹¹⁶ Edward Blishen, *Sorry, Dad!*, p. 130.

¹¹⁷ Elizabeth Fanshawe, *Penkhull Memories*, p. 6; Walt Palmer, *Mother's Ruin*, p. 21.

¹¹⁸ Elizabeth Fanshawe, *Penkhull Memories*, p. 7.

others consciously rejected the routines of the generation above them.¹¹⁹ Elizabeth Fanshawe reacted totally against her mother's insistence on routine and when she left home deliberately refused to wash on Mondays.¹²⁰ In the inter-war period, Winifred Renshaw's mother "wasn't quite so dedicated" as the older women on her street who "considered it sluttish if [the doorstep] wasn't done before 8 a.m.", and only cleaned her step twice a week.¹²¹ Roberts mentions a woman who when she was married in 1954 only scrubbed her doorstep because her mother, anxious about what the neighbours might think, threatened to do it for her. When the mother died, the daughter stopped altogether.¹²²

The concern about what neighbours might think demonstrated that respectability required an audience and the timing of household rhythms was about preparing the home to be opened for visitors. The weekend was the time when outsiders called and this explains why baths and cleaning happened on Friday or Saturday.¹²³ An extreme example of this was when the girlfriend of Evelyn Haythorne's brother came to tea for the first time one Sunday and the entire house was cleaned the day before: the paint work was washed down; the fireplaces black-leaded; clean curtains hung up; the aspidistra was washed and they even had new coconut matting.¹²⁴ Guests also came at Christmas so the house was cleaned for this event and a new rug made for the occasion. In Winifred Albaya's home the cutlery and crockery was cleaned before Christmas and when her uncle came for Christmas the whole flat "was turned inside out and cleaned including the lace curtains."¹²⁵ Her parents also bought a new tea set and mantelpiece hanging. Evelyn Cowan's mother did her spring cleaning before the Passover and like in Winifred's family, the crockery and cutlery were cleaned and everything polished.¹²⁶ The yearly event for which the house was cleaned seems to have varied according to the location of the household. The McMullen family, who lived in Jarrow in Northumberland in 1900s, and Molly Weir's family who lived in Glasgow in the 1920s, polished and cleaned their homes for New

¹¹⁹ Mass Observation, "The Housewife's Day (2)", pp. 1-20.

¹²⁰ Elizabeth Fanshawe, *Penkhull Memories*, p. 6.

¹²¹ Winifred Renshaw, *An Ordinary Life*, Chapter 18.

¹²² Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and Families*, p. 221.

¹²³ People washed before they wore their Sunday clothes and this was a way to ensure that they were properly looked after.

¹²⁴ Evelyn Haythorne, *On Earth to Make the Numbers Up*, p. 16.

¹²⁵ Winifred Albaya, *A Sheffield Childhood*, pp. 7, 20.

¹²⁶ Evelyn Cowan, *Spring Remembered*, p. 26.

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Year's Day parties rather than Christmas.¹²⁷ An even larger number of outsiders saw children when they were on Whitsun Marches or at Sunday School Anniversary parties, indicating why they had new clothes on these days. New clothes at Christmas were less likely because fewer people saw them.

Thus, respectability was about being clean and about others seeing that the family was clean. The dominant routines were those that were to do with cleaning (washing and bathing) and rigid adherence to these routines were a means of stressing the cleanliness and respectability of a family. However, it was not just the adherence to the routine that was important, but efficiency with which it was carried out. Tables and WC seats were scrubbed until they were white and doorsteps and hearthstones whitened with donkey-stone. It was particularly important that washing was white because it was on view to all and as Molly Weir explained, it was source of pride for someone to say "she hangs out a lovely washing."¹²⁸ This concern for whiteness indicates that the level of cleanliness desired and obtained exceeded that which even environmental conditions and level of technology made necessary.

The routines followed by working-class households were necessary and functional, responding to institutional time, the extent of space and type technology. This belies the Davidoff's statement that working-class homes were even less likely to adopt "rational economic organisations" than middle-class households.¹²⁹ In fact there was greater need for working-class homes to use their time efficiently, because although middle-class households were affected by institutional time and may have followed weekly routines, they had access to time-saving technology, more space and more help. Within the working class, routine was associated with respectability, but even the poorest families followed routines, and status seems to have caused less differences than occupation (of men and women) and the location of the home. The length of time and energy taken to do tasks meant that more members of the household were involved in the housework. The question of who was allocated which tasks is addressed in the following chapter.

¹²⁷ Catherine Cookson, *Our Kate*, p. 104; Molly Weir, *Shoes Were For Sunday*, p. 155.

¹²⁸ Molly Weir, *Shoes Were For Sunday*, p. 113.

¹²⁹ Davidoff, "The Rationalization of Housework", p. 138.

Chapter Eight

“When Father Papered The Parlour”?: The Allocation of Domestic Tasks

When Father papered the parlour
You didn't see father for paste
Splashing here, splashing there
Paste and paper everywhere
Mother was stuck to the ceiling
The kids were stuck to the floor
I've never seen such a family
So stuck up before¹

The second chapter in this section examines how time was spent in the working-class home. The focus is on domestic tasks, rather than on leisure activities, and how they were distributed among members of the household. The chapter begins by explaining what tasks were 'domestic' in the period 1900-1955 and then describes those tasks undertaken by different family members and how allocation of tasks was affected by status, age and gender. The second part of the chapter analyses why it was the ideal that the mother did most of the domestic work and focuses on how men's paid labour affected the division of domestic tasks. The final part describes those circumstances in which women were helped by other members of the family to a greater extent as a result of a dead or absent parent, male unemployment, and female employment.

Part One: The Division of Domestic Tasks

Ann Oakley defined what she considered to be the six “core” tasks of housework: cleaning; shopping; cooking; washing; washing-up; and ironing.² Pauline Hunt concurred with this definition, supporting Oakley's decision to exclude tasks generally done by men, such as home maintenance or gardening, on the basis that men choose to do these tasks and “[n]o social compulsion is involved.”³ Others have used

¹ Popular song.

² Ann Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework* (Bath: Martin Robinson, 1974), p. 49.

³ Pauline Hunt, “Gender and the Construction of Home Life” in G. Allan, and G. Crow, eds., *Home and Family: Creating the Domestic Sphere* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 67.

broader definitions of housework and have included tasks done by both men and women. Maureen MacKintosh, in a study of Senegal villages, uses the term "non-agricultural" work to cover those tasks done at or for the home. It covered: food preparation; cleaning; washing; care of children; wood and other gathering activities; care of sick; and physical maintenance of the house and its fencing.⁴ Despite the cultural differences, Blood and Wolfe's description of housework in their study of American families was similar to MacKintosh's, and included activities such as gardening, DIY and decorating. These activities were incorporated into Stephen Edgell's definition of domestic work in his study of gender divisions in British middle-class relationships.⁵

My definition of domestic work covers all those activities that entail labour for the benefit of home and family. For a single-person household, domestic work concerns the home only; for a couple or family it is work done for both home and other family members. Such a definition recognises that employment outside the home which provides for the family is a domestic task, though the more the earners spend on themselves the less 'domestic' it becomes. Thus, time spent in paid employment and travel to work is an indirect contribution towards domestic labour. While Hunt is arguably correct that men can choose to do DIY or gardening, this does not stop them from being domestic tasks.⁶ Furthermore, these tasks are not done by men alone, and to exclude them means that a group of domestic tasks performed by women are ignored.

While this definition of domestic work could apply to any period or place, the types of tasks that it encompasses can vary according to period, location, class and status. In the period 1900-1955, many household goods were produced in the home, such as clothes, bread, bedding and furnishings. Gardening was part of this production and many families had allotments from necessity because the family economy depended on it. Even within this period, the concept of 'domestic' tasks was not static. First, on a regional level, families in certain parts of the country continued to produce goods which families in other areas bought. Bread making, for example, was more prevalent in northern England, and quilting continued longest there and in

⁴ Maureen MacKintosh, "Domestic Labour and the Household" in Sandra Burman, ed., *Fit Work For Women* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), p. 178.

⁵ Stephen Edgell, *Middle-Class Couples: A Study of Segregation, Domination and Inequality in Marriage* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980), pp. 10-11.

⁶ Young and Willmott found that men did not see decorating and repairs as a leisure activity: Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (1957, Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1970), p. 209.

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Wales.⁷ Second, domestic tasks related to income and hence the status of a family. Boot mending was important in poor homes but as Winifred Renshaw observed, her father stopped doing this once he could afford to pay someone to do it.⁸ Third, people who lived in rural areas continued to do tasks that those living in towns no longer had to do, such as emptying the earth closet which was still a domestic task for some in the 1950s.⁹ Fourth, there were changes within the period, and by 1955, generally fewer goods were produced at home rendering certain tasks redundant. Betty Dickinson illustrated this point well. She and her husband had made their rugs as her parents had done, and their final one lasted until 1959 when carpets became affordable “even for the working class.”¹⁰ Other tasks increased, or had gained commercial recognition, as in the case of DIY, though the frequency with which people painted and papered their homes diminished as a result of improved housing and better paint.¹¹

The extent to which different members of the family participated in domestic work and the type of tasks they were willing to do varied from one family to another. The maximum number of tasks described as being performed by a mother in the autobiographies was eighteen while for a father it was fourteen. This was Joyce and Edna Skinner’s father who was:

very ready to do his bit in the house, washing up, lighting the fire, swilling out the passage, chopping sticks, cleaning shoes, cleaning windows, and at spring cleaning time beating carpets, polishing furniture and painting and decorating.¹²

This was unusual and on average, mothers were recorded as doing 3.5 tasks each, girls about three, father around two and boys just over one. This considerably understates

⁷ Alison Ravetz, *The Place of Home: English Domestic Environments, 1914-2000* (London: E.&F.N. Spon, 1995), p. 126; Anne Ward, “Quilting in the North of England”, *Folk Life: Journal of Ethnological Studies* IV (1966), pp. 75-83. Leslie Paul explained the reason why his mother baked was because she was from Lancashire: Leslie Paul, *The Boy Down Kitchener Street*, p. 63.

⁸ Winifred Renshaw, *An Ordinary Life*, Chapter 20.

⁹ One woman who lived in a village in Norfolk in the early 1950s described how her husband emptied the bucket once a week: Norfolk Federation of Women’s Institutes, *Norfolk: Within Living Memory* (Newbury: Countryside Books, 1995), p. 56.

¹⁰ Betty Dickinson, *Shanty Town*, p. 27.

¹¹ Ravetz maintains that DIY increased in the 1950s, though damp walls, bugs and lime-based paint meant that decorating was frequent before this period: Alison Ravetz, *The Place of Home*, p. 169. The paint in the hall of Fred Archer’s home was lime washed. This flaked because there was no oil in it and it had to be swept up everyday: Fred Archer, *Fred Archer, Farmer’s Son*, p. 14.

¹² Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, p. 82.

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the amount of domestic work done by women, because they were less often described as doing specific tasks and were instead described as doing all-encompassing tasks such as "cleaning", "cooking", "washing" or "shopping". The greater number of female autobiographers and the fact that they described in detail tasks they had done themselves, indicates that the figure for girls is more reliable than that for mothers. The most under-represented group were fathers who in all but two cases had their tasks described by other people.

Because there were so many different household tasks, I have aggregated them into eight different groups in order to assess which members of the family were doing what tasks. These groups were:

- 1 FOOD PREPARATION all activities which produced food including: cooking, baking, meal preparation and making cups of tea, plucking and skinning birds or rabbits (cited infrequently), jam making and fruit bottling, and making beer or wine (done by both parents)
- 2 CLEANING tasks commonly associated with water: washing-up, scrubbing, cleaning windows; other jobs which did not require water: tidying up, laying the table, making beds, fumigating, cleaning boots and shoes (done by children, principally girls)
- 3 WASHING washing, ironing, mangling, setting copper fire (often a father's task) and possing
- 4 SEWING unspecified sewing tasks, knitting, mending; production of: clothes, bed linen, quilts and curtains, and rag rugs
- 5 HOME MAINTENANCE decorating, house maintenance, 'DIY', making furniture
- 6 CHILD-CARE child minding, spending time with children and providing them with entertainment, taking physical care of children by: cutting their hair, bathing them, giving them medicine and looking after them when they were ill
- 7 SHOPPING shopping, collecting and delivering washing, taking batteries to be re-charged, carrying food to and from public bakehouse, fetching beer, collecting milk, and making insurance and other payments
- 8 OUTDOOR TASKS looking after the vegetable garden, chopping wood, carrying coal from the coal house, collecting wood and coal, looking after animals (not necessarily a rural task) collecting manure off the road (done by both girls and boys), blackberrying, and fetching water (generally a girl's task)

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Individuals who performed more than one task in each category were recorded in this category only once and this means that the quantitative analysis which follows does not assess levels of participation of different household members in certain domestic tasks, but whether they did any tasks at all in each category. For example, if a person did several tasks which came under "food preparation" such as for cooking, baking and jam making, they featured in the aggregated data to the same extent as someone who only skinned rabbits or made beer. Moreover, the frequency with which the tasks were done is also obscured: some members of the household did the cooking every day while others did it once a week, but even if they only did the task infrequently they are all recorded as doing the cooking. To summarise, the following analysis is about the sorts of tasks that people did or helped with in order to assess rigidity of accepted gender roles; it is not about the relative size of their contribution to these tasks.

The tasks performed by mothers and fathers did generally conform to the stereotypical views of what constituted men and women's roles. Thus women cooked, cleaned, washed and sewed more than anyone else, while fathers did household maintenance and outdoor tasks such as gardening, wood chopping or emptying the closet. Mothers also took charge of the household budget which would explain why they dealt with the pawning of items (even if they did not go to the pawnshop themselves) and did the main 'shop' rather than fathers. However, within this generalisation, tasks were allocated to mothers and fathers which were less predictable. Fathers, for example, were recorded as doing more childcare than mothers, and one in five fathers cooked, which was the same proportion as the number of fathers doing outdoor tasks (Table 8.1). While the kinds of childcare done by fathers was mainly to do with entertainment, there were fathers who were willing to take care of sick children and babies. In the 1910s, Dorothy Fudge's father would go to the children when they called in the night, while Winifred Foley's father in the 1920s helped with babies at night. When Emily Glencross's husband came home on leave during the Second World War, he offered to look after the baby so that Emily could get a proper night's sleep.¹³ Fathers did other things for children including bathing them and cutting their hair.¹⁴ Quite a high percentage of fathers did sewing jobs. This was because fathers made rugs or helped with making rag rugs and they were almost as

¹³ Dorothy Fudge, *Sands of Time*, p. 3; Winifred Foley, *A Child in the Forest*, p. 22; Emily Glencross, *For Better or For Worse*, p. 22.

¹⁴ Mollie Harris, *A Kind Of Magic*, p. 33; Joseph Farrington, "Manchester", p. 19; Dick Beavis, *What Price Happiness*, p. 9; Joe Loftus, "Lee Side", p. 31; Edward Blishen, *Sorry, Dad!*, p. 42; Elinor Sanderson, "Elinor Sanderson", p. 68; Joan Booker, *A Newbury Childhood*, p. 35. There were only two references to mothers cutting children's hair: Valerie Tedder, *The Pantry Under the Stairs*, p. 18; Elinor Sanderson, "Elinor Sanderson", p. 68.

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likely to do this as women: one in seven fathers made rugs compared with one in six mothers (Table 8.2). Mothers, apart from doing less childcare, did do activities that have commonly been associated with men. Although they did not do carpentry, they did paint and wallpaper as much as their husbands (Table 8.3) and one in ten did outdoor tasks.

Table 8.1: Allocating Tasks

Task Type	Mothers n= 127	Fathers n=119	Daughters n=130 (families)	Sons n= 130 (families)
	%	%	%	%
Cooking and food prep.	54.3	19.3	22.3	6.2
Cleaning/washing-up	46.5	16.8	41.5	18.5
Washing and ironing	40.2	5.9	23.1	6.9
Sewing/rug making	45.7	15.1	18.5	7.7
'DIY'/decorating	7.1	31.9	6.2	4.6
Care of children	26.8	30.3	23.1	7.7
Shopping errands	24.4	6.7	38.5	25.4
Outdoor tasks	11.0	18.5	15.4	20.0

The fact that men and women did not always conform to the stereotypical roles is explained further in the final part of the chapter. However, some of the similarities found in the type of tasks they performed were to do with the way the autobiographers remembered the tasks done by their parents. Fathers were remembered for childcare, not necessarily because they did it more than mothers, but because mothers looked after children for long periods while doing other tasks. Therefore, it seemed less obvious to the children that their mothers were taking care of them. Fathers, on the other hand, did specific activities with children such as playing games or taking them walking or cycling. They would also take care of children at specific times of the week, such as Sunday morning or afternoon, which again made the time spent with fathers more memorable.¹⁵ The remembering of fathers' contributions to domestic work because it happened at special times can also be used to explain the number of men who cooked or prepared food as well: they were generally described as doing this on specific days of the week or in relation to specific foods; only one father was described as doing it all the time.¹⁶ They might cook breakfast on a Sunday, like Edith Evans's, Elsie Gadsby's and Edna Nockalls's

¹⁵ Fathers took children out on Sundays so that mothers could prepare the Sunday dinner, or, as in Winifred Foley's and May Ayers's cases, looked after them so that their mother could go to church: Winifred Foley, *A Child in the Forest*, p. 25; May Ayers, *Memoirs of a Shannock*, p. 14.

¹⁶ Joseph Farrington, "Manchester", p. 14.

fathers, while other fathers such as Henry Blacker's and Margaret Monkham's prepared special foods.¹⁷ Margaret's father only cooked mussels, which he bought from a hawker once a week, while in the 1920s Henry's father would prepare them hot cocoa and buttered cholla on Saturday evening after the Sabbath had finished.¹⁸ Thus Figures 8.1 and 8.2 obscure the amount of cooking and childcare which fathers did, but they do give an indication of their willingness to participate in certain activities.

Table 8.2: Sewing, Knitting and Rug Making (Totals)

Items Made & Tasks Done	Mothers n = 127	Fathers n = 119	Daughters n = 130	Sons n = 130
Clothes	25	2	8	0
Rugs	20	17	11	10
Mending	18	1	7	1
Sewing (unspec)	14	0	5	0
Knitting	13	2	2	0
Bed linen	4	0	1	0
Curtains	3	0	1	0

Daughters, like their mothers, did the cleaning, washing and cooking and were as unlikely to do house maintenance though they helped with the decorating.¹⁹ Proportionately daughters were doing less of all these tasks than their mothers with the exception of cleaning jobs which they did almost as much. This was to do with the nature of the tasks which were described: as with tasks done by fathers, daughters were described as doing specific sorts of jobs such polishing the grate or brass ornaments, cleaning windows, washing-up and making beds. As explained above, although mothers did these tasks, they to be tended to be described just as doing "the cleaning". This point is illustrated well by Elizabeth Fanshawe who described her mother as cleaning the bedrooms and the other rooms, and scrubbing out the backyard. Elizabeth, on the other hand, black-leaded and polishing the boot scraper, scrubbed the tiles in the hall and cleaned the shelves in the meat safe.²⁰ The tasks in which there was the greatest disparity between mothers and daughters were cooking and sewing; girls made clothes but did not knit as much as their mothers (Table 8.2). On the other hand girls undertook more outdoor tasks and errands than mothers which suggested that age affected the allocation of tasks as well as gender.

¹⁷ Edith Evans, *Rough Diamonds*, p. 147; Elsie Gadsby, *Black Diamonds, Yellow Apples*, p. 10; Edna Nockalls, *Another Time, Another Place*, p. 6.

¹⁸ Margaret Monkham, *As I Remember*, p. 22; Henry Blacker, *Just Like It Was*, p. 30.

¹⁹ Doreen Wildgoose, *What Did You Do in the War, Grandma?*, p. 81; Maggie Newbery, *Reminiscences of a Bradford Mill Girl*, p. 74; May Ayers, *Memoirs of a Shannock*, p. 26; Winifred Renshaw, *An Ordinary Life*, Chapter 10.

²⁰ Elizabeth Fanshawe, *Penkhull Memories*, pp. 4, 6.

Table 8.3: Decorating, DIY and Mending Boots (Totals)

Task	Mothers n = 127	Fathers n = 119	Daughters n = 130	Sons n = 130
Decorating	7	8	6	2
DIY	2	16	0	2
Make furniture	1	6	0	1
Mend boots	1	18	3	1

The impact of age on the allocation of tasks is well demonstrated by the level and sorts of jobs done by boys. Of all family members, boys generally participated in domestic work the least and the only tasks that they did more than anyone else were outdoor ones, such as collecting wood. There was less similarity between the kinds of tasks fathers and sons performed than those done by mothers and daughters. Although they were as likely to do cleaning, washing and outdoor tasks as fathers, they were a third as likely to cook,²¹ one sixth as likely to do DIY and less than a third as likely as their fathers to look after children. The difference between jobs performed by men and boys is further enhanced by the fact that the tasks boys did most, errands and shopping, were among those which men did least.

Participation in tasks was only slightly affected by the status of families.²² For the mothers the greatest difference was between semi-skilled and unskilled groups: the latter were three times as likely as to do childcare. Semi-skilled husbands were twice as likely as to cook and were three times as likely to sew than the other fathers. The fewest differences were in the tasks done by girls, and sewing was the job which generated the most difference between status groups: the unskilled doing twice as much as the semi-skilled workers' daughters. Unskilled men's sons did the least washing and cleaning, but the most shopping and errands, while the semi-skilled sons were twice as likely to prepare meals as the others. When the family members of each status groups were compared, the types of tasks they performed were again little different from the overall data. The principal differences were that fathers who were semi-skilled workers did considerably more child-care than the rest of their family. This reflects the fact that this group contained unemployed men, and their contribution to home life is discussed in greater depth in the final section of the chapter. Wives of unskilled workers did more cooking and washing, and unlike the skilled and semi-

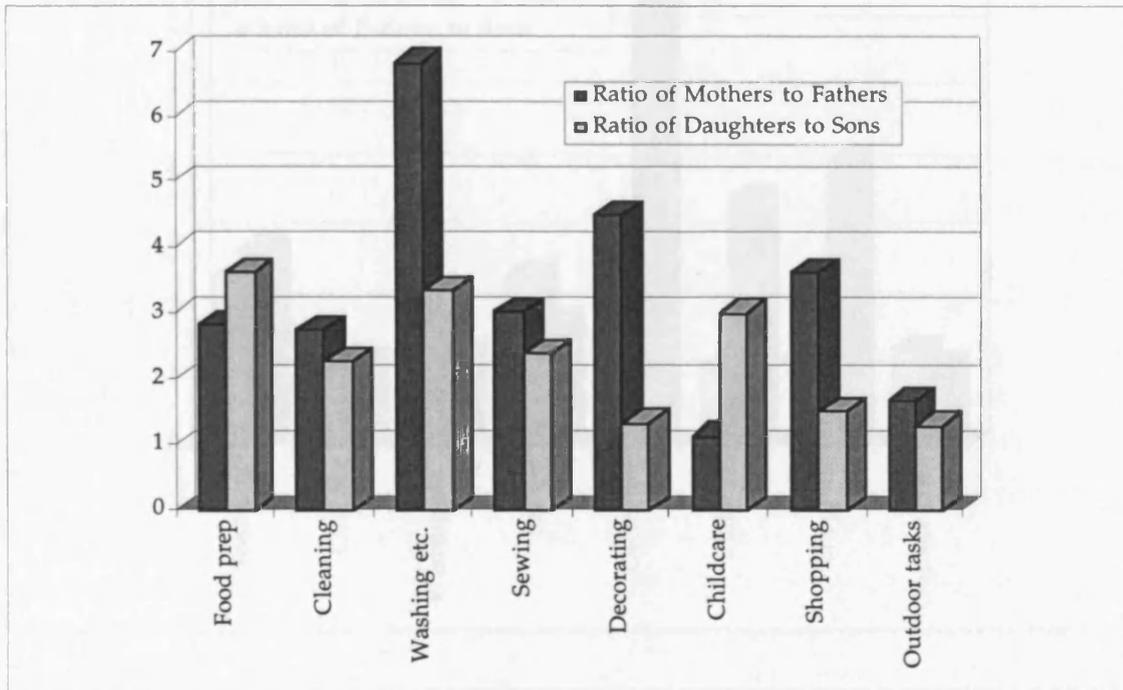
²¹ Jean Faley referred to instances when sons prepared meals: Martha MacMillan's mother would sometimes keep a son at home to cook on washday, while Peggy Taylor's brothers would make soup: Jean Faley, *Up Oor Close: Memories of Domestic Life in Glasgow Tenements, 1910-1945* (Wendlebury: White Cockade, 1990), p. 71.

²² The data on status and the allocation of tasks is in Appendix Two.

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skilled men's wives, had less help from daughters with the cleaning. No unskilled father was described as doing the shopping, which was done by girls and mothers. Mothers also performed child-related tasks the most in these unskilled families, though fathers helped more with this than girls.

Figure 8.1: Division of Tasks: Gender

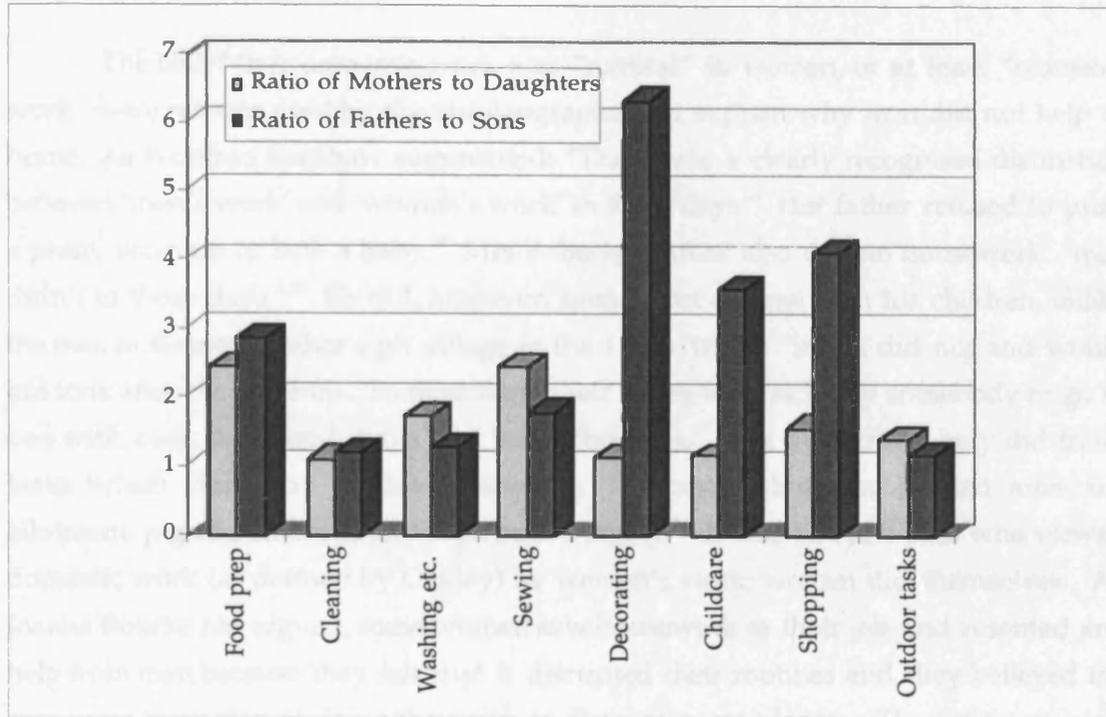


Thus the allocation of tasks was circumscribed by both age and gender. Mothers and daughters were likely to do the same kinds of tasks, as Figure 8.2 illustrates, while mothers and fathers seemed to participate to a similar degree only in specific child-care tasks (Figure 8.1). Fathers and daughters had some similarities and were as likely to do childcare, cooking and sewing. The gap between the domestic work done by girls and boys was smaller than that between fathers and mothers and this suggests that overall domestic work performed by married adults was divided according to gender more than those done by children. However, within this generalisation, fathers did certain tasks that have been labelled 'women's work' more than when they were boys. The greater extremes which existed in the types of tasks done by men and boys suggests again that age was an important factor in the allocation of tasks. Thus, girls from an early age were taught and expected to do tasks which they would perform as housewives, while boys did domestic tasks which provided them with no appropriate training for the tasks which they had to do when they were husbands and fathers: the jobs boys did the most were rarely done by

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fathers and vice versa.²³ The consequences of lack of training for boys is discussed further in the following section.

Figure 8.2: Division of Tasks: Age



Part Two: Strategies of Domestic Labour

Part One demonstrated that the majority, though by no means all, of domestic work was carried out by the female members of the family, generally the mother. Laite and Halfpenny noted that there were two ways of explaining why domestic tasks were mainly done by women.²⁴ The first is Oakley's "cultural approach" in which women do domestic work because of belief in their "natural" affinity towards home, an attitude which suited capitalist development.²⁵ The second was what Laite and Halfpenny referred to as the "pragmatic approach" in which families "allocated resources in the light of their circumstances."²⁶ They maintain that both these

²³ Davin noted that boys were expected to do domestic tasks for which they had no training at school, unlike girls: Anna Davin, *Growing Up Poor: Home, School and Street in London 1870-1914* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1996), p. 11.

²⁴ Julian Laite and Peter Halfpenny, "Employment, Unemployment and the Domestic Division of Labour" in D. Fryer and P. Ullah, eds., *Unemployed People: Social and Psychological Perspectives* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987), pp. 217-8.

²⁵ Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework*, p. 113; Laite and Halfpenny, "Employment, Unemployment and the Domestic Division of Labour", pp. 217-8.

²⁶ Laite and Halfpenny, "Employment, Unemployment and the Domestic Division of Labour",

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approaches are important for understanding why men do less domestic work. The “cultural” forces are addressed in the first half of this section, while the second assesses men’s role as breadwinners and how this might have prevented them from taking a more active role in the home.

The belief that domestic work was “natural” to women, or at least “women’s work” were reasons used by the autobiographers to explain why men did not help at home. As Winifred Renshaw commented: “There was a clearly recognised distinction between ‘men’s work’ and ‘women’s work’ in those days.” Her father refused to push a pram, wash up or bath a baby.²⁷ Mrs Roberts’s father also did no housework: “men didn’t in those days.”²⁸ He did, however, spend a lot of time with his children, unlike the men in Kenneth Maher’s pit village in the 1920s where “[m]en did not and would not look after the children...To most men, their wives was [sic] only somebody to go to bed with, cook their food, have and look after kids.” His mother not only did those tasks which Hunt and Oakley defined as “domestic” but also looked after the allotment, pig and chickens and even built a pigsty.²⁹ It was not just men who viewed domestic work (as defined by Oakley) as women’s work; women did themselves. As Joanna Bourke has argued, some women saw housework as their job and resented any help from men because they felt that it disrupted their routines and they believed the men were incapable of doing the work to their own standards. They did not view domestic work as menial but work that needed to be learned and required skill.³⁰ Ernie Taberner’s childhood experience of the division of domestic labour in the 1920s supported this view. He explained that there was a strong belief that men and women should stick to their jobs and this was not regarded as “sexist” at the time, rather a “fact of life”.³¹ Thus both men and women had definite ideas of what ‘domestic’ work entailed and who they believed should be doing it.

For some men it was not just the case that it was women’s work, but that as women’s work it was beneath them. Like Kenneth Maher’s father, Catherine Cookson’s grandfather and uncle would not even do more ‘masculine’ tasks such as mending shoes because “it lowered a man’s prestige if he as much as lifted a cup.” She added further:

pp. 217-8.

²⁷ Winifred Renshaw, *An Ordinary Life*, Chapter 25.

²⁸ Mrs Roberts, “Better Than Television”, p. 184.

²⁹ Kenneth Maher, “Caerphilly”, pp. 33-35.

³⁰ Joanna Bourke, “Housewifery in Working-Class England, 1860-1914”, *Past and Present* 143 (1994), pp. 185, 187.

³¹ Ernie Taberner, *A Lancashire Upbringing*, p. 44.

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Both me granda and me uncle Jack would have let their clothes go rotten on their backs before they would have washed them; as far as cooking a meal, even if they had known how to, they wouldn't have lowered themselves to the level of the fire, or the gas stove.³²

Kathlyn Davenport's uncles in the 1920s, too, considered that "housework and cooking were beneath their dignity."³³

Kathlyn's uncles may have thought that cooking was beneath them, but as the first part of the chapter showed, one in five of the fathers/husbands could bring themselves to do it occasionally. This was not the case for washing: one in seventeen fathers helped and only one father actually did the washing. This may have been because cooking was less menial and more creative than washing. However, it could have been due to the fact that in the public sphere men were paid to cook but only women were paid to wash. This gave cooking more prestige and made it more acceptable to do it at home.³⁴ This did not mean that men who were cooks or bakers necessarily cooked at home, but it made it more justifiable even to men who did not cook for a living.³⁵

This indicates that the type of work which men and women did outside the home had an impact on the kind of tasks they did within it. It also suggests that ability to do a task could be instrumental in whether a man helped at home. The decision for men to help might involve both husband and wife because, as Bourke pointed out, women thought their husbands lacked the necessary skills.³⁶ As indicated earlier, boys did not learn the domestic skills they needed as adults and the biggest gap was in the 'DIY' category. This would explain why "when father painted the parlour" it was such a disaster and why several autobiographers mentioned that their fathers were not very good at home maintenance.³⁷ Thus, although some men might not

³² Catherine Cookson, *Our Kate*, p. 26.

³³ Kathlyn Davenport, *My Preston Yesterdays*, p. 24.

³⁴ Some women evidently viewed washing and cleaning in the same light. Mary Hewins did all the "rough stuff" such as cleaning and washing, while her mother did all cooking and baking. Jim Bullock's mother only supervised the washing and cleaning, which was done by her daughter, but did the baking herself. James Charlton's sister who helped his mother did the heaviest tasks on washday and did the "detestable and dangerous" chore of cleaning the windows: Mary Hewins, "Mary, After the Queen", p. 362; Jim Bullock, *Bowers Row*, pp. 11-12; James Charlton, *More Sand in My Shoes*, pp. 75, 77, 108.

³⁵ Two of the fathers and husbands were ship's cooks but there was no mention of them cooking at home.

³⁶ Bourke, "Housewifery in Working-Class England 1860-1914", pp. 186-187.

³⁷ Joyce and Edna Skinner's father was not very good at "do-it-yourself". Winifred Renshaw

do washing because it was beneath them, others did not do it because they could not. They had not acquired this skill as boys (about one in seventeen boys helped with the washing) and were unlikely to learn it since was perceived as the kind of job only women were paid to do. Tasks that fathers were more willing to do were those which they learnt to do while at work. One father who was a baker did all the holiday cooking at home and taught his daughter how to cook. He "loved cooking 'cause he had been a cook in the First World War. An' ye never got near the cooker when he was in."³⁸ Joan Booker's father, as a carpenter, had no problems doing 'DIY' and made several items of furniture for their home.³⁹ Winifred Albaya's father, who was a spoon and fork stamper, would clean all the cutlery for Christmas although he felt he did enough of this at work.⁴⁰ Some men were forced by domestic circumstances to learn how to perform certain jobs. Emily Glencross's husband looked after her when she had 'flu over Christmas 1938. He prepared the meals "which was something he became quite adept at" and dusted and black-leaded the grate. He was also anxious to do the job properly:

During the time I had been in bed George had come upstairs several times to ask me how I cleaned the hearth and it became quite a joke between us. When I was going downstairs again after a fortnight in bed he said that he still could not do the hearth like I did, but he had done his best. So he had....⁴¹

Not all men were willing to transfer their skills to the domestic environment (and women did not necessarily want them to either),⁴² and as for Catherine Cookson's grandfather and uncle, she believed they would have refused cook even if they had known how.

Diana Gittins and Miriam Glucksmann argue that status and gender composition of husbands and wives' occupations influenced male participation in domestic work. Glucksmann has examined two groups of couples: the first consisting

described her father as "not much of a handyman" since the only shelves he had ever put up were lopsided and Kathlyn Davenport's father mended and made things for their home with the same lack of success: Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, p. 82; Winifred Renshaw, *An Ordinary Life*, Chapter 20; Kathlyn Davenport, *My Preston Yesterdays*, p. 21.

³⁸ Faley, *Up Oor Close*, p. 70.

³⁹ Joan Booker, *A Newbury Childhood*, p. 5.

⁴⁰ Winifred Albaya, *A Sheffield Childhood*, p. 7.

⁴¹ Emily Glencross, *For Better or For Worse*, p. 10.

⁴² Bourke argues that women did not want men to learn domestic skills because they thought it would threaten their authority in home: Bourke, "Housewifery in Working-Class England 1860-1914", pp. 186-187.

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of husbands employed in single-sex industries (often dockers or labourers) whose wives were doing 'unskilled' labour of cleaning and washing; the second covering wives and husbands who worked full-time in the textile industry where women did the same kind of tasks for similar wages as men. She has found that the first group of men were less inclined to do housework than the second and that the women themselves had different attitudes to domestic labour. The women who washed and cleaned for a living placed a high value on their role as housewives but did not rate their paid labour at all highly. The reverse was the case for the women employed in the textile industry, who saw themselves as skilled workers and thought that their paid work was more important than their domestic work.⁴³ The first section of this chapter showed that there was not much difference between skilled and unskilled workers' participation in domestic tasks. However, the 'maleness' of an occupation may have been an issue, and a comparison between miners and other skilled workers showed that there were differences in the amount of tasks done by each group (Figure 8.3). Miners did less of all domestic tasks with the exception of 'DIY', which they did far more, and child care which they did equally. Morris has extended this argument to assess how gendered leisure activities affected the division of labour in the home. She argues that male "collective" socialising which entailed a higher level of interaction with other men resulted in a more traditional and rigid division of labour within the home.⁴⁴

Another reason why miners helped less relates to the question of domestic skills. Miners, like other men-only occupations, were unlikely to acquire relevant skills at work which could be transferred to the home. However, the case of sailors illustrates the importance of skill acquisition in the workplace as a factor influencing male willingness to participate in household tasks. For example, two unemployed sailors were notable for their high degree of participation, both because they were

⁴³ Miriam Glucksmann, "Some Do, Some Don't (But in Fact They All Do Really); Some Will, Some Won't; Some Have, Some Haven't: Women, Men, Work, and Washing Machines in Inter-War Britain", *Gender and History* VII 2 (1995), pp. 275-294. Gittins has examined three groups of wives: wives of textile workers who were employed full-time; wives of miners who did not work outside the home; and a control group from the South East of England which was a mixture of employed and non-employed wives. She has found that the weaver's husbands shared housework while those women who had had an isolated occupation before marriage had little or no help from their husbands. Like Glucksmann she notes that men who had been in single-sex employment regarded women's work as inferior: Diana Gittins, *Fair Sex: Family Size and Structure 1900-1939* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), pp. 31, 130-142.

⁴⁴ Lydia Morris, "Local Social Network and Domestic Organisations: a Study of Redundant Steel Workers and Their Wives", *The Sociological Review* XXXIII 1 (1985), pp. 327-342. Lein noted that men's networks did not provide the support for increased involvement in home life: Laura Lein, "Male Participation in Home Life: Impact of Social Supports and Breadwinner Responsibility on the Allocation of Tasks", *The Family Coordinator* Oct. (1970), p. 489, 492.

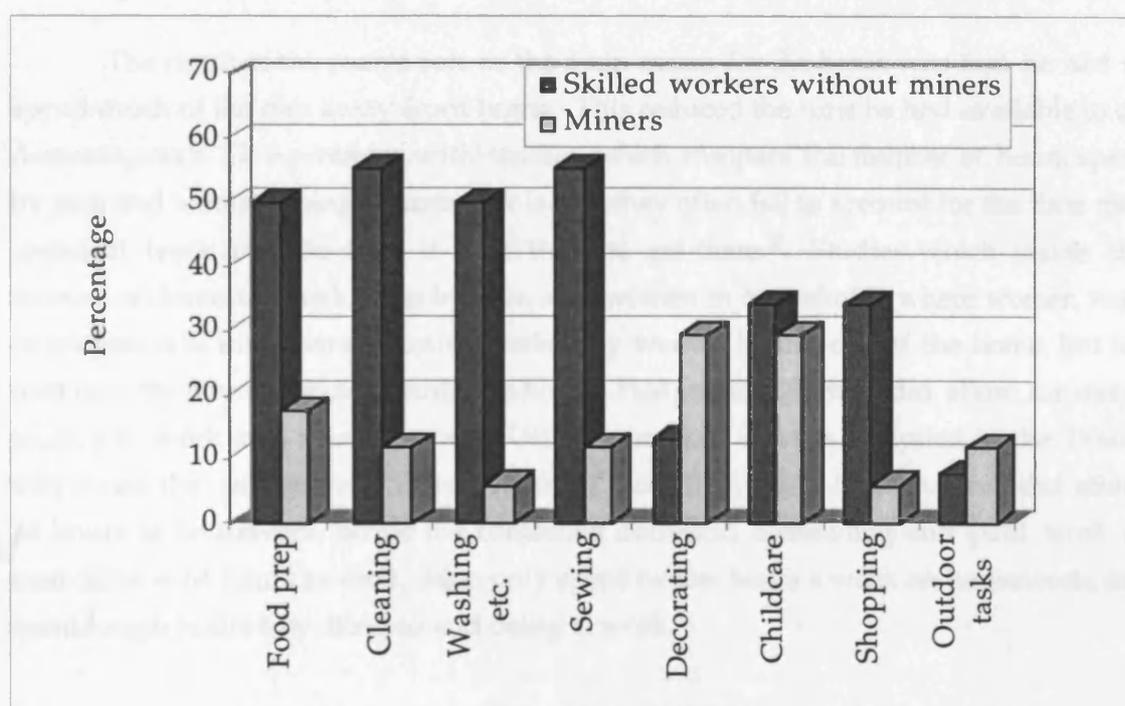
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unemployed and also because when aboard ship they had to do tasks which, if they had been at home, would have been done by their wives:⁴⁵

My dad used to get two canvas bags and sew them together. He'd cut up different coloured coats and make a pattern. It was as though he'd bought it in a shop when he'd finished it. He was clever with being a sailor. He could knit, he could splice a rope, he could do anything. He even used to cook the meals because my mother couldn't cook.⁴⁶

Like Joseph's father, Rose Gamble's made mats to go in front of the fire and it was their ability to sew in particular which set them apart from other unemployed fathers. Rose's father also cooked, cleaned, made furniture and mops, and was responsible for keeping their one room "shipshape".⁴⁷

Figure 8.3: Miners and Skilled Workers Contribution to Domestic Tasks



Laite and Halfpenny argued that the cultural and pragmatic approaches should be combined to explain why men did less domestic work. They do not, however, stress that one is the consequence of the other. By 1900 it was assumed that

⁴⁵ Men also had to do domestic tasks as soldiers, and this may have been why Mollie Harris's stepfather, who "kept his army habits", machined their dresses and made rag rugs: Mollie Harris, *A Kind of Magic*, pp. 30, 128.

⁴⁶ Joseph Farrington, "Manchester", p. 14.

⁴⁷ Rose Gamble, *A Chelsea Childhood*, p. 34. Each member of the family had a "locker" and all the beds had to be called bunks.

it was 'natural' for women to do domestic work and it was 'natural' that the husband should be the breadwinner. This resulted in the 'family wage', which meant that when women had, or wanted, to work in the non-domestic sphere they were paid less than men on the assumption that they had a man (father/husband) who provided for them. In order to ensure the maximum income (and 'protection') for the family, whether the family agreed with this situation or not, it was 'practical' for the man to go out to work. It was important to co-operate with the concept of the 'family wage' for the good of the family.⁴⁸ Domestic work still had to be done and in some families more money was saved by women staying at home, or by women doing domestic and part-time work. Not all couples co-operated with each other and some were "confrontational" as result of this gendered division of labour: women may have used housewifery to increase their power over their husbands, while men may have kept their wages from their wives.⁴⁹

The result of the man's role as the main earner for the home was that he had to spend much of the day away from home. This reduced the time he had available to do domestic work. One problem with studies which compare the number of hours spent by men and women doing housework is that they often fail to account for the time men spend at work and the time it took them to get there.⁵⁰ Studies which assess the amount of domestic work done by men and women in households where women were employed, take into account hours worked by women in and out of the home, but for men only the hours worked within the home. Hedges and Barnett did allow for men's journey to work and time at work. Using household surveys compiled in the 1960s, they found that women who were employed more than thirty hours a week did about 34 hours of housework, while the combined domestic, commuting and paid work of men came to 64 hours as well. Men only spent twelve hours a week on housework, but spent longer hours travelling to and being at work.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Lein noted in 1979 that "[m]en do not see their wage-earning activities apart from family life. As they see it, working in the paid labour force is their primary contribution to the well-being of their families." The habit of "tipping" wages by some men in the first half of the century suggested that this attitude was not new: Lein, "Male Participation in Home Life", p. 493; Andrew Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working-Class Culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992), p. 31.

⁴⁹ Bourke, "Housewifery in Working-Class England 1860-1914", p. 171.

⁵⁰ Oakley examined the effort men put into domestic work only, while Vanek is vague even about the hours men spent in housework: Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework*, Chapter 8; Joann Vanek, "Time Spent in Housework", *The Scientific American* 321 Nov. (1974), p. 87.

⁵¹ Janice Hedges and Jeanne Barnett, "Working Women and the Division of Household Tasks", *Monthly Labour Review* XCV 4 (1972), pp. 10-11.

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Contemporary surveys did not look at the number of hours men spent in domestic work, whether this was digging the allotment, playing with the children, or lighting the copper. Dennis et al in their study of a coal mining community justified this by claiming that: "It is not relevant in connection with a study of family life to describe in detail the activities of men."⁵² Such an attitude makes it impossible to compare the combined working hours of men with those of women. However, it is possible to estimate the amount of time men were out at work. Before the First World War, Maud Pember Reeves, indirectly recorded the amount of time some men spent at home while detailing housewives' routines. One husband, who was a carman for the L.C.C., left at five o'clock in the morning and did not return until 7.30 in the evening and went to bed at around 8.30. Another husband on night shift, returned at 9.30 for breakfast and slept from around ten o'clock until five in the afternoon when he had his dinner. He left for work again at 6.30 which meant that in total he spent two hours a day awake at home and during these two hours he had two meals.⁵³ In the period 1918-21, the average number of hours worked each day in a six-day week was reduced from nine to eight hours. This applied principally to workers who belonged to unions, and in 1937 seasonal industries, including agriculture, were still able to demand sixty hour weeks from their workers. Stevenson noted that in 1938 the average hours worked by men were 47.7 hours and this had increased slightly by 1958. He concluded that in certain industries ten and twelve hours shifts were "not uncommon."⁵⁴ This was certainly the case for George Noakes who in the 1930s worked a ten and half hour day, leaving at six a.m. and returning at five p.m.⁵⁵

These hours worked did not include the time taken to get to work, though for most of the period men lived as close to their work as possible because they could not afford to travel far. When families moved into the suburbs, the time travelled to work increased and if the family could not afford public transport then more energy and time for walking and cycling was required. Miners, even when they lived in a mining town, had their shifts timed from the coal face and not the pit head and could walk some way underground. Some fathers had two jobs. Daisy Rayson's and Elinor Sanderson's fathers had day jobs and worked on their small holdings in the evenings.⁵⁶

⁵² Norman Dennis, Fernando Henriques and Clifford Slaughter, *Coal is Our Life: An Analysis of a Yorkshire Mining Community* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1956), p. 207.

⁵³ Maud Pember Reeves, *Round About a Pound a Week* (1913, London: Virago, 1979), pp. 165-6, 169-170.

⁵⁴ John Stevenson, *British Society, 1914-45* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), pp. 192-3.

⁵⁵ Daisy Noakes, *Faded Rainbow*, p. 6.

⁵⁶ D. C. Rayson, "Memories of a Suffolk Childhood", p. 4; Elinor Sanderson, "Elinor Sanderson", p. 60.

Fred Chant's father worked as a miner and agricultural labourer. He went straight from pit to farm and would also scythe people's grass.⁵⁷ Unemployed men were also occupied outside the home for much of the day. Although the image of the inter-war unemployed was of men hanging around street corners, only a minority did nothing.⁵⁸ The majority were eager to provide for themselves and their family once again. Bakke's study of unemployed men in 1930s Greenwich estimated that on average the men spent 4.2 hours a day looking for work.⁵⁹ This was often done on foot, which took longer, and might entail waiting outside factories in the hope that they might replace a sacked worker.⁶⁰ Moreover, the unemployed were supposed to sign on every day, though as Burnett notes, this was not possible in areas of high unemployment.⁶¹

It was not only the hours men worked that affected the degree to which they were willing and able to do domestic work, but the amount of energy they had left afterwards. This would explain why miners, dockers and building labourers were all less likely to help at home. Jim Bullock described his elder brothers coming home from the mines and falling asleep at the table while waiting for their dinner, while Margaret Monkham's father, who was also a miner, fell asleep in front of the fire and was too tired to eat.⁶² This might also explain why Elsie Gadsby's mother had the task of moving their monthly coal allowance from the street: Elsie's father was usually on an afternoon shift when it arrived and he did not return until after ten o'clock.⁶³ As the 1950s survey *Coal Is Our Life* commented: "[t]he miner feels that he does an extremely difficult day's work; he makes it plain that he thinks it 'a poor do' if his wife cannot carry out her side of the contract."⁶⁴

⁵⁷ Fred Chant, "Cider in the Autumn", p. 91.

⁵⁸ John Burnett, *Idle Hands: The Experience of Unemployment 1790-1990* (London: Routledge 1994), p. 236.

⁵⁹ E. Wright Bakke, *The Unemployed Man: A Social Study* (Nisbet and Co. Ltd., 1933) cited in Burnett, *Idle Hands*, p. 220.

⁶⁰ Robert Roberts wrote that it was myth that unemployed men spent all their time hanging around street corners and drinking. Most of them could not afford this and stayed at home. Davies also cited the *Manchester University Settlement Survey of Ancoats* (1934) which found that few unemployed men kept their dole and this curtailed their leisure outside the home: Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, pp. 43-46.

⁶¹ Burnett, *Idle Hands*, p. 236.

⁶² Margaret Monkham, *As I Remember*, p. 11; Jim Bullock, *Bowers Row*, p. 6. They were expected to do some domestic chores that would have required energy such as building a sty and digging the allotment. Whether they did this in the evening or on a Saturday is not mentioned.

⁶³ Elsie Gadsby, *Black Diamonds, Yellow Apples*, p. 8.

⁶⁴ Dennis et al, *Coal Is Our Life*, p. 181.

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Time and energy absorbed by labour outside the home can explain why fathers and husbands were unwilling to undertake some tasks in the belief that housework would direct energy away from their bread-winning.⁶⁵ Therefore, the most suitable domestic tasks were ones which, though energy intensive, could be done over a long period of time (such as digging an allotment) or jobs that could be done quickly or at the weekend. Taking care of children could be done for any length of time and, if the children were old enough, was a potentially passive task. This could be why fathers were more willing to take care of older children than younger ones. Specific activities done with children, such as walking or cycling, needed more time and energy and were done at weekends, often on Saturday afternoon or Sunday. Fathers did more home-centred activities with children on weekday evenings after work.⁶⁶ As Chapter Seven detailed, washing was a time-consuming and exhausting task which took most of the day. For this reason it would have been impossible for the man to help other than to do small tasks such as lighting or setting the copper before he left, and these were indeed the washing-related tasks which fathers performed.⁶⁷ This might also explain why teenagers and school children only helped with, rather than actually did, the washing. Baking was another task that required time, which was why only mothers did this, though fathers seemed more willing to cook on a Sunday, the one full day they had off a week.

Although the first part of this chapter showed that boys did not do the same domestic tasks as their fathers, they were more likely to emulate their father's task of financially supporting the family. More boys than girls did paid work while still at school; in one in six families boys had jobs before they had left school, compared with one in twelve girls. This meant that the boys had less time than girls to do domestic work. The majority of the boys did paper rounds before and after school or worked as errand boys on Saturday or outside school hours, and in rural areas, did odd jobs on the farms.⁶⁸ When girls did do paid work, they had cleaning jobs or ran errands for neighbours.⁶⁹ These jobs took up much of the boys' spare time: Robert Morgan worked as an errand boy from four thirty in the afternoon to six o'clock each day, and Joe Hind was an errand boy on Saturday and a paper boy on weekday mornings and

⁶⁵ Lein, "Male Participation in Home Life", p. 489.

⁶⁶ Mrs Roberts, "Better Than Television", p. 181; Elinor Sanderson's father would "spend hours" playing games with them on winter evenings: "Elinor Sanderson", p. 61.

⁶⁷ Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, p. 28; Daisy Noakes, *The Town Beehive*, p. 5; Douglas Burbidge, "My Early Memories", p. 4.

⁶⁸ George Noakes, *To Be a Farmer's Boy*, p. 18; Spike Mays, *Reuben's Corner*, p. 146.

⁶⁹ Margaret Penn, *Manchester Fourteen Miles*, p. 197; Maggie Newbery, *Reminiscences of a Bradford Mill Girl*, p. 27; Babs Hilton, "A Whyteleafe Childhood", p. 48.

evenings. Joe's brother continued to deliver papers even when he worked full-time.⁷⁰ John Smith worked between six and nine in the morning, during his dinner time, and after school. Like Joe, his contribution was especially useful because no money was forthcoming from his father. The income from these jobs was often important for the family income and, if the fathers were unemployed, it "kept the family going".⁷¹ Like the men in Lein's survey, the children considered their wages as a way of helping their families, as Joe Loftus explained: "I took modest pleasure in turning in a few shillings to help mother make ends meet."⁷² Others spent it on themselves: Victoria Massey's brother and Archie Hill spent their earnings on a bike, while G. E. Miles and Spike Mays spent theirs on clothes.⁷³ However, in the latter two cases these were items that their mother would have had to buy and so the boys were indirectly supporting the family budget.⁷⁴

The intention here is not to deny that women spent long hours in housework. Spring Rice found that some women were working up to fourteen hours a day in the 1930s while others did housework as well as paid labour.⁷⁵ These hours worked by women should, however, be compared with the work hours and type of employment of working class men. This also applied to sons and daughters: while girls were certainly doing far more domestic work than boys, the latter were often contributing to the household income in their spare time. When the work hours of men and boys are combined with the amount of time they spent on 'masculine' domestic tasks, the evidence suggests that men and women were making equal but different contributions to domestic life.

⁷⁰ Robert Morgan, *My Lamp Still Burns*, p. 44; Joe Hind, *A Shieldfield Childhood*, pp. 45, 84.

⁷¹ Mourby, "The Wives and Children of the Teesside Unemployed 1919-1939", *Oral History Journal* XI 2 (1983), p. 58.

⁷² Joe Loftus, "Lee Side", p. 63. Girls spent some of their earnings on themselves too, though Betty Dickinson gave her money to her parents, Betty Dickinson, *Shanty Town*, p. 49.

⁷³ Victoria Massey, *One Child's War*, p. 101; Archie Hill, *A Cage of Shadows*, p. 58; G. E. Miles, *More Fragments From the Tapestry of Life*, p. 35; Spike Mays, *Reuben's Corner*, p. 146.

⁷⁴ Balancing the time budget for girls and boys ended once boys started full-time work. Girls were often expected to do a full-time job and domestic chores. Elsie Gadsby, who grew up in the inter-war period, thought that once she started work she would be treated differently to her brothers who were still at school. She soon discovered that this was not going to happen. When she returned from her first day at work, her mother was exhausted from moving the coal in from the road all afternoon and Elsie claimed that she did not feel indignant when she did the washing-up while her brothers were playing games: Elsie Gadsby, *Black Diamonds, Yellow Apples*, p. 59.

⁷⁵ Margery Spring Rice, *Working Class Wives* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1939), p. 99. Over one in four of the mothers and wives in the autobiographies worked outside the home and one in five did paid work at home.

Part Three: When Men and Children Helped

The ideal family was therefore one which had a male breadwinner who was prepared to do socially-recognisable masculine domestic tasks, such as gardening and house-maintenance, and a mother who did the remainder of the domestic work. The reality for some families was quite different. As Michael Peplar has argued, while some families accepted these roles, others actively resisted them. However, he believed that between these two extremes was a larger group who had to adapt gender roles to suit their circumstances. The circumstances he cited were: the absence or death of one parent; illness of one parent; the size of the family; and the employment of the mother. To this list should be added the unemployment of the father, and the age and gender of the children.⁷⁶

The autobiographers' fathers who had lost their wives while their children were still small did tasks that were commonly recognised as women's work. Nearly all the fathers who did the cleaning had wives who were ill or dead. Robert Murdie's mother died when he was six months old and his father brought up both him and his sister. The father knitted and crocheted, making all their stockings and mittens, and as Robert detailed further "[h]e was good at looking after us. He was also good in the house and did most things until my sister was old enough to do it for us."⁷⁷ Robert's father only did 'female' domestic tasks until his daughter was old enough to do them herself, but the expectation that an older girl should take on the housewife's role was not held by every family. Ralph Glasser's mother died when he was six and while she was ill in hospital his father lit the range, cooked and did the washing up.⁷⁸ He must have continued to do this after she died since Ralph's elder sister left the home at eight in the morning and did not return until midnight. This meant that his father took him and his sister to school. Jimmy Buckley's mother died when he was fourteen. The remainder of the family all worked, and so they divided the housework between them. His father took over the cooking and did the dusting, while Jimmy and his sister did the washing and cleaning.⁷⁹ Maybe the fact that they were millworkers explains why they considered it to be more important for the daughter to continue at work.⁸⁰ When

⁷⁶ Michael Peplar, "Official Discourse and Remembered Experience in British Culture, 1945-1970", Paper presented to the Social History Society Conference, 1998.

⁷⁷ Robert Murdie, "Robert Kerr Murdie", pp. 39, 44.

⁷⁸ Ralph Glasser, *Growing Up in The Gorbals*, pp. 147, 143,

⁷⁹ Jimmy Buckley, "Rochdale", p. 152.

⁸⁰ Glucksmann, "Some Do, Some Don't", pp. 275-294.

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Joan Booker's mother died her father did not take on more domestic work but employed a housekeeper because Joan and her elder sister were still at school. When this did not work out, Joan agreed to do all the housework around her homework and school hours.⁸¹

Fathers and children helped more when the mothers were ill. While Ralph's and Joan's mothers were dying, their fathers cooked and looked after them.⁸² Tom Wakefield's father "insisted on" washing up, clearing the table and did "domestic chores" partly because Tom's mother was ill.⁸³ There were no daughters in this family to help the mother. Grace Foakes's father did have an older daughter who stayed at home while his wife was ill and Grace remained at home after her mother had died.⁸⁴ Daughters did not automatically inherit the tasks their mothers were not longer able to perform. Mary Hewins's father took over the cooking when her mother was too ill to do it any longer because her mother thought that Mary was incapable of cooking. Mary continued to do the cleaning and washing.⁸⁵

Unemployment resulted in men spending more time in the home. As explained above, unemployed men did spend a lot of time searching for work, but as Burnett observed, the remaining hours when they would have been working were spent at home.⁸⁶ Mourby, in her oral history of wives and children of unemployed men in inter-war Teesside, argued that the majority of these men did not help at home more than before.⁸⁷ Burnett opposed this viewpoint, claiming that:

contrary to the stereotypical divisions of functions between husbands and wives in working-class households, it seems that a good many unemployed men were prepared to help in at least some domestic tasks, even going across traditional role boundaries.⁸⁸

⁸¹ Joan Booker, *A Newbury Childhood*, p. 113.

⁸² Joan Booker, *A Newbury Childhood*, p. 62.

⁸³ Tom Wakefield, *A Forties Child*, p. 153, 159.

⁸⁴ Grace Foakes, *My Part of the River*, p. 125.

⁸⁵ Mary Hewins, "Mary, After The Queen", p. 253.

⁸⁶ Burnett, *Idle Hands*, p. 236.

⁸⁷ Mourby, "The Wives and Children of the Teesside Unemployed 1919-1939", p. 58. Morris also found this to be the case: Lydia Morris, *The Workings Of the Household: A US-UK Comparison* (1990, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996 reprint), p. 30.

⁸⁸ Burnett, *Idle Hands*, p. 236. Sarsby found that unemployed men often helped in the home: Jacqueline Sarsby, *Missuses and Mouldrunners: An Oral History of Women Pottery Workers at Work and at Home* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988), p. 38.

When the types of tasks performed by unemployed fathers in the autobiographies were compared with those in the total group of fathers, it showed that fathers who were unemployed did help more. Rose Gamble's father was unemployed though the 1920s and 1930s. As well as doing the more commonly recognised male work of 'DIY' and boot mending, he would cook, mop the floor, do the washing up after the midday meal, and took care of Rose before she attended school and when she was ill.⁸⁹ Joseph Farrington's father, like Rose's, was an ex-sailor and (as referred to in the previous section) was similarly active in the domestic sphere. He cooked, made rugs, knitted, and looked after the children. When the house needed cleaning he would divide the tasks up among all the children while he cooked the dinner.⁹⁰ Just before the Second World War, Emily Glencross's husband "saw to the cleaning and laying of the fire" before he went to sign on the dole in the morning.⁹¹ Ron Barnes did the housework while he was unemployed in the 1950s, and looked after his daughter.⁹² Unemployed sons were also prepared to help more. Michael de Larrabeiti, when jobless, stayed at home to look after his younger sister while his mother was in hospital. He took in lodgers and did the washing up, cleaning, cooking and shopping.⁹³

Other fathers, who were unemployed because they were ill or physically unfit, might be prepared to help at home. May Ayers's father did the shopping after he had recovered from a sprained ankle, and Dolly Davey's father, who had lost a leg in an industrial accident, did a variety of tasks. He scrubbed the floors, cleaned indoors and did "almost anything". He would help on wash days, doing the passing, and scrubbed the kitchen floor white with an ordinary stone.⁹⁴ In Hall's study of inter-war marriage in Birmingham, one husband had done the cooking because he was ill and at home all day while his wife was at work. He refused to wash or clean, despite having more time to do it, clearly indicating which domestic tasks were more acceptable to men.⁹⁵

In this last example, it was not only that the man was at home, but also that his wife went out to work that resulted in him doing the cooking. The wives of

⁸⁹ Rose Gamble, *A Chelsea Child*, pp. 52, 42, 78, 95, 103.

⁹⁰ Joseph Farrington, "Manchester", pp. 14-19-21.

⁹¹ Emily Glencross, *For Better or For Worse*, p. 4.

⁹² Ron Barnes, *Coronation Cups and Jam Jars*, p. 53.

⁹³ Michael de Larrabeiti, *A Rose Beyond the Thames*, p. 164.

⁹⁴ May Ayers, *Memoirs of a Shannock*, p. 26; Dolly Davey, *A Sense of Adventure*, p. 5.

⁹⁵ Catherine Hall, "Married Women at Home in Birmingham in the 1920s and 1930s", *Oral History* V 2 (1977), p. 75.

unemployed men were often earning and this may be an additional factor why unemployed men did more domestic work: Rose Gamble's mother was employed full-time in a laundry; Emily Glencross's worked in a textile warehouse; and Ron Barnes's wife had a job in a tassel making firm. The employment of women, especially in full-time work, has been linked to increased participation of adult men in domestic tasks. However, when domestic work done by men and women in families where the mother was employed was compared with the figures in Table 8.1, it highlighted that these mothers actually did more work (Figure 8.4).⁹⁶ This might reflect the types of jobs they were doing. Laite and Halfpenny, in their study of the impact of employment patterns on the division of domestic labour, found that women with part-time jobs did more domestic work than women who were non-employed and women who worked full-time.⁹⁷ It is not always easy to identify mothers and wives who did full-time or part-time work in the autobiographies, especially since at least one in five did paid work at home. Paid work done at home may have seemed part-time even when it was not, and the part-time feel to the work may have undermined its importance to the housewife and the family in comparison to traditionally defined domestic work.⁹⁸ This could indicate why women who did some form of paid work were found to be doing more housework than housewives. Thus, it may have been the combination of unemployed father and employed mothers which was significant in why fathers did housework and child-care.⁹⁹

Glucksmann noted that women in full-time employment had help with domestic work from other sources, such as by employing others to help them or by buying time-saving technology. There was evidence of the former in the autobiographies. May Ayers, Dolly Scannell, Leslie Paul and Winifred Albaya's mothers all had someone to help them do the washing.¹⁰⁰ Four mothers paid for

⁹⁶ This contradicts the findings by Miriam Glucksmann, "Some Do, Some Don't", p. 281; Laite and Halfpenny, "Employment, Unemployment and the Domestic Division of Labour", p. 229; Blood and Wolfe (1960), Pahl (1984) cited in Morris, *The Workings Of the Household*, pp. 86, 88; and Oakley, *The Sociology Of Housework*, p. 156.

⁹⁷ Laite and Halfpenny, "Employment, Unemployment and the Domestic Division of Labour", p. 229. This links back to Glucksmann's comments about women who did part-time work and men's attitudes towards women who were doing unskilled part-time jobs: Glucksmann, "Some Do, Some Don't", pp. 275-294.

⁹⁸ Glucksmann, "Some Do, Some Don't", p. 276.

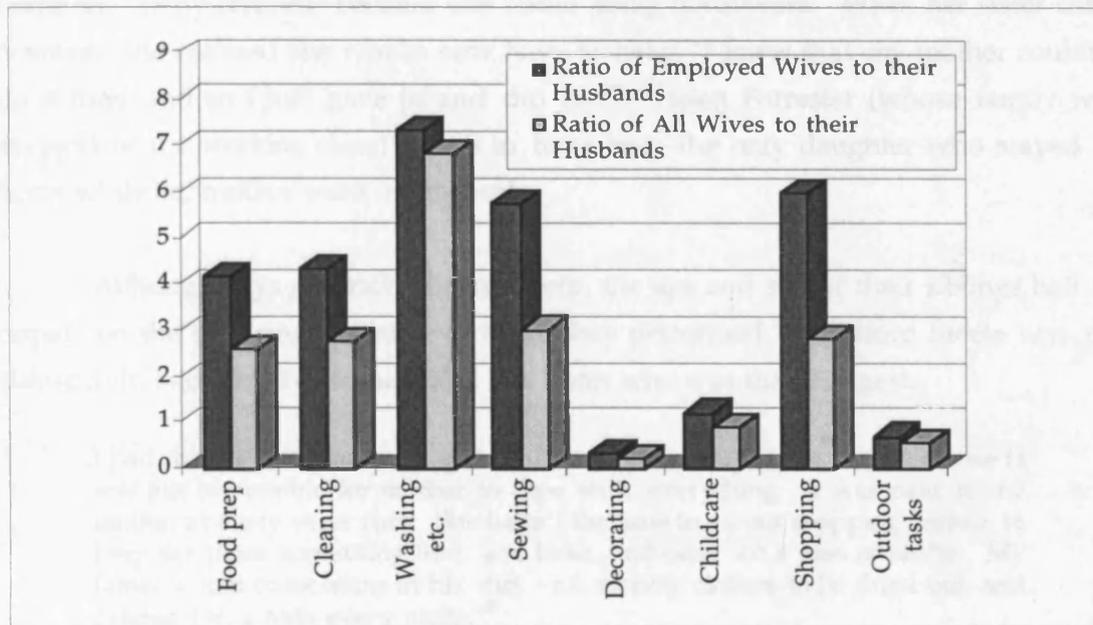
⁹⁹ Not that an employed mother and an unemployed father ensured that the father would participate in domestic life. Joe Hind's father did nothing in the home even though he was unemployed and his wife was working: Joe Hind, *A Shieldfield Childhood*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁰⁰ Leslie Paul, *The Boy Down Kitchener Street*, p. 64; May Ayers, *Memoirs of a Shannock*, p. 85; Dolly Scannell, *Mother Knew Best*, p. 136. Ruby Lee's mother used a laundry service for her bedding and towels only: Ruby Lee, "A Tapestry of Country Life", p. 28.

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someone to take care of their children, while two mothers paid neighbours to do the washing.¹⁰¹ The majority of these mothers were in full-time employment. More often, employed women relied on relatives to take care of their children, and one in three of the autobiographers whose mothers were employed were cared for by aunts or grandparents.

Figure 8.4: Distribution of Domestic Labour and Working Women



Not all families could afford to pay someone and this made the children's contribution to domestic work important. Glucksmann did not consider working mothers (and mothers in general) who were helped by children: in the autobiographies one in six of the women who worked outside the home were helped by their children and this equalled the number who were helped by their husbands. Helen Forrester was kept away from school to look after the children, to do the housework and shopping while her mother was at work.¹⁰² Emily Glencross shared the ironing and baking with her mother because they both went out to work.¹⁰³ A survey carried out in the late 1940s on how children spent their time out of school noted the extent to which families relied on children's help, especially if the parents were at work:

The majority of the children, not only girls, but boys of all ages, had to undertake quite responsible household tasks, doing all the shopping, cleaning, looking after the younger ones and cooking the midday meal.

¹⁰¹ Valerie Avery, *London Morning*, p. 77; Molly Weir, *Shoes Were For Sunday*, p. 17.

¹⁰² Helen Forrester, *Liverpool Miss*, p. 11.

¹⁰³ Emily Glencross, *Breakfast at Windsor*, p. 56.

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Several went home in the evening after school to prepare the evening meal for their parents.¹⁰⁴

In some families girls were kept at home after they had left school to help their mothers at home. James Charlton had an elder sister who stayed at home to help his mother with the washing and cleaning, while Dolly Davey had several older sisters of whom one stayed at home to help their mother.¹⁰⁵ If Dolly was asked to do anything in the home she “flatly refused” because she hated doing housework. When her sister died, however, she realised she would now have to help: “I knew that my mother couldn’t do it then, and so I just gave in and did it.”¹⁰⁶ Helen Forrester (whose family was atypical of the working class) seems to have been the only daughter who stayed at home while her mother went out to work.

Although boys generally did not help, the age and sex of their siblings had an impact on the type and quantity of tasks they performed.¹⁰⁷ Clifford Steele was the eldest child and had six brothers and one sister who was the youngest:

I had to take the place of a girl really as far as helping at home because it was just impossible for mother to cope with everything. I was near to my mother at every verse turn. She hadn’t the time to go out shopping herself, to keep the place something like, and bake, and cater for a man on shifts. My father would come home in his dirt - all sweaty clothes to be dried out, and catered for, a bath every night.¹⁰⁸

Clifford would wash the pantry floor and look after the baby of the family by pushing him (or her) around in the pram for one to two hours each evening. Ron Barnes, who had a baby sister in the 1940s but no other siblings, also pushed her around in her pram.¹⁰⁹ Michael de Larrabeiti, like Ron and Clifford, only had elder brothers. At the end of the 1940s, he would collect his sister from nursery or school and look after her until his mother came home from work.¹¹⁰ Later, when his mother went into hospital in 1951, he stayed at home to look after his sister and he also cooked for his elder

¹⁰⁴ Central Advisory Council for Education, Ministry of Education, *Out of School: The Second Report of the Central Advisory Council For Education* (1948, London: HMSO, 1963 reprint), p. 36.

¹⁰⁵ James Charlton, *More Sand in My Shoes*, p. 75.

¹⁰⁶ Dolly Davey, *A Sense of Adventure*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁷ Roberts noted that boys without sisters had to help with a full range of tasks, but does not describe what these were: Elizabeth Roberts, *A Women’s Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940* (1984, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 22.

¹⁰⁸ Clifford Steele, “Barnsley”, p. 128.

¹⁰⁹ Ron Barnes, *Coronation Cups and Jam Jars*, p. 126.

¹¹⁰ Michael de Larrabeiti, *A Rose Beyond the Thames*, pp. 98, 163.

brother. Joe Hind, who lived in Shieldfield in the 1920s, was the second of four brothers. He and his eldest brother would help in the house doing chores and the washing-up and they would make Saturday morning breakfast. When their sister was born, Joe and Ronnie looked after their younger brother and Ronnie would look after their sister as well while their mother was at work.¹¹¹ Spike Mays, who had one younger brother, washed all the nappies while his mother was recovering in bed after giving birth to his sister.¹¹² In three of the examples, the mothers were in full-time paid work away from home which made their elder children's co-operation more important. Additionally, in at least two of these cases it was implied that the non-co-operation of the father at any domestic level was one of the reasons why the boys helped much more.

Studies of domestic technology have shown that not only did the number of hours spent in housework increase after the adoption of 'time-saving' goods, but that the washing machine and dishwasher in fact decreased the participation of men and children domestic chores. The result of this, as argued by Schwartz Cowan and subsequent historians of technology and women's work, was that sexual division of labour within the home increased between 1930 and 1980.¹¹³ This is difficult to assess from the autobiographies because very few families described having white-good technology, though they were affected by important time-saving utilities such as piped water and electric lighting which meant that men and children no longer had to fetch water or clean oil lamps.¹¹⁴ The implication of this, therefore, is that since the working class as a whole were only beginning to get access time-saving technology and utilities, men and children still had to help more in households.

¹¹¹ Joe Hind, *A Shieldfield Childhood*, pp. 9, 44, 61, 68.

¹¹² Spike Mays, *Reuben's Corner*, p. 145.

¹¹³ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, "A Case Study of Technology and Social Change: The Washing Machine and the Working Wife" in M. Hartman and L. Banner, eds., *Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women* (N.Y.: Harper Colophon Books, 1974), p. 249; Ruth Schwartz Cowan, "The Industrial Revolution in the Home: Household Technology and Social Change in the Twentieth Century", *Technology and Culture* XVII 1 (1976), p. 14; Charles Thrall, "The Conservative Use of Modern Household Technology", *Technology and Culture* XXIII 2 (1982), p. 186; Tanis Day, "Capital-Labor Substitution in the Home", *Technology and Culture* XXXIII 2 (1992), p. 315; Christine Bose, Philip Bereano and Mary Malloy, "Household Technology and the Social Construction of Housework", *Technology and Culture* XXV 1 (1984), pp. 37-52; Christine Bose, "Technology and Changes in the Division of Labor in the American Home", *Women's Studies International Quarterly* II (1979), p. 301.

¹¹⁴ Bourke notes that the increase in household goods and facilities (such as water supply) created more work for women in the home because they got less help from others: Joanna Bourke, *Husbandry to Housewifery: Women, Economic Change, and Housework in Ireland, 1890-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 212-223. Davin has also noted this: Anna Davin, *Growing Up Poor: Home, School and Street in London 1870-1914* (London: River Oram Press, 1996), p. 5.

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Also crucial to the change in allocation of tasks in the period 1900-1955 was decreasing family size. This meant that children no longer had to look after younger siblings, or at least not as frequently. Instead, women were expected to spend the time they had 'saved' by technology in childcare. Time spent with children, especially after 1945, became the means by which 'good' motherhood was assessed and this created further pressures for those who did not possess white-good technology. The relationship between mother and child, and all the relationships between different members of the family are the concern of the final chapter.

5

FAMILY

Chapter Nine

Home and Family

Talcott Parsons believed that the ideal, "functional" family consisted of a bread-winning father and a non-employed, dependant wife whose role was to care for home and family.¹ Although Parsons was writing in the 1950s, this structure of domestic life was the basis of Victorian domestic ideology in which working wives were discouraged as unnatural and immoral.² The mother-child relationship was more important than any other family relationship, because she remained at home all day while the husband was at work. This meant that a 'bad' mother was more devastating to the traditional family than a 'bad' father and women who worked were particularly considered to put the well-being of the family at risk. This ideal family was "sustained and reinforced by a plethora of institutions and processes including education, the state, the media and above all economic life."³ Girls were taught housewifery and childcare at school, women's employment reflected the "assumed desirability of...women's economic dependence within the family"⁴, while philanthropic and state housing was designed to protect the nuclear family.⁵ The wives of publicly funded workers were often forbidden to work at all, as in the case of policeman's wives, and female teachers and civil servants had to be single until after the Second World War.

The power of this ideal had two consequences for the study of family relationships. The first was that the association of women with the home meant that

¹ T. Parsons and R. F. Bales, *Family Socialisation and the Interaction Process* (Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1955) cited in Jane Lewis, *Women in Britain Since 1945: Women, Family, Work and the State in the Post War Years* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 13.

² Catherine Hall, "The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology" in Sandra Burman, ed., *Fit Work For Women* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), p. 31.

³ Stephen Edgell, *Middle-Class Couples: A Study of Degradation, Domination and Inequality in Marriage* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980), p. 106.

⁴ Shani D'Cruze, "Women and the Family" in June Purvis, ed., *Women's History: Britain, 1850-1945* (London: University College London Press, 1995), p. 55.

⁵ Marion Roberts, "Gender and Housing: The Impact of Design", *Built Environment* XVI 4 (1990), pp. 258-260. This was not only the case in Britain: Kirsi Saarikangas, *Model Houses for Model Families: Gender Ideology and the Modern Dwellings. The Type Planned house of the 1940s in Finland* (Helsinki: SHS, 1993); Philip Wagner, "Suburban Landscapes for Nuclear Families: The Case of Greenbelt Towns in the United States", *Built Environment* X 1 (1984), pp. 35-41.

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other family members are seen in relation to them and not to each other.⁶ Relationships between fathers and children, between siblings, and relationships with non-nuclear family members who also lived in the home are generally ignored. The second is that the ideal family has appeared to be “above class”⁷ and as a result “[p]oliticians, policy makers, and most lobbyists for the family have assumed the bourgeois family to be the normal family form throughout the twentieth century” and this is the case in historiography.⁸ However, what was “functional” to Talcott Parsons was not so for the autobiographers’ families. Uncertain income and different working conditions tended to make the ideal family impracticable and ‘impractical’. In summary, while historians have identified class (and locational) differences in women’s experiences of family life,⁹ the association of women with the home has meant that they have concentrated on women’s domestic experiences while those of other family members have been seen generally in relation to women and not each other.

Unlike other aspects of home life, the emotional side of home life is far harder to access because it is such a personal matter and cannot necessarily be expressed by words. For this reason, I have employed a number of verbal and non-verbal indicators to try and gauge how different members of the family interacted. These include: positive and negative descriptions of family members; display of physical affection; evidence of tension in terms of quarrelling and violence; methods of discipline; time spent together; reaction towards death; and feelings on leaving home. The first part of the chapter examines the relationship between husbands and wives, the second the relationship between parents and children, and the third part relationships between siblings. The final section of the chapter assesses how these relationships affected the way the autobiographers felt about home life in general.

⁶ Some examples of the woman-centric approach are: Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman’s Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984) and *Women and Families: An Oral History 1940-1970* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Judy Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain, 1900-50* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995).

⁷ Hall, “The Formation of the Victorian Domestic Ideology”, p. 31.

⁸ Jane Lewis, “Anxieties About the Family and the Relationships Between Parents, Children and the State in Twentieth-Century England” in M. Richards and P. Light, eds., *Children of Social Worlds: Development in a Social Context* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), p. 32.

⁹ Roberts and Chinn have concentrated on urban women’s experiences of family and home, Giles on suburban women: Roberts, *A Woman’s Place* and *Women and Families*; Carl Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives: Women of the Urban Poor, 1870-1939* (Manchester: M.U.P., 1988); Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life*.

Part One: Relationships Between Husbands and Wives

Ellen Ross, in her study of marriage between 1870 and 1914, has argued that the working-class marriage contract “did not enjoin romantic love or emotional “intimacy”.”¹⁰ This supported Shorter’s thesis that married love was a feature of modern marriage only.¹¹ The twentieth century has therefore been associated with increasing companionship within marriage enabled by smaller families which meant that couples could spend more time together.¹² While it is possible to assess the attachment between middle-class couples in previous centuries using their own descriptions, it is far harder to do this for the working class. Ross mainly utilises court records (which shed light only on acrimonious couples), and the testimony of commentators on the working class, who were not describing their own experiences. This would explain why she found “husband-wife violence was incredibly frequent”, and concluded that working-class couples lacked emotion.¹³ In contrast, Ralph Houlbrooke has argued that love and companionship was not just desirable in modern marriage. He has shown how the medieval and early modern Church stressed that marriage should be about love, mutual comfort and support, though women were viewed as a subordinate partner.¹⁴ He has examined letters, diaries and autobiographies and found examples of loving marriages in the early modern period, even lower down the social scale. He has also found unhappy marriages, but concludes that for many companionship was preferable, even essential.¹⁵ He stressed that just because church and common law considered women to be subordinate this did not mean that couples viewed their relationships in this way.¹⁶ This observation is appropriate for the twentieth-century relationships too; although the state or other

¹⁰ Ellen Ross, “‘Fierce Questions and Taunts’: Married Life in Working-Class London, 1870-1914”, *Feminist Studies* VIII 3 (1982), p. 578.

¹¹ Unlike Shorter, however, Ross believed children were important to the mothers if not to the fathers: Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (London: Collins, 1976).

¹² Shani D’Cruze, “Women and the Family”, pp. 75-76. Moge’s study of family life in Oxford in the 1950s maintained that moving to housing estates allowed for “disappearance of extended family and the emergence of something like the companionship type family”: J. M. Moge, “Changes in Family Life Experienced by English Workers Moving from Slums to Housing Estates”, *Marriage and Family Living* XVII 2 (1955), p. 127.

¹³ Ross, “‘Fierce Questions and Taunts’”, p. 577.

¹⁴ Ralph Houlbrooke, *The English Family, 1450-1700* (London: Longman, 1984) pp. 96, 100.

¹⁵ Shoemaker concluded that “patriarchal and companionate marriages could be found at all social levels”: Robert Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650-1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres?* (London: Longman, 1998), p. 112.

¹⁶ Houlbrooke, *The English Family, 1450-1700*, p. 119.

institutions advocated the dependence (and implied subordination) of women to men, this did not necessarily make it the reality.¹⁷

The relationship between husband and wife is the most intimate domestic relationship and one which is culturally the hardest to discuss with outsiders. This applies to both contemporary surveys and to autobiographies. Men might have concealed their feelings in surveys to avoid been labelled 'unmanly' or simply did not wish to talk to a sociologist about their personal life. Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter failed to understand this in their study of 'Ashton' miners. They found that miners were vocal about their relationships with their mothers but were reluctant to discuss their marriage with a stranger. They concluded from this that husbands and wives had "no intimate understanding of each other". They commented further that the fact that men did not discuss their wives when they talked about sex to their friends indicated the divide between family and male pursuits.¹⁸ They did not acknowledge that it was because the relationship was intimate that men did not want to discuss it with others. Moreover, having an outsider observing a relationship, whether a friend or sociologist, could make people act differently, which again Dennis et al failed to note.¹⁹ They used the public behaviour of a husband to draw conclusions about how he behaved in private: "[t]he whole life of the miner under influence of his group of friends inhibits any display of tenderness and love in sexual relations."²⁰ Autobiographies can generate similar problems because the majority of the husband-wife relationships discussed were the autobiographers' descriptions of their parents' relationships. Like the sociologists, the children were observers of the relationship seeing only certain (but different) aspects of it. In addition, those who described their own relationships were reluctant to discuss them, partly because it is personal matter and they might wish to conceal problems, and partly because their spouses might still

¹⁷ Finch and Summerfield use prescriptive literature to question the idea that marriage was becoming more equal and companionate after the last world war: Jane Finch and Penny Summerfield, "Social Reconstruction and the Emergence of Companionate Marriage, 1945-59" in David Clark, ed., *Marriage, Domestic Life and Social Change: Writings for Jacqueline Burgoyne (1944-88)* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 7-32.

¹⁸ Norman Dennis, Fernando Henriques and Clifford Slaughter, *Coal Is Our Life: An Analysis Of A Yorkshire Mining Community* (1956, London: Tavistock Publications Ltd., 1969), pp. 228, 232.

¹⁹ The Working-family Project, produced in the 1970s, found that because of publicly held expectations of fatherhood men were reluctant to show "loving behavior" to children in front of observers: "[o]nly through the child's clear expectation of a demonstrative response did we learn that such interaction was usually forth-coming": Laura Lein, "Male Participation in Home Life: Impact of Social Supports and Breadwinner Responsibility on the Allocation of Tasks", *The Family Coordinator* Oct. (1979), p. 491.

²⁰ Dennis et al., *Coal Is Our Life*, p. 229.

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be alive. However, the autobiographies reveal the complexity of relationships: relationships were not static, and while they might have been predominantly happy or unhappy, they contained moments of (respectively) stress and relief.

The fact that many of the parents' relationships were being described by their offspring suggests why there were few examples of loving relationships between husband and wives; affection can be hard to explain and can be less noticeable to observers. Slater and Woodside, who produced a survey on marriage in the mid-forties, found this to be the case: "[h]appiness is an elusive thing, not only in the finding but also in the description; and most of our more happily married people found it very difficult to pin down in words."²¹ Out of 122 couples in the autobiographies, only seven were described as being close to or fond of each other. Joyce and Edna Skinner thought that their parents were "devoted" to each other, while Margaret Ward claimed hers "adored" one another.²² Margaret Monkham had an "affectionate and loving" attachment with her husband, Henry Hollis's parents were the "best of partners" whose love was a "very strong bond" and Percy Ambrose's "close attachment" with his wife lasted all their lives.²³ A further three autobiographers explained that the affection was one-sided: in all cases the children thought that their father adored their mother but that their mother did not seem to feel the same way.

The one-sidedness of these relationships could reflect trends found by Elizabeth Robinson and Natalie Higgins in their research on working-class choice of spouses in the first half the century. They both found that while men claimed that they married for love, women gave far less emotional reasons such as their fiancé's ability to provide, if he did not drink and if he was hard working.²⁴ Because the autobiographers were not around when their parents had met, they did not generally comment on why their parents were together. Some seemed to have married because it was the thing to do and others because they had to. Joyce Storey, for example, was aware that her parents had been forced to get married because her mother was

²¹ Eliot Slater and Moya Woodside, *Patterns Of Marriage: A Study of Marriage Relationships in the Urban Working Class* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1951), p. 140.

²² Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, p. 81; Margaret Ward, *One Camp Chair in the Living Room*, p. 10.

²³ Margaret Monkham, *As I Remember*, p. 97; Henry Hollis, *Farewell Leicester Square*, p. 12; Percy Ambrose, *Reminiscences of a Loughton Life*, p. 77.

²⁴ Elizabeth Robinson, "Rugby Women: Choosing and Finding a Husband 1920-1950", Paper presented to Midland History Post-Graduate Conference, 1997; Natalie Higgins, "How Did You End Up Together? Marriage Choices and the English Working Class", Paper to Social History Society Conference, 1998.

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pregnant. This made her mother resent her husband "for robbing her of her precious youth."²⁵ On the other hand, Kathleen Dayus also married her husband because she was pregnant, but explained that they both loved each other.²⁶ This love receded somewhat over the ten years they were married and this happened to other couples and made it difficult for children to understand why their parents had married at all. Kathleen certainly thought this about her own parents. She noted, however, that her parents' wedding photograph still hung on the wall and next to it was the hat her father had worn to the wedding. Anyone who touched the hat was liable to get into trouble with her mother because evidently it had sentimental value.²⁷

Using physical displays of affection to assess the intimacy/attachment between couples in the period 1900-1950 is far harder. Parents were not particularly demonstrative. On the one hand this may have indicated lack of affection, on the other it may have been a reflection of what was considered to be acceptable behaviour. As Burnett has observed "love takes many forms and the way that it is displayed is largely a cultural phenomenon."²⁸ Parents were embarrassed to express their affection for each other in front of other people, including their children. Joyce and Edna Skinner noted this. Although their parents were devoted to each other, they were "undemonstrative" and used no public words of endearment.²⁹ Joyce Storey's father "loved my mother passionately, but he couldn't express what he felt; a lack of education dammed him up, he could find no expression in words."³⁰ Fathers could be more demonstrative than mothers. Kathleen Dayus' remembers her father asking her mother for a kiss and looking "dejected" on receiving the reply: "Don't be daft!...I ain't got time any mower fer that sort of thing." Kathleen commented further that she did not remember her parents kissing each other; "they were always snapping or not on speaking terms."³¹ She saw lack of physical affection as a result of the amount of time her mother had spent bearing children and as clear indication that they did not get on. Tom Wakefield saw his father kiss his mother for the first time when he was twelve and they were on holiday: the absence of affection may have more on his mother's

²⁵ Joyce Storey, *Our Joyce*, p. 4.

²⁶ Kathleen Dayus, *Where There's Life*, pp. 133-135.

²⁷ Kathleen Dayus, *Her people*, p. 78.

²⁸ John Burnett, *Destiny Obscure: Autobiographies of Childhood, Education and Family from the 1820s to the 1920s* (1982, London: Routledge, 1994), p. 38.

²⁹ Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, p. 81.

³⁰ Joyce Storey, *Our Joyce*, p. 4.

³¹ Kathleen Dayus, *Her People*, p. 21.

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than his father's part because Tom believed that his father "deeply" loved his mother; it may have also reflected the fact that his father was unable to express his feelings.³²

Reaction to the death or absence of a spouse indicated the type of relationship which existed between couples. Often it was the absence of the spouse which enabled people to express their feelings for them. After the death of Margaret Monkham's husband, she felt very "lonely and depressed". She lost her faith in God and never went to church again because it evoked too many memories of her husband.³³ When Spike Mays's father went to Canada to find work in 1913, his mother was "inconsolable" for weeks.³⁴ Ralph Glasser's father became solitary and distant after the death of his wife in the early 1920s and in the years after her death became more "melancholy" and "depressed".³⁵ The reaction by mothers on the death of their spouse was more often concern over how they were going to provide for their children. Edith Evans's mother did not get on with her husband, and when he was reported dead during the First World War her mother was at first "relieved" and then far more worried about how she was going to bring them all up alone.³⁶ Widowers had to cope with the worry of who was to take care of the children and home, but unlike widows, did not have the same pressing financial worries and could pay for help.³⁷

Intimacy between couples has also been examined by assessing the level of interaction between couples. A high level of interaction in areas such as family planning, household decisions, domestic tasks, and leisure activities has been used to signify a close relationship because of the greater equality within the marriage.³⁸ These relationships have been referred to as "joint-role" relationships, while those that have a low level of interaction have been termed "segregated-role" relationships. The latter consisted of couples with strongly demarcated roles within the home and with independent social lives. Emily Glencross's relationship with her husband, which she

³² Tom Wakefield, *A Forties Child*, pp. 89, 44.

³³ Margaret Monkham, *As I Remember*, pp. 35-36.

³⁴ Spike Mays, *Reuben's Corner*, p. 19.

³⁵ Ralph Glasser, *Growing Up in the Gorbals*, pp. 16, 145-6.

³⁶ Edith Evans, *Rough Diamonds*, p. 35.

³⁷ Robert Murdie and Joan Booker's fathers employed housekeepers after their wives had died: Robert Murdie, "Robert Kerr Murdie", p. 39; Joan Booker, *A Newbury Childhood*, p. 75.

³⁸ Edgell, *Middle-Class Couples*, p. 5; Ann Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework* (Bath: Martin Robinson, 1974), pp. 142-3; Diana Gittins *Fair Sex: Family Size and Structure, 1900-39* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), p. 129. Mogyey described the "companionship type family" as consisting of: parents who were more willing to make loving comments about their children and each other; families who spent more time together; and husbands who were more inclined to give more help with household chores: Mogyey, "Changes in Family Life", pp. 125-128.

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described as "steadfast" and happy, had many of the attributes of the "joint-role" relationships.³⁹ Her husband helped with domestic tasks, they played cards together or read on Saturday evenings, and would entertain friends on Sunday evenings. Diana Gittins identified joint relationships as couples who practised family planning and made joint decisions about family size.⁴⁰ This also applied to Emily and George's marriage. Because George was unemployed "starting a family was only something we could dream about...we wanted to have children when times got better."⁴¹ In the first year of their marriage (1938), George practised birth control until Emily attended a birth control clinic. She implied that the decision to have children was agreed by both of them: "We had been thinking seriously about starting a family since George had been called back to work at last and I was not really surprised to find that we were to become proud parents...."⁴²

Joyce Storey, who like Emily was married in the late 1930s, described her relationship with her serviceman husband as "a mockery of what a relationship ought to be", explaining that "there was no companionship between John and me."⁴³ Her description of her marriage matched the "segregated role" type relationship. In the early years of their marriage during the war they rarely went out together; John went with his friends to the pub and only after she complained did he take her out to the pictures once a month. Joyce's concern with poverty was reflected in her desire to work and keep the family small. John, however, thought that she should stay at home; if she did work then this meant he did not have to contribute to the housekeeping. This contrasted with Emily's experience: she had worked full-time while George was unemployed and then a prisoner during the Second World War, and she did not mention whether George minded this. Joyce's husband had different attitudes to family planning as well. He believed that they should keep having children until he had a son, even though his wife had been advised not to have any more children. When she tried to discuss family planning with him in the mid-1940s, he told her that if she did not want any more children then she should deal with contraception, not him. Neither did he include Joyce in important domestic decisions nor did he believe in sharing his worldly possessions with his wife. When he bought their home in the early 1960s, he did not consult her and refused to put her name on the house deeds because

³⁹ Emily Glencross, *For Better or For Worse*, pp. 2, 47.

⁴⁰ Gittins, *Fair Sex*, p. 149.

⁴¹ Emily Glencross, *For Better or For Worse*, pp. 7-8.

⁴² Emily Glencross, *For Better or For Worse*, p. 10.

⁴³ Joyce Storey, *Joyce's Dream*, p. 116.

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he told her "I pay the mortgage and it belongs to me. It will always be mine."⁴⁴ However, despite the unhappiness she felt throughout much of her married life, there were some happy times, emphasising the complex nature of relationships. Joyce described their Sundays as "precious" because it was the only day that John did not work and the family could go to the park together. Although their household decisions and leisure time (except Sunday afternoon) was generally segregated, John did spend hours playing with their daughters and helped with the washing.

Discord and tension within relationships were referred to more often, presumably because it was harder to conceal and easier to describe. This partly explains why so many studies of marital relations have concentrated on confrontation between husband and wife who are seen as having "competing priorities."⁴⁵ There were certainly couples who had difficult relationships. Twenty of the husbands and wives in the autobiographies argued, but this did not automatically mean that they had a bad relationship. Affection and discord co-existed and, as one autobiographer explained, his parents were devoted to each other but they did argue "like every married couple".⁴⁶ Ron Barnes explained that there was a difference between rows and disagreements and he thought that the latter were acceptable but the former were not.⁴⁷ Arguing was used to relieve tension as much as it created it and could indicate a more equal relationship. Furthermore, there were couples who did not argue but this did not mean that they were happy together. Arguing could be avoided out of fear or out of desire to keep the peace. Tom Wakefield's father, for example, accepted his wife's rages and did not rage back.⁴⁸ Three autobiographers maintained that their parents definitely did not argue, while Daisy Noakes commented that she could remember her parents arguing on one occasion only and this was during the First World War when her father was going to sign up.⁴⁹

Six couples argued violently and although in all cases the violence was started by the husband, this did not mean that the wives did not fight back. Pat O'Mara

⁴⁴ Joyce Storey, *Joyce's Dream*, p. 93.

⁴⁵ Pat Ayers and Jan Lambertz, "Marriage Relations, Money, and Domestic Violence in Working-Class Liverpool, 1919-39" in Jane Lewis, ed., *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family, 1850-1940* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 196.

⁴⁶ Henry Hollis, *Farewell Leicester Square*, p. 12.

⁴⁷ Ron Barnes, *Coronation Cups and Jam Jars*, p. 195.

⁴⁸ Tom Wakefield, *A Forties Child*, p. 158.

⁴⁹ Daisy Noakes, *The Town Beehive*, p. 16.

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wished that his mother had not resisted because it meant that she suffered more.⁵⁰ Another two couples had violent relationships, but did not argue: Josephine Gibney's mother was afraid of aggravating her husband because he was violent and tried to avoid upsetting him as much as possible. However, even these violent relationships had redeeming features, features which would have otherwise been considered attributes of joint-role relationships. Josephine Gibney thought that her stepfather loved her mother even though he hit her because he was willing to take on her four children when he married her in the early 1930s. Her parents spent time together, going for walks on summer evenings and making rag rugs in the winter.⁵¹ Josephine's natural father had also beaten her mother, but she kept all the cards, letters and gifts he sent in a "treasure box" until she died. Rose Gamble's father was violent towards his wife, but did a large number of domestic tasks. Although he spent most of his evenings in the pub, he went with the family to the park on Sunday where he mended their shoes and took them on lecture tours round London.⁵²

In the eyes of the offspring of these relationships, the positive aspects of the marriage were never enough to counteract the violence. Given that their mothers remained with their husbands it is possible that they felt differently. Although the divorce laws provided little encouragement for wives to leave husbands, women who were given the opportunity to leave did not necessarily take it up. Edith Evans's mother was encouraged by her children to leave her husband and they promised to support and live with her. In the end she did not leave because she wanted to be near her sister who provided her with company during the day.⁵³ Josephine Gibney's mother could have admitted her violent husband to a mental hospital but she did not want him to have to leave the home he had worked for.⁵⁴ Husbands, being financially independent, were able to leave wives more easily. Despite this, only one seems to have disappeared for good, though others left home for a few days or weeks. The fact they did not leave suggests that they either had a sense of obligation towards their family, or simply that it was easier for them to stay. Women too might leave for short periods, though this was usually for days rather than weeks. Joe Hind's mother ran away from her violent husband frequently but never left him permanently.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Pat O'Mara, *Liverpool Slummy*, p. 113.

⁵¹ Josephine Gibney, *Joe McGarrigle's Daughter*, pp. 69, 79, 86.

⁵² Rose Gamble, *A Chelsea Childhood*, pp. 17, 35.

⁵³ Edith Evans, *Rough Diamonds*, p. 191.

⁵⁴ Josephine Gibney, *Joe McGarrigle's Daughter*, p. 126.

⁵⁵ Joe Hind, *A Shieldfield Childhood*, p. 37.

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Five spouses did separate permanently. The separations or divorces were usually blamed on the husband: violence, drunkenness, extra-martial relations or simply that the father had just left. Margaret Ward was one wife who divorced her husband because he took to assaulting her after she had discovered his extramarital affairs.⁵⁶ Others wanted to leave but were constrained by finance and the fact that husbands had the right to claim the home and its contents since it was assumed that as the breadwinners they had paid for it. When Joe Loftus's mother finally left his father, she had to start their new home from scratch because of such assumptions.⁵⁷ Pat O'Mara's mother was afraid of leaving her husband for economic reasons and because of the response of the Catholic church. These examples suggest that the small number of separations was more a reflection of divorce laws than the number of contented couples, though wives who were really desperate did leave.

Ayers and Lambertz observe that "[m]oney problems had enormous potential for creating tension between husbands and wives."⁵⁸ Contemporary surveys certainly considered economic circumstances to be among the top causes of marital discord. Slater and Woodside argued that they were second only to personality while Dennis et al in their survey of 'Ashton' maintained that most disputes between husbands and wives were about money. The corollary of this was that the less well paid the husband was, the greater the potential for discord.⁵⁹ The most cited explanations for marital discord by the autobiographers were poverty, financial concerns and unemployment. Ross, Ayers and Lambertz argued that financial disputes between couples was often the result of husbands withholding money, or because they did not understand that their wives did not have enough money to feed the family.⁶⁰ Although Ayers and Lambertz acknowledge that low pay was a problem, like Ross they focus more on financial difficulties as a gender struggle. There were autobiographers' fathers who spent precious income on alcohol,⁶¹ but the class factors of unemployment, short time and low pay were at the root of much domestic discord. Clifford Steele showed

⁵⁶ Margaret Ward, *One Camp Chair in the Living Room*, p. 32.

⁵⁷ Joe Loftus, "Lee Side", p. 104.

⁵⁸ Ayers and Lambertz, "Marriage Relations, Money, and Domestic Violence in Working-Class Liverpool, 1919-1939", p. 195.

⁵⁹ Dennis et al, *Coal is Our Life*, p. 187.

⁶⁰ Ayers and Lambertz, "Marriage Relations, Money, and Domestic Violence in Working-Class Liverpool, 1919-1939", pp. 195, 199; Ellen Ross, "'Fierce Questions and Taunts'", pp. 575-597.

⁶¹ Kenneth Maher's parents argued on Saturday evenings after his father had spent his money on drink: Kenneth Maher, "Caerphilly", p. 32. Other examples were: G. E. Miles; *Fragments From the Tapestry of Life*, p. 31; Elsie Gadsby, *Black Diamonds, Yellow Apples*, p. 10; Emily Glencross, *Breakfast at Windsor*, p. 11.

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how these factors were important in determining the tenor of his parents relationships. His father "pushed his head in the sand" and was unaware of the difficulties that his wife had with budgeting; it was not that he "squandered" his money but just that "he tipped his money in and thought it did the job." Before the strike and depression, the atmosphere at home had been different: "If we had a full week's work we were in clover...You could sense my parents were happy. There wasn't the friction."⁶² Ron Barnes admitted that when he and his wife rowed about money it was due to his lack of understanding of how hard it was for his wife to manage on the wages of an unskilled labourer. He gave her what he believed to be reasonable, but recognised that this was not very generous. However, he thought that even if he had been aware of the cost of living he could not have afforded to give her more money.⁶³ It was not that he was spending the remainder of the money on himself but that he was trying to save it, which on unskilled labourer's wages was not feasible. Ron's problems were compounded by frequent unemployment which also put a great strain on household income. Ron and his wife stopped rowing once he had a permanent job.⁶⁴ Edna Nockalls father was unemployed for six years and she was at times "aware of the bitter quarrels, then the long silences and the looks of despair on the faces of Mum and Dad that only poverty can bring."⁶⁵ Illness was also important in domestic relations because it not only altered personality but put financial strains on the family if it was the father who was unable to work.

Ron explained that part of the problem while he was unemployed was the role reversal in his relationship. This indicates that while division of tasks created a positive atmosphere for some couples, some were uneasy with exchanging socially accepted roles. The concept of the ideal family was powerful, and the pressures to achieve it were felt more by working-class couples because it was so much harder for them because of their circumstances. Men seemed to be particularly frustrated by their inability to carry out their role as breadwinner. Thus, when Edna Nockall's father was off work because of an industrial accident "his usual good spirits were deflated to say the least...Now and again he felt at the end of his tether." Betty Dickinson's parents shouted at each other during the General Strike because her mother was not used to her husband being at home and her father found it hard not being at work.⁶⁶

⁶² Clifford Steel, "Barnsley", pp. 126, 128, 124.

⁶³ Ron Barnes, *Coronation Cups and Jam Jars*, p. 180.

⁶⁴ Ron Barnes, *Coronation Cups and Jam Jars*, p. 200.

⁶⁵ Edna Nockalls, *Another Time, Another Place*, p. 9.

⁶⁶ Edna Nockalls, *Another Time, Another Place*, p. 68; Betty Dickinson, *Shanty Town*, p. 22.

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The impact of low and uncertain income on relationships is born out by examining the social status of the couples who quarrelled or were violent. The couples who were least likely to have acrimonious relations were skilled workers, as Figure 9.1 demonstrates, while unskilled and semi-skilled were far more likely to do so. The high rate among the semi-skilled reflected the fact that this class contained the families of

Table 9.1:

Size of Skilled Workers' Dwellings

N° of Rooms	Sizes of Skilled Workers' Homes n=66		Sizes of Miners' Homes n=19	
	total	%	total	%
	1	3	4.5	0
2	2	3.0	4	21.0
3	5	7.5	1	5.0
4	5	7.5	7	37.0
5	6	9.0	2	10.5
6	15	23.0	0	0.0
7	4	6.0	0	0.0
8	1	1.5	1	5.0
9	1	1.5	0	0.0

unemployed men and were financially pushed like the unskilled workers. Space was also an issue here, since these couples generally had smaller homes than skilled couples. This had implications for the privacy of couples: it made it harder for them to spend time together and to spend time alone. Frequenting the pub was one solution to this problem. The impact of the size of the home on relationships could explain why miners were exceptions among skilled workers (three of the six skilled workers who rowed were miners) because, as Table 9.1 shows, they generally had smaller homes.

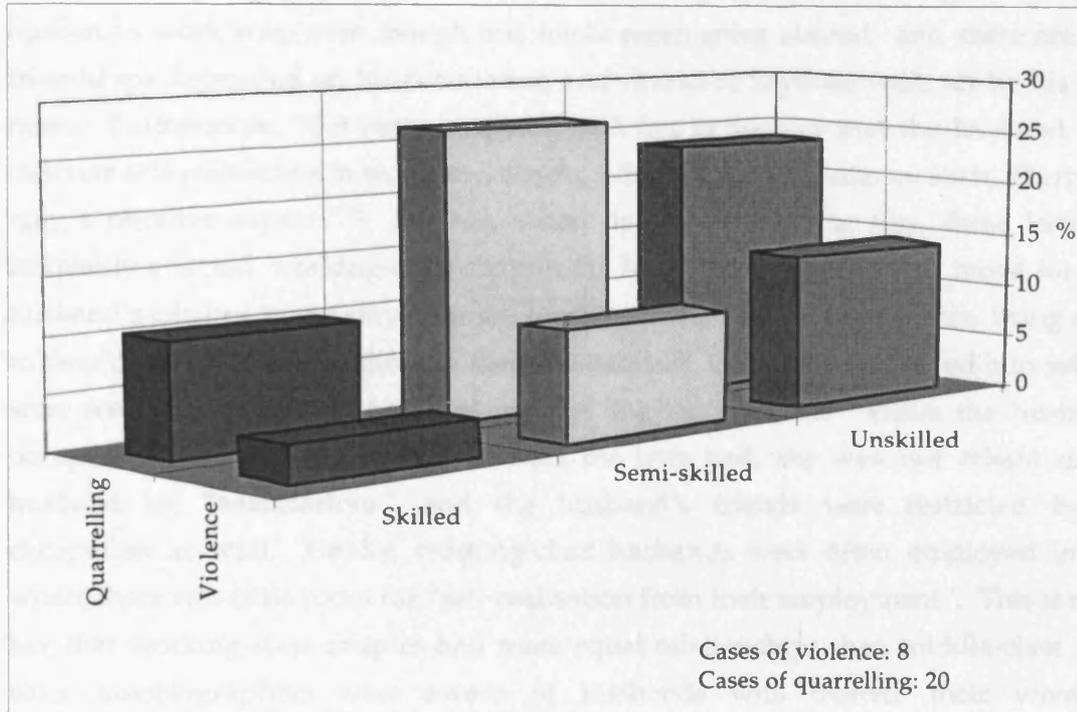
Mogey's 1950s study of Oxford, connected the type of house with family relations. He argued that estate housing encouraged more intimate and loving family relations and this contrasted with relations of families in central Oxford "slums" which were hindered by the attitudes of the inhabitants who were not open to "new ideals" of childcare and "individual betterment."⁶⁷ However, he did not compare the income and status of the families in these houses with those in the old houses in central Oxford.⁶⁸ Given the council rent and housing selection policy in the 1950s, the families living in estate houses were often better paid, skilled workers: their economic conditions and work environment meant that they would have had better family relations anyway and these were further aided by larger homes on the estate. The

⁶⁷ Mogey, "Changes in Family Life", p. 126.

⁶⁸ Mogey, "Changes in Family Life", pp. 123-128.

“slum” dwellers’ acceptance of “small old fashioned brick boxes” may have been a pragmatic approach to everyday life.⁶⁹

Figure 9.1: Impact of Status on Marital Relationships



To summarise, the negative aspects of relationships are easier to show. However, out of 122 couples, 106 were not mentioned for quarrelling or violence. They may have quarrelled and only three autobiographers mentioned that their parents did not quarrel at all. Ralph Glasser explained that if his parents had argued he would have known because they lived in a small house and this would have applied to most of the autobiographers’ families.⁷⁰ However, even those couples who generally did not get on experienced positive moments, which the long periods covered by the autobiographies illustrated well. Kathleen Dayus’ husband, for example, spent part of his wages on drink which meant that they quarrelled often, but in spite of this there were “happier times”. She explained that “[i]f Charlie was off the drink he could be very good company and although the first flush of love had passed long since we would go out together some Saturday nights....”⁷¹ The autobiographers used economic conditions to explain the pressures on these relationships more than any other and this

⁶⁹ Moge, “Changes in Family Life”, p. 128.

⁷⁰ Ralph Glasser, *Growing Up in the Gorbals*, p. 133.

⁷¹ Kathleen Dayus, *Where There’s Life*, p. 171.

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reason suggests that marital relationships were affected by class-based factors, because middle-class families suffered from financial hardship to a far lesser extent. Middle-class marriages were affected by different factors. Simone de Beauvoir believed that because men continued to have “economic responsibility” in the family this prevented equality between couples. Thus, women had to go where their husband’s work was, even though this might mean going abroad, and therefore their friendships depended on his occupation and domestic rhythms were set by his work hours. Furthermore, “the basic inequality still lies in the fact that the husband finds concrete self-realisation in work and action, whereas for the wife, as such, liberty has only a negative aspect.”⁷² In 1949, when de Beauvoir wrote this, these issues of inequality affected working-class couples far less. Some women did move for their husband’s job, but many stayed in the locality where they grew up, often living closer to their own families than those of their husbands.⁷³ Couples who moved into suburbs were removed both from families and the husbands’ work. While the husband’s occupation dictated the kinds of friends the wife had, she was not reliant on her husband for “associations” and the husband’s friends were restricted by his occupation as well. Finally, working-class husbands were often employed in jobs where there was little room for “self-realisation from their employment”. This is not to say that working-class couples had more equal relationships than middle-class ones, since autobiographers were aware of husbands who treated their wives as subordinates; men still retained “economic responsibility”, but this could be more easily lost or tempered by working wives.

Part Two: Children and Parents⁷⁴

As with marital relationships, the twentieth century has been associated with the development of understanding and affectionate relationships between parents and children.⁷⁵ This was allegedly because: smaller families meant that parents could give more time to their children; discipline became less harsh; and children became less

⁷² Simone de Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* (first published 1949, 1972 edition), pp. 498-9, cited in Edgell, *Middle-Class Couples*, p. 112.

⁷³ Moge noted that most of the girls in central Oxford lived near their mothers when married and Madeline Kerr found young couples more often lived with the wife’s family: Moge: “Changes in Family Life”, p. 126; Madeline Kerr, *The People of Ship Street* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), pp. 40-1.

⁷⁴ The term ‘children’ is used here to apply both to offspring and to those who were not adults. See Chapter Two for explanatory note.

⁷⁵ Harry Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society, 1880-1990* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1997), p. 35.

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economically important.⁷⁶ These trends apparently mirrored those of companionate marriage by beginning among middle-class families and gradually moving down the social scale as the twentieth century progressed.⁷⁷ The affection was principally seen in terms of mother-love and the good relationships were those between mother and child. This reflected assumptions about who was caring for children. Diane Richardson argued that throughout the first half of the century the onus of childcare shifted from both parents to the mother so that by the 1950s John Bowlby in his *Childcare and Growth of Love* (1953) could argue that all other relationships were of secondary importance to that of mother and child.⁷⁸ These prescriptive sources were taken as the reality by surveys of the 1950s, who maintained that mothers and their offspring had closer relationships.⁷⁹ Slater and Woodside noted that “neurotic” mothers affected childhood happiness to a far greater extent than “neurotic” fathers.⁸⁰ Ironically, despite the fact that the twentieth century has been viewed as a period of more loving relationships, inter-war childcare manual writers such as John Watson and Truby King encouraged mothers not to cuddle, kiss or play with children and to follow strict time-tabling and discipline.⁸¹ This policy was abandoned in the 1950s when mothers were encouraged to devote themselves to the entertainment and desires of their children. The impact that these trends had on working-class childcare was probably limited because few working-class mothers had access to these books and magazines and relied more on the advice of friends and relatives.⁸² Even in the 1950s a Mass Observation survey noted that poorer women did not read books on the subject, though they might read newspaper articles.⁸³

⁷⁶ Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, pp. 18, 22, 35.

⁷⁷ Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, p. 28.

⁷⁸ John Bowlby, *Child Care and the Growth of Love* (1953) cited in Diane Richardson, *Women, Motherhood and Childrearing* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), p. 43. See also Jane Lewis, *Women in Britain Since 1945*, p. 15. Mass Observation’s survey on the bringing up of children interviewed only mothers and had a section of “mother love” but fathers are not mentioned at all: Mass Observation, “Bringing Up a Family” *Mass Observation Bulletin* March/April (1952), pp. 2-11. The direction of childcare manuals towards women seems to have started in the eighteenth century: Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650-1850*, p. 126.

⁷⁹ Kerr, *The People of Ship Street*, Chapter IV; Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (1957, Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1962, 1970 reprint), pp. 44-75; Moge, “Changes in Family Life”, p. 125.

⁸⁰ Slater and Woodside, *Patterns of Marriage*, p. 53.

⁸¹ Richardson, *Women, Motherhood and Childrearing*, pp. 33-35.

⁸² Richardson, *Women, Motherhood and Childrearing*, pp. 36, 44-6.

⁸³ Mass Observation, “Bringing Up a Family”, *Mass Observation Bulletin* VLIV March/April (1952), p. 3.

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However, as with the companionate marriage thesis, historians of earlier periods found affectionate and understanding relationships between parents and children and that fathers played a significant, if limited, role in bringing up children. The activities fathers performed were remarkably similar to those in the twentieth-century autobiographies: they played with them; took them for walks or on outings; and found them employment.⁸⁴ Houlbrooke found in the early modern period that parents had varied attitudes towards their children.⁸⁵ Cunningham has pointed out that those who have attempted to discover whether parents loved their children have established a "false dichotomy between parents who did love their children, and those who did not, quite failing to recognise that some parents might both love and not love their children...."⁸⁶ This ambiguity of emotions was experienced by parents in the autobiographies. Edith Evans considered that her children were her "whole lovely world" and she was "overjoyed" when she became pregnant again at forty-five. Her enthusiasm was not shared by her husband who "didn't mind children, but took very little interest in them."⁸⁷ He spent more time with his adopted daughter than with his own children. Other fathers were openly fond of their children. To Henry Hollis's father "[h]is children was his life" and "he did all he could" for them and Henry's mother felt the same way.⁸⁸ Doreen Wildgoose's father always said that he would not be without his three daughters and did not regret having no sons.⁸⁹ Joyce Storey and her mother, alternatively, certainly had ambivalent feelings about motherhood: Joyce's mother observed "[y]ou cannot make a woman love her child just by virtue of the fact that a man can make her pregnant" while Joyce Storey was unhappy each time she was pregnant.⁹⁰ She saw it as a curtailment of her freedom which made her life a monotonous existence and believed that it drove the family further into poverty.⁹¹ However, she did love her children and was determined to have close relationships with them in the way her mother had failed to do.

Given that all autobiographers described their childhood, there is far more detail on the children's feelings towards parents. Again, these relationships differed

⁸⁴ Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650-1850*, p. 124.

⁸⁵ Houlbrooke, *The English Family, 1450-1700*, p. 156.

⁸⁶ Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (London: Longman, 1995), p. 187.

⁸⁷ Edith Evans, *Rough Diamonds*, p. 233.

⁸⁸ Henry Hollis, *Farewell Leicester Square*, pp. 12, 9.

⁸⁹ Doreen Wildgoose, *What Did You Do in the War, Grandma?*, p. 52.

⁹⁰ Joyce Storey, *Joyce's War*, p. 109.

⁹¹ Joyce Storey, *Joyce's Dream*, p. 37.

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widely. Winifred Foley described her father as “the fount of wisdom, kindness and honour. Whenever we wanted his attention he became a child among us - slow, dreamy and always understanding.”⁹² Archie Hill saw his father in a completely different light: “I promised my soul that when a man’s years had weighted my arms I would crush my dad into pulp. I would destroy him and kick the remnants about until they disappeared....”⁹³ Despite the fact he tried to protect his mother from his father’s violence, he felt a similar hatred for her. Nor should it be assumed that mothers were considered only to be loving:

Our Mum was also very cruel and spiteful towards us, especially to me...and I could never make out why until I was old enough to be told...I felt sorry for her at times and I tried my best to love her but we all lived in fear when she started to shout.⁹⁴

Thus, as with attachments between couples, there was no one, dominant experience in parent-child relationships.

Demonstrative affection between parents and autobiographers was referred to more often than that between parents. This was because the autobiographers were directly involved and because it was far less intimate than affection between husband and wife. Henry Hollis’s mother used to “cuddle” him, James Charlton and Grace Foakes would climb into bed with their mothers and Grace liked to lie with her arms around her mother.⁹⁵ Several people explicitly stated that their family did not show any physical affection, but this did not necessarily mean that they did not feel loved. As Edna Nockalls explained:

We never had much money, but we did have caring parents and although we never openly expressed our emotions by hugging and kissing each other, we had a love that came from deep inside.⁹⁶

Alice Foley, Evelyn Cowan, Michael de Larrabeiti and Tom Wakefield were all positive about parents who did not show them affection. Their childhoods spanned the period 1900-1955 showing the continuity of this experience: Alice was born at the end of the nineteenth century and Tom and Michael in the late 1930s. Daisy Noakes

⁹² Winifred Foley, *A Child in The Forest*, p. 22.

⁹³ Archie Hill, *A Cage of Shadows*, p. 9.

⁹⁴ Kathleen Dayus, *Her People*, p. 6.

⁹⁵ Henry Hollis, *Farewell Leicester Square*, p. 22; James Charlton, *More Sand in My Shoes*, p. 92; Grace Foakes, *Between High Walls*, p. 9.

⁹⁶ Edna Nockalls, *Another Time, Another Place*, p. 19.

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and Kathleen Dayus, on the other hand, were not positive about lack of affection and this affected how they felt about their mothers. People also had different understanding of degrees of affection. Josephine Gibney commented that: "We never showed a lot of affection in our family. It was something we couldn't do. But mother always kissed us goodnight."⁹⁷ For other families this would have been very demonstrative and unheard of in their homes. Finally, parental affection was not always appreciated by children. George Hitchin's "doting" mother was affectionate but he found her "sentimental to a sickly degree" and actually felt far more positive about his father who was not described as demonstrative.⁹⁸

As with the lack of displays of affection, punishment that involved slapping, spanking or smacking did not necessarily make children feel negatively towards their parents. The respect or deference children had for parents meant that they accepted this as parental right, even if it was an unpleasant experience.⁹⁹ Extreme punishment, however, did upset or destroy relationships, as in the case of Grace Foakes's brother and her father and between Archie Hill and his father. In these cases the children felt that their fathers had abused their power over them. The violence of the punishment, especially when there was no apparent reason for it, indicated that domestic violence was not just limited to husbands and wives. Rose Gamble's father hit his wife and children and Josephine Gibney's brother was punched around the pig sty by his stepfather several times a week; after several years of this abuse her brother ended up in a mental asylum.¹⁰⁰ Alice Foley and Joe Loftus noted that as their brothers got older, their fathers' authority weakened. In Alice's household this meant that her father was no longer able to stop his sons from fighting, while Joe's brother laid his father out flat for "once too often threatening mother".¹⁰¹ Unlike domestic violence between husband and wife, that between parent and child was less tolerated by the state. Archie's father was frequently violent towards his mother but when the local policeman discovered that the father had hit Archie, he took the father into the back yard and thrashed him.¹⁰² Archie Hill later got his revenge himself by beating up his father before he left home - as he had promised himself as a child.

⁹⁷ Josephine Gibney, *Joe McGarrigle's Daughter*, p. 37.

⁹⁸ George Hitchin, *Pit-Yacker*, p. 18.

⁹⁹ Davin notes that children's reaction to discipline depended on the relationship between parent and child, the form of the punishment and whether the child thought they deserved it: Anna Davin: *Growing Up Poor: Home, School and Street in London 1870-1914* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1996), p. 9.

¹⁰⁰ Josephine Gibney, *Joe McGarrigle's Daughter*, pp. 81, 141.

¹⁰¹ Joe Loftus, "Lee Side", p. 32.

¹⁰² Archie Hill, *A Cage of Shadows*, p. 28.

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The importance of children's economic contributions to household income has been used as an indication that parents cared less for their children, though Cunningham has commented that economic and emotional attachments were not mutually incompatible.¹⁰³ Working-class families often needed their children to work, even though they wished they could stay at home. Winifred Foley's father explained this to her before she went into service:

'now I don't have to tell thee 'ow much your mam and I wish we could kip thee at 'ome...A year do seem a long way at thy age, and it'll seem a long time to we at 'ome, but just you think o' the excitement when we all come to the station to meet thee.'¹⁰⁴

When her sister came home from service, the importance of the occasion to her parents was marked by the fact that they used the best cutlery.¹⁰⁵ Spike Mays's father evidently wanted the best for his son and preferred him to remain at school. He sold his prized pen to pay for the train ticket to Newport when Spike took his scholarship exam and took the day off to go with him. However, in the end Spike's parents were not able to send him to grammar school and needed him to work.¹⁰⁶ Children themselves often wanted to help their parents because it made them feel grown-up and gave them privileges and self-esteem.¹⁰⁷ This was often the case for the autobiographers, as Chapter Eight demonstrated, though some regretted having to leave school.

From the descriptions of feelings for parents, certain patterns emerged, showing that particular words were used to describe both parents while others were applied more to fathers than mothers and vice versa. The first part of Table 9.1 shows the words used to describe both mothers and fathers, the second those used to describe mothers more than fathers and the final section words which were applied mainly to fathers. Mothers were described more often for what they did. Fathers were remembered for temperament such as being kind and gentle, though the one thing they were often remembered for doing was drinking. The latter was not automatically a negative description: Doreen Wildgoose proudly claimed that her father could drink

¹⁰³ Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500*, p. 177.

¹⁰⁴ Winifred Foley, *A Child in the Forest*, p. 150.

¹⁰⁵ Winifred Foley, *A Child in the Forest*, pp. 152.

¹⁰⁶ Spike Mays, *Reuben's Corner*, p. 172.

¹⁰⁷ See Chapter Eight, part two. Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western society Since 1500*, p. 177.

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anyone under the table.¹⁰⁸ Others hated their fathers drinking because it meant that their parents argued.¹⁰⁹ Mothers were hardly ever described as being kind or gentle, possibly because they had too much to do or because they were the ones who generally disciplined children.

Table 9.2: Descriptions of Parents

Persons Described	Description	N° of Occurrences for Fathers	N° of Occurrences for Mothers
		n=122	n=128
parents	loving, caring, affectionate	8	12
	wonderful, perfect	2	4
	easy going, indulgent	4	2
	good relationship with	4	4
	loves, adores	9	12
	bad relationship with, quarrels with	7	5
	hates	5	3
	afraid of	3	4
mothers	bad tempered, erratic tempered	3	9
	clean and tidy, house proud	3	11
	hard worker, good manager, did all the work	4	16
	brings up children	2	8
fathers	strict	11	6
	gentle, kind	9	2
	drinks	12	0
	better when out, dominating, boss of house, master of house	12	0

Using these descriptions and the way that the parents behaved towards their children, I have classified relationships with fathers and mothers into categories of “very positive”, “positive”, “ambiguous”, “negative” or “very negative”. In contrast with Hendrick, who believed that affection between children and fathers was rarer than that between mothers and children, Figure 9.2 shows that daughters felt slightly more positive about their fathers than their mothers, though boys were slightly less positive about their fathers than their mothers.¹¹⁰ However, they discussed their fathers more than their mothers and this contrasts with the findings of Davin who argued that “fathers seldom loom large” in autobiographies and did not inspire loyalty in the way that mothers did.¹¹¹

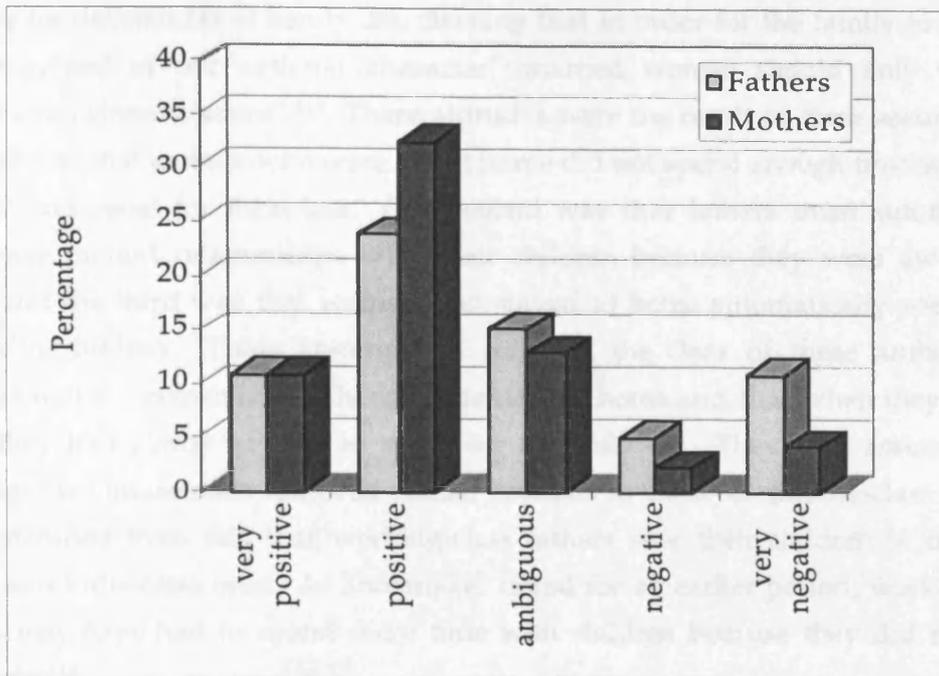
¹⁰⁸ Doreen Wildgoose, *What Did You Do in the War, Grandma?*, p. 47.

¹⁰⁹ See previous section for examples.

¹¹⁰ Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, p. 26.

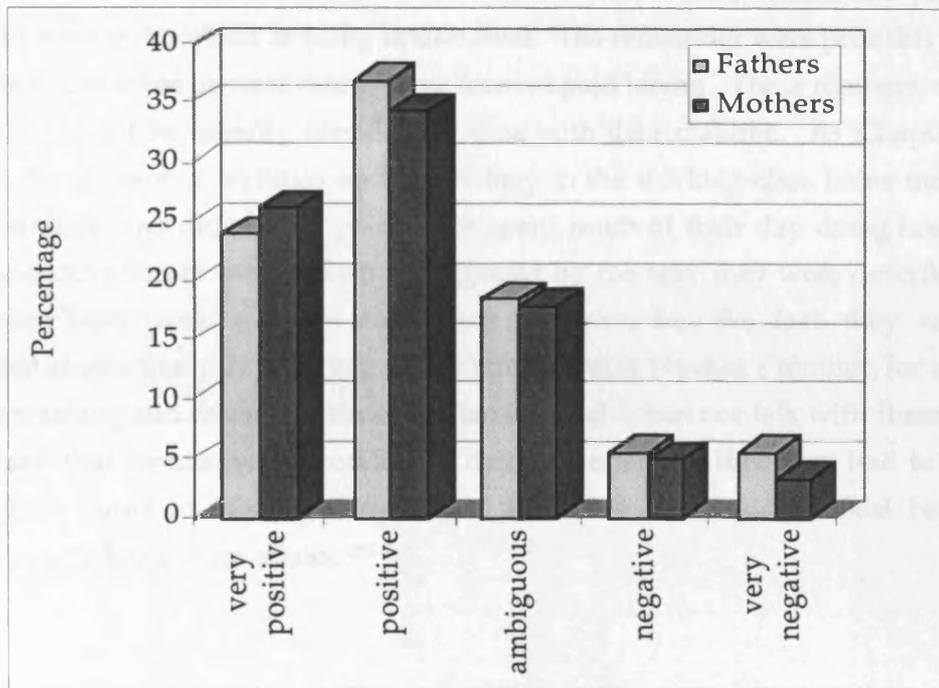
¹¹¹ Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, p. 26.

Figure 9.2: Boys' Descriptions of Parents



Fathers: 46 (no description = 14); Mothers: 46 (no description = 17).

Figure 9.3: Girls' Descriptions of Parents



Fathers: 54 (no description = 5); Mothers: 61 (no description = 8).

The fact that fathers were more often mentioned than mothers also contradicts the childcare manual writers such as Bowlby who believed the relationship with the mother had a greater impact on the child's experience of home than that with the

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father. It also questions those, such as H. Mainwaring Holt, who blamed working mothers for deficiencies of family life, claiming that in order for the family to “remain the stronghold of our national character” married women should only work in “exceptional circumstances”.¹¹² These attitudes were the result of three assumptions. The first was that women who were not at home did not spend enough time with their children and cared for them less. The second was that fathers must automatically have more distant relationships with their children because they were away from home, and the third was that women who stayed at home automatically spent more time with children. These assumptions reflected the class of these authors who believed that all women could choose to remain at home and that when they were at home they had plenty of time to spare for the children. They also assumed that working-class households followed similar routines to those of middle-class families and concluded from this that working-class fathers saw their children to the same extent as middle-class ones. As Shoemaker noted for an earlier period, working-class fathers may have had to spend more time with children because they did not have paid help.¹¹³

Over one in four of the mothers in the autobiographies worked outside the home on a part or full-time basis, one in five did paid work at home and just under one in four were described as being housewives. The remainder were probably at home either as housewives or were doing some form of paid labour. These mothers, although at home, did not necessarily spend more time with their children. As Chapter Seven argued, the absence of facilities and technology in the working-class home meant that those mothers who did not do paid work spent much of their day doing housework. The pre-occupation of the mothers is suggested by the way they were described: that they were hard working, clean and good managers, but the fact they were bad tempered shows that this put them under stress. Daisy Noakes’s mother, for example, took in washing and never had time to listen to her children nor talk with them. This is not to say that women were working all day, but often the time they had to rest, as Spring-Rice noted in *Working-Class Wives*, was after the midday meal before the children came home from school.¹¹⁴

¹¹² The author, however, considered domestic service to be an acceptable female occupation: H. Mainwaring Holt, “The Decay Of Family Life”, *Health Education Journal* IX 4 (1951), pp. 183-5.

¹¹³ Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650-1850*, p. 128.

¹¹⁴ Margery Spring Rice, *Working-Class Wives: Their Health and Conditions* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1939), p. 99.

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Working-class fathers may have helped less in the home because of work hours, but working-class routines and hours of employment meant that they could spend more time with their families than middle-class fathers. Since many working-class families still lived in terraced housing near the place of work, fathers and school children often came home for the midday meal.¹¹⁵ The family also met at the evening meal which was frequently eaten early so that younger members of the family could join in. This was not the case in middle-class homes:

in middle-class families...five o'clock tea for small children is the norm...followed by father's return and a short playtime, after which their children are packed off to bed and the parents are free to enjoy their evening meal together.¹¹⁶

Mass Observation also found this to be the case: "[t]he time before 6.30 p.m...is more often a working rather than a middle-class eating time...."¹¹⁷ This pattern of family life would have been harder to maintain on housing estates which were too far away to permit the father to come home for lunch; a feature of suburban living not noted by Mogey in his avocation of family-fostering housing estates.¹¹⁸

Particular features of working-class employment, such as shift work and cyclical unemployment, resulted in some fathers being around during the day: "[w]orking-class far more than middle-class fathers take being at home during the day as a matter of course".¹¹⁹ Social investigators John and Elizabeth Newson argued that these fathers got to see their pre-school children more than those doing a nine to five job:

Night-shift working, and to some extent morning and afternoon shift work also, may mean that the father in fact becomes more intimately involved in domestic life and the care of the baby than if he were doing an ordinary eight-till-five job.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Joe Hind believed that he and his brother had been sent to an open air school because their father did not want to have to put up with them in the dinner break: Joe Hind, *A Shieldfield Childhood*, p. 25.

¹¹⁶ John and Elizabeth Newson, *Patterns of Infant Care in a Urban Community* (1963, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 194.

¹¹⁷ Mass Observation, "Cooking For the Family", *Mass Observation Bulletin* XLVII September/November (1952), p. 9.

¹¹⁸ This was discussed in the previous section of the chapter.

¹¹⁹ Newson and Newson, *Patterns of Infant Care*, p. 217.

¹²⁰ Newson and Newson, *Patterns of Infant Care*, p. 215.

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This was the case in the autobiographies. George Glencross's hours of work meant that he was able to see his daughter at all times of the day and he loved coming home after his night shift to watch her having her morning bath. When his shift finished at two o'clock, he and Emily would take the baby to the park. May Ayers, whose father was a fisherman, played in their boat shed while her father mended his nets when waiting for the tide.¹²¹ Many of the autobiographers were writing about the twenties and thirties when their fathers suffered long-term unemployment and this meant that they got to see their fathers more. As I explained in Chapter Eight, unemployed fathers, such as Rose Gamble's and Joseph Farrington's, would look after their children. In Joseph case this resulted in his father being the "best friend" he ever had. Rose, on the other hand, did not get on with her father that well. Kathleen Dayus got to know her father better when helping him sell wood while he was unemployed just before the First World War.¹²² Unemployed men and shiftworkers, therefore, could see their children more, and this generally fostered good relationships. However, children could be fond of parents whom they did not see much. Rose Gamble may have seen more of her father during the day, but she was much more positive about her mother whom she only saw in the evenings - as many other children only saw their fathers.¹²³ This also applied to fathers: Spike Mays did not see his father very often but he still loved him.¹²⁴

The importance of fathers is further illustrated by the fact that autobiographers mentioned the things they did with their fathers more often than the things they did with their mothers, though mothers might be there in the background watching what went on. One in six fathers were described as doing activities with children compared with one in ten mothers. This may have made the children feel that their fathers had more time for them than their mothers. Fathers took their children for walks, or cycling, or to the allotment and played games with their children in the evening. Peggy Walker played with her siblings on their river bank where their father would join them and teach them about wildlife or fishing.¹²⁵ Going for walks or playing games, even if only for a short period of time were activities appreciated by children, and were seen as more important than having their washing and cleaning done by their mother.

¹²¹ Emily Glencross, *For Better or For Worse*, p. 15; May Ayers, *Memoirs of a Shannock*, p. 4.

¹²² Rose Gamble, *A Chelsea Childhood*, p. 34; Joseph Farrington, "Manchester", pp. 12-13; Kathleen Dayus, *Where There's Life*, p. 86.

¹²³ Rose Gamble, *A Chelsea Child*, p. 9-10.

¹²⁴ Spike Mays, *Reuben's Corner*, p. 12.

¹²⁵ Peggy Walker, *Rudgwick Memories*, p. 10.

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While mothers may have had less time for children, this did not mean they had less affection for them. What kept them so busy was maintaining the home, either in housework or paid labour.¹²⁶ This is not to say that mothers did not entertain children at all. Mollie Harris's mother told them stories and took them blackberrying and mushrooming, despite having eight children. Joe Hind listened to radio plays with his mother and Elsie Balme's told her stories.¹²⁷ For some others, spending time with parents was not necessarily desirable, and they preferred their peers. As a result they were not often at home for their parents to spend time with them. Because of limited space, children generally spent much of their spare time on the street and during the day attended school or work and sometimes both. This was the case in Babs Hilton's family: "Children never stayed in the house much. We were always outside playing: When you only had a two-bedroom house and five children, there wasn't a lot of room!"¹²⁸ Sarsby found that minding children in inter-war pottery towns consisted of just calling them in for tea.¹²⁹

Relationships between parents affected those between parents and children. Thus, the harmonious relations between Margaret Ward's parents "overflowed into affection" for Margaret and her sister and made them feel positive towards their parents.¹³⁰ Autobiographers were fond of fathers who were devoted to mothers. George Hitchin seemed to dislike his mother mainly on the basis that she did not give his father enough attention: "My father was a good man whom I loved dearly, and him she neglected shamefully. His prime function was, in her opinion to bring money into the house."¹³¹ Autobiographers were definitely not fond of fathers who hit their mothers. With one exception, the mothers who were on the receiving end of the violence, were described affectionately and the children took the mother's side and tried to protect her from their father. Even Archie Hill tried to defend his mother, although he hated her and called her "witch mam" and was later violent towards his wife. On the other hand, parents who quarrelled were loved by their children even

¹²⁶ Some mothers spent savings or earnings on themselves: Elsie Goodhead's mother spent her father's savings on hats while Helen Forrester's mother used her wages to keep herself smart for her work. Ironically, as a middle-class woman fallen on hard times, this would have been more socially acceptable for Helen's mother to do than Elsie's: Elsie Goodhead, *The West End Story*, p. 37; Helen Forrester, *Twopence to Cross the Mersey*, p. 147.

¹²⁷ Joe Hind, *A Shieldfield Childhood*, p. 91; Elsie Balme, *Seagull Morning*, p. 20.

¹²⁸ Babs Hilton, "A Whyteleafe Childhood", p. 46.

¹²⁹ Jacqueline Sarsby, *Missuses and Mouldrunners: An Oral History of Women Pottery Workers at Work and at Home* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988), p. 69.

¹³⁰ Margaret Ward, *One Camp Chair in the Living Room*, p. 10.

¹³¹ George Hitchin, *Pit-Yacker*, p. 17.

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though they did not understand why their parents were arguing at the time. This was presumably because, as mentioned above, quarrelling and affection were not mutually exclusive.

Some mothers may have exploited children's loyalty in their own battles against their husbands. Edith Evans described her father as "an ogre", who refused to be seen in public with his family and considered them to be the responsibility of his wife. While on the face of it he seemed an especially unloving father, this attitude seems to have been fostered by their mother. He used to take the older girls out when they were young but once took them out for the whole day. Edith's mother "wouldn't let that happen again",¹³² maybe because she did not trust her husband, or because she did not want her children to get close to their father. If the latter was her intent then she succeeded. However, the fact that he insisted on having a photograph taken of the family before he visited New Zealand, suggests that he was fonder of his family than he showed: "He looked such a proud man, standing...at the back of his seated family."¹³³ Given the emphasis on the role of the mother, it was easier for mothers to turn their children against their fathers, making them feel excluded and isolated from family life.

The relationships between parents and children were not static and could change in response to events and life-course. This was the case for Mary Bentley who had been very close to her father throughout her childhood and they had gone everywhere together. However, they quarrelled when she was eighteen and this completely destroyed any closeness between them.¹³⁴ For some the relationship changed simply because they grew up. Babs Hilton explained that she had been afraid of her mother when she was small but as she got older her mother became more like a sister, the implication being that it was possible to be close to sisters but not to mothers.¹³⁵ The same change occurred in Alice Linton's relationship with her mother and she commented that "[i]t was only when I got older that I realised what a dear my mother was." She assumed this was because once she and her brother were older her mother had less to worry about and became more easy going.¹³⁶ The relationships with their mothers may have changed because they were more supportive of their mothers, helping more with chores and even with their paid labour. Alice Foley's

¹³² Edith Evans, *Rough Diamonds*, p. 72.

¹³³ Edith Evans, *Rough Diamonds*, p. 30.

¹³⁴ Mary Bentley, *Born 1896*, p. 33.

¹³⁵ Babs Hilton, "A Whyteleafe Childhood", p. 47.

¹³⁶ Alice Linton, *Not Expecting Miracles*, p. 4.

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mother took in washing too, and the girls all helped with the ironing, but they only did this once they had started work. This might reflect increasing gender segregation, with girls associating themselves with their mothers and boys with their fathers. However, children could appreciate their fathers more as they got older, especially if their father was more inclined to spend time with older rather than younger children. Joyce Storey felt positive about her father as a child, but became even closer to him as an adolescent when they went cycling together. Elizabeth Fanshawe did not "take notice of and appreciate" her father until she was in her thirties and her autobiography was intended to be about her father whom she "adored".¹³⁷

The autobiographers generally had positive feelings towards both parents, even though the physical affection seemed rare. Fathers spent more time with their families than is usually acknowledged and this was demonstrated by the fact that frequent activities with fathers were mentioned more often than those with mothers. However, the autobiographers were distressed when their relationships with their father were bad (as they were with their mothers although this happened less), which suggests that while 'authorities' on childcare believed the mother to be more important, the children placed equal weight on their interaction with their fathers.¹³⁸ On the other hand, mothers who were not at home - or frequently busy when they were - were not loved the less by their children. They could appreciate the pressures their parents had to face, but as they got older they understood this far more and the relationship could move from one of deference to one of support and friendship.

Part Three: Sibling Relationships

Davidoff has observed that sibling relationships have generally been ignored by historians.¹³⁹ However, good or bad relationships with brothers and sisters considerably affected the experience of home life and the ability to get on with siblings in the autobiographies was portrayed as a positive experience. Sibling relationships were especially important in working-class homes in which bedrooms and beds were shared with brothers and sisters and older children looked after younger ones. There were several factors that inspired close or antagonistic relationships between brothers and sisters. Closeness could be the result of: absence or death of a parent; parental

¹³⁷ Elizabeth Fanshawe, *Penkhull Memories*, pp. 2, 22.

¹³⁸ George Miles explained that his bad relationship with his father originated from the time when his father had refused to look after him while his mother was in hospital: G. E. Miles, *Fragments From the Tapestry of Life*, p. 21.

¹³⁹ Leonore Davidoff, "'A Like Unlike' - Brothers and Sister in Modern England", Paper presented to the Social History Society Conference, 1998.

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discord; bad relationship with one or both parents; working or over-worked mother; and the isolation of the family. Some of these factors could also cause antagonism; taking care of siblings because of busy or working mother; older siblings disciplining younger ones; and disregard for personal space, both in terms of objects and in terms of actual space. Finally, indifference, rather than antagonism, towards brothers and sisters could just be a response to gender or age differences.

Hendrick's comment that "the larger the family the lower the level of affection" accounted only for parent-child, and principally mother-child relationships.¹⁴⁰ As the previous part of the chapter showed, mothers were generally busy and the size of their families often made them more so. This did not mean that the father did not have time for the children, but relationships between siblings were often strengthened because of the preoccupation of the mother. Older children were expected to take care of younger siblings and in some cases this created very close relationships. Elinor Sanderson basically brought up her younger sister until she went into service:

I missed home very much but my little sister most of all. She was the only one I cried for when I left. We had been so close, it upset me terribly. She had always come to me for everything. It was a great wrench.¹⁴¹

Autobiographers who were especially positive (as measured by the same kind of criteria that are used above regarding feelings towards parents) about their siblings had on average six siblings each. Of those who explicitly described their childhood as happy, just over half had five or more siblings, while just over a third had three or less. The reason behind this slight trend could be that in larger families children had to depend on each other more for attention. Peggy Walker commented that she thought large families were generally happy because there was always someone to do things with.¹⁴² Joe Loftus concurred with this, explaining that he learnt a great deal from his siblings:

As the youngest born it was not surprising that I owed a lot to my five brothers and two sisters. Wittingly or not their more mature interests stimulated my young mind and opened up vistas I might not otherwise have come to know until much later.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Harry Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, p. 26.

¹⁴¹ Elinor Sanderson, "Elinor Sanderson", p. 69.

¹⁴² Peggy Walker, *Rudgwick Memories*, p. 3.

¹⁴³ Joe Loftus, "Lee Side", p. 33.

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Family size alone was not enough to ensure happy families and the status of the family was an important factor in ensuring better relationships. As Burnett has noted: "the happiest memories of childhood generally came from larger working-class families which, by modern standards had no luxuries and few comforts, but stood somewhat above the level of very poor."¹⁴⁴ This was the case in the autobiographies. Of those families who had very positive relationships with siblings, more than two thirds of them came from the intermediate and skilled classes.¹⁴⁵

Four families, whose parents did not get on at all, were very close to each other as well as their mother. These families referred to their brothers and sisters frequently and described activities and events which they had all done together.¹⁴⁶ The relationships are notably different from descriptions of sibling relationships by other autobiographers, with the exception of those who had lost a parent. Edith Evans, for example, thought that they were an exceptionally agreeable family who rarely showed resentment towards each other and Edith was cared for by an elder sister whom she found very understanding. One factor that bound the children and the mother together was dislike for their father.¹⁴⁷ Rose Gamble was not only looked after by her sisters, but one returned home so that she could pay for Rose to go to grammar school. All four families implied that it was the aggressive behaviour of their fathers towards their mother and themselves which meant they took care of each other.

The absence of a parent could create similar relationships. Bill Griffiths, Evelyn Cowan and Dorothy Ash all had close and supportive relationships with siblings, Evelyn and Bill depending on older brothers and sisters for pocket money and other treats. Dorothy Ash explained why the children got on well: they wanted to make life as easy as possible for their widowed mother. This no doubt applied to Evelyn and Bill who were positive about their mothers.¹⁴⁸ The death of a mother may have had similar results, but in Ralph Glasser's home his mother was the linchpin of the family and the parent who inspired loyalty. Once she had died there was nothing to keep his sisters at home and Ralph was angry with them for deserting him and leaving him to cope with his father alone. The desire to make life easier for widowed

¹⁴⁴ Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, p. xvii. Hendrick, in revealing what he considered to be the contradictions in Burnett's argument, failed to note that when Burnett argued that larger families were happier he *did* relate this to status: Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, p. 19.

¹⁴⁵ These families made up 70% of the 'close' families.

¹⁴⁶ These were Rose Gamble, Edith Evans, Josephine Gibney, and Pat O'Mara.

¹⁴⁷ Edith Evans, *Rough Diamonds*, p. 34.

¹⁴⁸ Dorothy Ash, *Memories of a London Childhood*, p. 11.

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mothers was a reflection of the fact that they faced greater difficulties bringing up children without a proper income than did widowed fathers.

Lack of interest from one parent often meant that children supported each other. Kathleen Dayus, whose hatred for her mother is quoted above, had a close relationship with her brother and older sister. The close relationship with her brother was also the result of her victimisation by another sister. The lack of interest which Edith Evans's husband took in his own children possibly explains why the children were "devoted" to each other.¹⁴⁹ Joe Hind explained that he and his brother were very close because they were ignored by their father.¹⁵⁰

Having an employed mother, either in or out of the home, meant that siblings had to take care of one another. One reason why Alice Linton and her brother were so close was because their mother was away from home most of the day. They were generally left to their own devices and would get their tea together.¹⁵¹ Daisy Noakes's mother was so busy taking in washing and doing the housework that her ten children looked after each other. Daisy explained that they were "happy together" and were still "as close as peas in a pod."¹⁵² Edith Evans's and Rose Gamble's mothers' employment was an additional factor in creating close relationships between the brothers and sisters. In the latter two cases at least, closeness to siblings did not lessen their attachment to their working mothers.

Living in isolated places - as the children of tenant farmers or gamekeepers often did - could make brothers and sisters close because they had to spend more time entertaining each other. Alice Markham's family lived three miles out of the village and until they got bicycles most of their activities centred around the farm and each other. Maggie Newbery lived almost three miles from her school and the children spent their holidays together helping on the farm or picnicking by the river. Lillian Bentley's father was a gamekeeper whose cottage was some way out of the village too. She spent a great deal of time with her siblings and they were unhappy when they had to move to a far less isolated home.¹⁵³ This reluctance suggested they were content with each other's company.

¹⁴⁹ Edith Evans, *Rough Diamonds*, p. 233.

¹⁵⁰ Joe Hind, *A Shieldfield Childhood*, p. 61.

¹⁵¹ Alice Linton, *Not Expecting Miracles*, p. 10.

¹⁵² Daisy Noakes, *The Town Beehive*, pp. 85-6.

¹⁵³ Lillian Bentley, "Rainbows in a Frowning Sky", p. 74.

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Looking after siblings had the potential to generate ill feeling, or at least irritation among siblings. It was not necessarily that they did not love their younger brothers and sisters but that they had better things to do. Joe Hind did not like having to take care of his younger brother: "My younger brother cramped my style and curtailed my various adventures with my mates. However, I never neglected him and grudgingly gave him my time when necessary."¹⁵⁴ Joe explained further that the age difference made empathy for him impossible. Doreen Wildgoose would have sympathised with his feelings. She had a close friend and they hated it when they had to take care of Doreen's younger sister: "I loved her dearly most of the time, but when we had to take her with us she seemed to grow horns."¹⁵⁵ Because older brothers and sisters took care of younger ones this invested them with authority and some felt that they had a right to discipline younger siblings. Joe Loftus's sisters dealt with him swiftly when he annoyed them:

[o]n occasion I got sorted out from my sisters, usually for making noise in the backyard when someone was trying to sleep between shifts and got beaten almost unconscious while mother was out of the way.¹⁵⁶

While this did not seem to affect his relationship with his sisters, he was certainly fondest of the brother who defended rather than belted him.

Other bones of contention between brothers and sisters, were the division of household tasks and the demarcation of personal space and possessions. Sisters were more likely to quarrel over household tasks than brothers simply because the latter had less chores to perform.¹⁵⁷ Clothes in particular were the focus of disagreements among siblings: Joe Loftus's sisters argued about clothes "as sisters usually do".¹⁵⁸ Helen Forrester hated it when her mother and sister borrowed her clothes without permission because she always took great care of her own things which they did not. They were bigger than her and always returned her clothes with rips and tears in them.¹⁵⁹ In all these cases, the anger was at the fact that boundaries of personal space had been ignored by others. However, clothes were important to boys too, and they were willing to thrash younger brothers or sisters who damaged their clothes. Another issue which

¹⁵⁴ Joe Hind, *A Shieldfield Childhood*, p. 61.

¹⁵⁵ Doreen Wildgoose, *What Did You Do in the War, Grandma?*, p. 56.

¹⁵⁶ Joe Loftus, "Lee Side", pp. 41-2.

¹⁵⁷ Joyce Skinner and Ruth Purchase, *Growing-Up Downhill*, p. 39; Bill Griffiths, *Growing Up in Manchester*, p. 26.

¹⁵⁸ Joe Loftus, "Lee Side", p. 42.

¹⁵⁹ Helen Forrester, *By the Waters of Liverpool*, p. 182.

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caused arguments was having to share rooms and beds. Kathleen Dayus loathed her sister because she used to push her out of bed in the night and was happy when she got a bed of her own.¹⁶⁰

However, although sibling relationships were important to many autobiographers, as a whole they discussed brothers and sisters less than their parents. This might have been that for some relationships with peers were more important than with their siblings, though not more important than relationships with parents. The closeness with friends was no doubt because they were of a similar age or because they had similar interests. This was the case for Fred Archer who rarely discussed his brother and only mentioned his sister twice. His best friend, however, did feature frequently in his autobiography.

Part Four: Family Relationships and the Experience of Home Life

Children generally had positive experiences of home life. Over half of the autobiographers implied that they had a happy childhood - this was five times as many those who implied they had had an unhappy childhood. Supporting this evidence is the fact that "happy" was the most common word explicitly used to describe childhood family life: one in five of the autobiographers used this term. They also stress that they were happy despite the fact that their family was poor:¹⁶¹

We were lucky enough to have a happy and secure home, although money was often scarce. We did not expect much from either of our parents; most families were in the same boat, and many families had a meagre existence. Our parents did all they could to ensure we had the necessities of life....¹⁶²

We may have been very poor in regards to wealth but we were always a happy family, we made our own enjoyment.¹⁶³

Often the children were unaware of the poverty of their family, especially if all the other families they knew were in the "same boat": "We children did not understand the worry they were going through. It was a way of life and we didn't know any other, so we took it all in our stride!"¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Kathleen Dayus, *Her People*, p. 14.

¹⁶¹ Burnett found this to be the case as well: Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, p. xvii.

¹⁶² May Ayers, *Memoirs of a Shannock*, p. 8.

¹⁶³ Dick Beavis, *What Price Happiness*, p. 17.

¹⁶⁴ Edna Nockalls, *Another Time, Another Place*, p. 19.

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The relationships which the autobiographers had with their parents did have an impact on their experience of home life. Those who were positive about their home life were positive about both or at least one parent. This parent could be either the father or the mother, but was generally both. Conversely, negative experiences of family life were linked to negative attitudes towards both or one parent. Joe Hind's father was violent and unloving to him and his brother and this generated an atmosphere which "was not conducive to loving relationships".¹⁶⁵ Pat O'Mara, whose father was extremely violent towards his wife, would have rather lived in the communal closet which stank because it was quieter than his home.¹⁶⁶ However, he did feel homesick the first time he left home, though this was because he missed his mother. Kathleen Dayus had similar feelings about her home and this reflected her negative attitude towards her mother:

There were even papers stuck to the [living room] wall which announced such sentiments as "God Bless this House" and "Home Sweet Home". I could never understand why they were there, our house or home was far from happy.¹⁶⁷

Only Margaret Monkham felt unhappy as a child while describing both her parents positively. This unhappiness she blamed on her family's living conditions which at the age of eight she realised was due to their poverty.¹⁶⁸ Good relationships with siblings were important as well, though autobiographers were more resentful at being ill-treated by parents than by brothers and sisters.

When the autobiographers described their married life the tone of the autobiography became less nostalgic and more concerned with difficulties. Some of this was due to personality clash that was exacerbated by financial circumstances and living conditions. This suggests while family relationships were important to domestic happiness for children, financial security was more important for the domestic happiness of the married couple. However, the relationship between the mother and father did affect the way the children felt about their parents and thus about home life. Children whose parents quarrelled or fought never explicitly mentioned that they had a happy childhood. Since quarrelling was linked to the economic status of the family this meant that indirectly the children were affected by material conditions and explains why a large number of autobiographers who had "happy" childhoods were from the intermediate and skilled classes.

¹⁶⁵ Joe Hind, *A Shieldfield Childhood*, p. 61.

¹⁶⁶ Pat O'Mara, *The Autobiography of a Liverpool Slummy*, p. 92.

¹⁶⁷ Kathleen Dayus, *Her People*, p. 77.

¹⁶⁸ Margaret Monkham, *As I Remember*, p. 10.

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This chapter has demonstrated two main points. The first is that the experience of family relationships was varied both at the beginning and the end of the period 1900-1955. This variety in experience was also a trait of previous centuries, reflecting the continuities in human personalities and needs. However, there were factors external to relationships which could (though did not always) make them less stressful; these were higher income and the resultant standards of living. These factors could directly affect the dynamics of a couple's relationships and as a consequence indirectly affect the relationship between parents and children. The second point is that good relationships with all members of the family were important for a positive experience of home life and despite what official discourse and historians of the family have implied, fathers were as important for childhood happiness as mothers. A violent or uncaring father could make home life an equally distressing experience as an indifferent mother. In these cases, no matter how much the mother cared for the children, this could not counteract the behaviour of the father.

Chapter Ten

Conclusion

This chapter summarises the main arguments of the thesis, and places it in its historiographical context. It links the working-class experience of home to the broader discussion on “separate spheres” and gives some pointers for further research.

General Summary

My aim has been to provide a comprehensive study of all areas of home life, bringing various strands of history together in one volume, and to analyse the different aspects of home from the perspective of the dwellers themselves. The primary intention has been to let working people speak for themselves and to show that working-class homes were not just houses with tenants, nor were they hovels or ‘slums’. By focusing on working-class perceptions, I hope that the distance and sense of ‘other’ that is often present in studies of the working class has been minimised. There were certainly autobiographers whose lives appeared incomprehensible, but the majority described their childhood in a way which made them seem emotionally accessible, even if their material conditions were so different from today’s norms. A secondary intention, which is a result of the first, has been to show that domestic life was important to men. The so-called non-domestic task of providing for the family was crucial for family life and men made important contributions to the running of the home on an active as well as passive level. Moreover, it was evident that their families were important to them. Understanding men’s experiences of home is as necessary as recognising within traditional historical approaches the roles women played in the non-domestic sphere.

The sense of ‘other’ has been far less of a problem in studies which have used oral history and autobiographies. Social surveys of working-class housing are not suited for understanding the experience and emotional side of home life. This is partly because they have a political agenda and focus material conditions of the home in order to justify its improvement. If they were to admit that families put up with what they had (even if families had ideals about the place they would like to live) then nothing would change. They are unsuited also because social investigators had their

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own ideas of what was 'best' for the working class. The latter is well illustrated by the Tudor Walters Report which did not include the recommendations of the Women's Sub-Committee because they did not match what the male, middle-class committee thought working-class homes should be like. The negative representation of working-class domestic life in historiography is also due to the political agenda of the authors who, too, have needed to show the negative side of it to prove their point. Throughout much of the 1970s and 1980s, this point concerned the subordination of women to men.

This said, it is important to be aware that the more positive side of working-class home life portrayed by the thesis is partly a consequence of the source. The autobiographies focused mainly on childhood experiences which, although an extremely valid area of study, is the time in people's lives when they are most likely to be carefree and happy. Those who had really terrible childhoods may have been more reluctant to write about them because recalling distressing experiences means that they have to be re-lived. However, there were autobiographers who were willing to write about their childhoods, despite the bad memories which were evoked and the vivid anger they still felt.¹ There were also autobiographers who described materially impoverished childhoods yet still managed to describe positive experiences. The representativeness of the autobiographies was most affected by the small proportion of adult, and especially male adult, experiences of home life. If there had been more perceptions of married home life, then memories could well have been less nostalgic; this would probably be case for other classes as well, since adult life is generally more complicated.

Thus, it is important not to underestimate the difficulties that many working-class families had to face, or the fact that working-class women were less able, and maybe less inclined, to escape from these in the pub than men were. However, many of their difficulties were the result of class rather than gender relations: antagonism within families was the result of low pay and frustration at dull jobs and this was further enhanced by the general economic situation. Although between 1900 and 1955 there was overall a substantial increase in wages and therefore in living standards, there were variations which seemed more extreme during the inter-war depression. The families with fathers in full-time employment were far better off and benefited materially from the fall in prices. This was the reverse experience of the unemployed, some of whom lost any material assets they had acquired in the years prior to the

¹ The most extreme examples of this were Helen Forrester, Archie Hill, Pat O'Mara, Kathleen Dayus and Jo Gibney.

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slump. These variations have always been present in the twentieth century, and continued after 1945 even after the extension of the welfare state. The latter was viewed as a solution to the situation of the 1920s and 1930s and for much of the 1950s it was assumed that it worked. However, during the 1960s poverty was “rediscovered” and it was admitted that the welfare state (which had become increasingly less universal), was not helping those who really needed it. This was part of a long tradition in which institutions were designed to help the ‘deserving’ poor.² Thus in the 1950s when the period covered by the thesis ended, poverty was still a problem, if unacknowledged.

Specific Issues : Working-Class Autonomy

The study set out to determine whether there was an autonomous working-class culture. This was the case. To an extent it was economically determined because income affected the type and amount of household goods, the amount of space and the dynamics of family relationships. The level of domestic space was the prime way in which the difference between working and middle-class home life manifested itself and it had repercussions on the use of material culture, time management and family relationships. Generally speaking working-class families had less space, not just in terms of square feet but because they had larger families. Even in homes which were bigger than the average lower-middle-class house, the number of persons in the home counteracted the benefits of this extra space. The result of low levels of domestic space and large families was that space had to be used intensively. Living rooms or kitchens had multiple uses, while bedrooms were used intensively because they were filled with beds. Since the living-kitchens were used so much in terms of activities, the items of furniture within the rooms were given several uses which in middle-class homes would have involved several different items of furniture. Moreover, it meant that time management was especially necessary because it was not possible to do all domestic activities which needed to be done at the same time in the space available. Confined space and large families affected family relationships because physical closeness to the family inspired both emotional closeness and conflict, and privacy and time alone were difficult to find. Finally, limited space and low income meant that working-class families relied on non-domestic space to find privacy and for access to facilities they could not afford or fit in their homes.

² This “rediscovery” of poverty was the subject of Ken Coates and Richard Silburn’s *Poverty, The Forgotten Englishmen* (1970, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

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However, working-class domestic culture was more than just a passive acceptance of limited circumstances: working people actively participated in the creation of their own lifestyles by negotiating strategies for survival within their limited set of choices. The fact that these strategies were often considered 'irrational' by middle-class social investigators, illustrated the difference between working-class and middle-class lifestyles. They were quite 'rational' to the working class because they were tried and tested forms of household management. The front room, seemingly a waste of space, was important for maintaining family dignity and privacy and this was why people aspired to a front room even if they never had one. It created a transition zone between the inside and outside of the home and those who did not have a front room had to develop other ways of creating boundaries between family and outsiders. The front room could in fact limit family expenditure by reducing the amount spent on fuel and on furnishings; the less the latter were used the longer they lasted. The strict adherence to routines ensured that arduous tasks which had to be done were completed each week and the most arduous task, washing, was done after a day of rest. Even the allocation of tasks had 'logic' to it: in a system which paid men the highest wages the best thing for the family was to ensure that men were in paid employment while women became efficient and thrifty managers. Compared with the other strategies this involved the least choice, unless the household was located in an area where female employment was skilled, well paid and full-time, such as in mill towns. In most other areas, although women worked and their contribution to household income was important, it was viewed as a supplement to the husband's income. While middle-class families did have some similar practices to working-class ones - such as using one room more than others, giving alternative uses to furniture or by having weekly routines - these practices were acted out within a wider set of choices than those available to the working class.

The gendered experience of home was especially linked to class. Those factors which have been used to explain the different existences of middle and working class women apply to working and middle-class men as well. While some women found housework monotonous, monotony and boredom was also a feature of many male working-class occupations. Like their wives, working-class men were also subject to middle-class architects and designers' ideas of what was appropriate and had even less power to determine the form that their homes took. Mass Observation interviewed women for their survey *People's Homes* but not men and this applied to nearly all the other surveys. The irony of the "Homes Fit For Heroes" scheme was that Tudor Walters Committee consulted everyone except the heroes themselves. At home, fathers as head of households had privileges that other members of the family did not, but there were other things that middle class men had access to - such as personal

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space and privacy - which were rarely available to working-class men. Because women were expected to take care of the home they had greater control of the domestic environment and since they generally outlived their husbands, they were more likely to have a room of their own. Working-class men were also doing different types of domestic tasks than were middle-class fathers. They particularly helped with childcare, while other factors such as shift work, unemployment, employed wives and lack of facilities meant that there was greater onus on them to help at home.

Working-class culture was therefore not a mere reflection of middle-class culture. It did not match theories of trickle-down, nor was it just aspirational. It was not that the working-class lived in total isolation to the other classes, but the movement of lifestyles was not always downward because the middle class learnt from the working class as well. During the course of the century, middle-class families have had to live more like working-class ones as the amount of domestic space they had decreased and as they had to learn to do activities that had traditionally been performed for them by servants.³ Jennifer Craik has argued that the kitchen has acquired a "pivotal role" in the house during the twentieth century because the absence of servants made it the most used room in the house. She does not link this to class experience by acknowledging that the kitchen already had a "pivotal role" in working-class homes and that in the twentieth century this room was in fact becoming less used by working-class families as the middle-class used it more. She has arrived at this conclusion because she works within traditional historiography and common perception, in which the working class are portrayed as learning from the middle class and not the other way around. This attitude is summed up well by her reference to the 'daily' help who came into middle-class homes during the day: "[t]his contact ensured that the homes of employers became ideal 'models' of domesticity to which working women aspired and approximated in their own homes."⁴ Yet working-class servants managed middle-class homes and they took their own practices to work as much as they brought their employers' practices home.

Helen Forrester's experience is one instance which demonstrates the differences between middle-class and working-class lifestyles. Her upper-middle class family went bankrupt and lost everything. Helen's parents had no idea of how to run a

³ Ravetz discussed the "convergence" of working and middle-class domestic life: Alison Ravetz, *The Place of Home: English Domestic Environments, 1914-2000* (London: E.&F.N. Spon, 1995), p. 151.

⁴ Jennifer Craik, "The Making of Mother: The Role of the Kitchen in the Home" in G. Allan and G. Crow, eds., *Homes and Family: Creating the Domestic Sphere* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 51.

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home, provide cheap, nutritious meals, take care of children, or budget their income: ignorance of these was usually considered a working-class failing. The Forrester parents' ignorance was because they had always relied on servants to do these things for them. This is consistent with the argument that the working class were taking their skills to middle-class homes, or learnt them from their fellow servants and not from their employers. The ability to budget on a small income was crucial knowledge and the working-class families around Helen's were better off on smaller incomes because, unlike her family, they bought necessities before luxuries. If Helen's parents had been born working class, they would have been condemned as feckless and undeserving of help from the state or charities. As a middle-class family living a working-class lifestyle, they got more help than the those working-class families who did not make these mistakes; people did not expect them to cope in the way that working-class families had to.⁵ Helen's family is only one isolated example, and further study would illuminate whether it was part of a general trend.

Specific Issues: Diversity in Experience

The case of Helen Forrester suggests that Bourdieu was partially correct in seeing working-class life in terms of a "choice of necessity". The strategies discussed above were developed as way of coping within limited resources in terms of space, time and material culture. If Helen's parents had followed these strategies then their lives would have been more comfortable. However, the concept of a "choice of necessity" understates the extent to which people negotiated strategies to suit their needs. Moreover, it conceals the diversity of experiences within the working class which were the result of status, occupation, life-cycle, region, gender and age.

The greatest impact that status had on the way people lived was connected to income, but this seems to have affected material culture more than anything else and it was the low-paid, unskilled workers who had the least choice in selection of household goods. However, in the other aspects of domestic culture, such as time management, use of space, and pleasure in possessions, there was not much difference between skilled and unskilled workers. This was partly because income did not always match status owing to the fact that the Registrar General's classifications only took into account the father's occupation. However, households often had much larger incomes than their status suggested because of earnings from children and mother: the families worked on the basis of a household income and children were expected to contribute most, and sometimes all, their wages.

⁵ Helen Forrester, *Twopence to Cross the Mersey; Liverpool Miss; By the Waters of Liverpool*.

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Children only contributed to family income when they had reached a certain age, and this indicates that life course was more an appropriate category of analysis than status since standards of living were directly linked to the stage parents were at in their life course. Those with school children were under greater financial pressures than parents with working children and this affected the types of goods and the amount of space they had access to. As Chapters Three and Five showed, when families increased in size and as children started work, they could move to larger homes: more space and higher income meant that families were able to buy more things. These changes had repercussions on family relationships because they reduced parental anxiety and the tensions in family relationships. Thus the time when couples were most comfortable were when they had children who were working but still living at home; the time when financial pressures were greatest was when they had several young children none of whom were in full-time work.

Life cycle was not the only factor which could supersede status. The regional location of the home and its urban and rural location could be more important as well. The former particularly affected the type of house a family had access to, as Chapter Three demonstrated. Since the amount of space was a central issue in determining the way that working-class families lived, the importance of regional diversity in housing should not be under-estimated. Although the rise in number of council houses eroded this diversity by standardising the level of space in the home, in the period up to 1945 the working class was still predominantly residing in older, pre-1918 houses. Income and employment was regionally affected too, because the inter-war depression was particularly acute in northern industrial towns and in rural areas. The urbanity or rurality of the home had particular impact on the type of facilities in it. Living in a city meant that a family, whatever its status, was more likely to have access to gas, electricity, or piped water than families in the countryside. Therefore, tenant farmers despite being in an "intermediate" occupation, had to use the well and oil lamps when skilled and semi-skilled workers had gas lighting and piped water.

Regional diversity was linked to occupation which in itself generated distinctive lifestyles. The occupations that had the most impact on the functioning of the home were fishing, mining, textiles and shipping. Being a miner could determine house size, domestic routines and allocation of tasks. Miners living in tied cottages had to put up with smaller homes than other skilled workers were used to. The nature of their work meant that bathing routines were especially affected, while the masculine nature of mining influenced the types of tasks that miners were willing to do at home. Moreover, they did not learn skills at work that could be used at home, while the

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exhausting nature of their work also meant that they tended to help less at home. Ex-sailors had different impact on the home altogether. They learnt skills at work they could use in a domestic environment and they took the habits they learnt as sailors back home: they ran the home as if it were a ship. It was not just men's occupation which affected home life; the families of female textile workers also followed different routines.

Because of assumptions about women and domesticity, gendered perceptions of home have tended to be given priority over age hierarchies. However, the age of an individual and the position that they held within the family had direct impact on their experience of home: it determined the extent of privacy they had, how much food they were given, and what domestic tasks were expected of them. Boys' experiences of home, for example, seemed to be determined more by age than by gender. They were not expected to do the same domestic tasks as their fathers, nor did they feel the same way about their material environment. This may have made men's experiences of home more difficult to deal with because when they grew up they had to do things that they had little training in. Girls' experiences of home, on the other hand, seemed to have been determined by both age and gender: the chores they did resembled their mothers' more than boys' tasks resembled their fathers', and they had similar attitudes towards material conditions. Interestingly, their level of participation in domestic chores and perception of material culture, were closer to their fathers than their brothers. Position within the family was important and this connects to the issue of life cycle discussed above. Younger members of the family who grew up when elder siblings were working and still living at home had easier childhoods because generally the family was better off.

Separate Spheres?

The division between public (male) and private (female) life, which has been used to as a yardstick for 'modern' domestic life, has been increasingly called into question as an organising concept. One reason for this doubt is the fact that it has been used to analyse domestic life in almost every other period - ancient, medieval and early modern - and therefore cannot be a 'modern' innovation. Another reason is that the concept of public and private spheres is far too simplistic, because it is difficult to determine where one starts and the other stops. One way in which the divide between public and private has been questioned has been by demonstrating that the domestic sphere was by no means just a female space. Jameson noted the time men in Greek

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city states spent at home and the value they placed on it,⁶ while Gabriele Vom Bruck found that even in the seemingly rigid division of spheres in the Yemeni home, men not only spent a great of time at home but even carried out some of their 'public' business there.⁷ Women were also evident in the public sphere and as Robert Shoemaker found in the period 1650-1850 there was still "overlap in areas such as working for income and some aspects of housework and parenting."⁸ The fluidity between the public and private spheres had also been observed in relation to space. Habermas has argued that the boundary between the two extended into the home or went "right through the home". This was not only related to the fact that the bourgeois home had public and private rooms (salon and living room) but that the bourgeois household was very much dependent on the public world of the reproduction of capital for its continuation.⁹ Likewise, private space has been described as extending into public space such as when domestic activities take place outside the home.¹⁰

This recognition of the fluidity of what is 'public' and 'private' has been related especially to the experiences of the working class because working women have had to participate in the public sphere more than middle-class women. There are several ways in which this thesis has further nuanced these criticisms of the concept of "separate spheres". As Chapters Three and Four showed, the porous nature of 'domestic' space meant that non-domestic space was used for domestic purposes and 'public' spaces were used for 'private' purposes and to find privacy. This could apply to all classes but it was particularly necessary for working-class families who lived in small, crowded homes. Working-class families were also used to sharing their adjacent domestic space with their neighbours. Chapters Seven and Eight showed how working hours and employment affected the running of the home. The home was run in accordance with institutional and work time and the type of work done outside the home dictated household rhythms and the allocation of tasks. The latter resulted

⁶ Michael Jameson, "Domestic Space in the Greek City State" in Susan Kent, ed., *Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space: An Interdisciplinary Cross-cultural Study* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1990), pp. 92-113.

⁷ Gabriele Vom Bruck, "A House Turned Inside Out: Inhabiting Space in a Yemeni City", *Journal of Material Culture* II (1997), pp. 139-172.

⁸ Robert Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650-1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres?* (London: Longman, 1998), p. 144.

⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989 translated by Thomas Burger with the aid of Frederick Lawrence), pp. 45, 47.

¹⁰ Barbara Bodenhorn, "Gendered Spaces, Public Places: Public and Private Revisited on the North Slope of Alaska" in Barbara Bender, ed., *Landscape. Politics and Perspectives* (Oxford: Berg, 1993), pp. 169-203.

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in men doing 'private' domestic work and the absence of facilities or paid help in working-class homes meant that men had to help at home more than in middle-class homes. Moreover, women contributed to the family income by doing paid work in the home, making it a workplace and therefore theoretically 'public'.

This last point indicates the continuities in working-class experience, because the concept of separate spheres was primarily about the division of home and work: the home as a workplace was purportedly why working-class home life remained 'public' longer than that of the middle class. It was also connected to working-class sense of community. However, it is possible to argue that the working class, because they tended to socialise outside their homes due to lack of space and comfort, have always had 'private' domestic space. The reason for this contradiction seems to be due to the different uses of the words 'public' and 'private'.¹¹ 'Public' in terms of home as workplace concerns the issue of production for non-domestic purposes, while 'private' in terms of exclusion from the home relates to issues of visibility. Thus, on the one hand, as (male) work was increasingly removed from the home during the nineteenth century, the home became focused for 'private' production. On the other hand, homes became more 'public' because as working-class incomes increased, more domestic space and consumer goods were acquired, and as a result there was less concern about outsiders coming into the home. This suggests that the argument which has explained increasing privacy in terms of a move from community-centred to home-centred life, which is supposed to have occurred during this century, needs to be re-evaluated.

However, the ability to exclude outsiders was contingent on their status: while fellow members of the working-class (except housebreakers) could be excluded, those with authority could enter their homes when they chose thereby tempering this form of 'privacy'. The nineteenth-century concern with producing surveys seems to have expanded in the twentieth century. All aspects of housing have been examined, whether this was in the interest of the inhabitants or not, and the way that working-class people lived in their homes has been assessed through slum clearance and overcrowding surveys made from the 1920s to the 1970s. Furthermore, the state has played a greater role in instructing the working class how they should live. The means test dictated what furnishings unemployed people could have, health visitors policed infant care and school inspectors ensured that children were 'educated'. These

¹¹ Lawrence Klein, "Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions About Evidence and Analytical Procedure", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* XXIX 1 (1995), pp. 97-109.

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representatives of the authorities were all people who could (and did) walk into working class homes unannounced; but they would have never dreamt of behaving in this way to a middle-class family. Thus in this sense too, working-class homes became more 'public' in the twentieth century, although relying on the state rather than on community networks has again been viewed as evidence of increasing 'privacy'. In sum, domestic life can always be 'public' or 'private' depending on what meanings of these terms are being employed.

Further Study

There are some aspects of the thesis which would benefit from further development. Firstly, the comparison between middle and working-class cultures could be given more depth by an examination of more middle-class autobiographies including those classified by the census as Group I. There were wide differences in middle-class culture as much as that of the working class and it would be interesting to compare the facilities in rural middle-class and working-class homes. Secondly, the focus on childhood memories needs counterbalancing with more adult, and especially more male adult, experiences of home. While these first two aspects have concerned the source, other issues relate to the subject matter. While I tried to cover all areas of home life, the question of household budgeting, despite its importance, has been dealt with more as a side issue rather than in its own right. However, the autobiographies provided information on a whole host of ways in which families supplemented their income in both a financial and in a non-monetary sense: the latter is particularly hard to assess from traditional sources. Another area concerns interior decoration and arrangement, which Scott argued was specific to a particular culture and the class-specific nature of interior design would compliment the discussion of objects in Section Three.¹² This would help to inform the final point, which was the tension between the way that working-class people wanted to live and the way that middle-class people urged and desired them to live. This desire to teach 'taste' to the working class was not specific to Britain and was possibly part of an international trend which was inspired at first by the Arts and Crafts movement and which sought to recreate 'national' styles.¹³

¹² Joseph Scott, "The Arrangement and Use of Domestic Space", *Humanitas* XII (1976), p. 364.

¹³ Lisbeth Cohen, "Embellishing a Life of Labor: An Interpretation of the Material Culture of American Working-Class Homes, 1885-1915" in Thomas Schlereth, ed., *Material Culture in America* (1982, Nashville, Tennessee: The American Association for State and Local History, 1989 reprint, article first published in 1980), pp. 295-8; Marc Adang, "Betutteling Tot in de Huiskamer" in L. de Klerk and H. Moscoviter, eds., *'En Dat al Voor de Arbeidende Klasse': 75 Jaar Volkshuisvesting Rotterdam* (Rotterdam: Uitgeverij 010, 1992), pp. 79-101.

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This study has focused on the continuities within the period 1900-1955, and change over time has been downplayed in order to assess synchronic rather than diachronic differences. There were two main reasons for this. Firstly, because the history of home is generally described in terms of progress and change. This is how Ravetz discussed it in her study of home but, while many things did change, it is important to stress that there were also continuities in material conditions of the home. The second reason is that the way people actually felt about home did not change a great deal, it was still home whatever they had in it. What remains to be studied is whether this sense of continuity continued in the period after 1955: did the wide dispersal of time-saving technology and television change the way in which people felt about and used their homes, or did it just alter weekly and daily routines? Furthermore, to what extent have middle and working-class lifestyles increased in similarity or have they found other ways to differentiate themselves from each other?

Appendices

Appendix 1: **One Entry From the Database**

Appendix 2: **Status and the Allocation of Tasks**

Appendix One

DETAILS OF AUTHOR

Name	Avery, Valerie	gen.	f	age	c	mar. stat.	s	status	3
book	London Morning	period	15		ave pay	ns			
	London Shadows		occup	school child					
	London Spring	occup of sp	-						
county or pt of L.	Old Kent Road	occup of fa	dead						
town.city	London	occup of mo	machine operator =2						
pt of country	LSE	location	lt						
time code	15								

DWELLING

dwll type	sh	rent	ns	storey	1	no. rooms	3	no.room.	0.67		
rms in ho.	Kitchen = LR, FR = Front room, 1 BR - the latter shared between Mo and daughter						no. in hoho				2
storage	none						hot water	none, water boiled on stove			
shared	staircase, wc, bath (tin), hall way shared with father's parents (4 persons), dustbin wd get full so wd dump in ruins opposite, backyard						cold water	through hot tap			
							w.c. type	shared wc in yard with green distempred walls, access thro G'pars' K			
cook facs	gas cooker "New World Cooker"						bath type	tin bath, temp in K, stored on shed door in yard, full of g'mo's magazines, wooden seat ZBK			
lighting	electricity, candle in BR by Mo, torch on landing, erbo chr						n-m wash facs	none			
							no. fam using wc	2			
ho probs	cracked sink, no drainage, damp walls, rotting floors, windows not stay open, K: steamy & stifling and all pans stuck together & needed to be dry before use, door warped, ceiling stained brown, locks rusted up, enamel K cupboard not keep food cool, windows not open properly & had to be propped open, doors and stairs squeaked, doors warped - had to slam to close, bad relations with hoho below, slate missing leak in BR,										
impro	electricity, linoleum and wallpaper										
ext/gar	backyard										

HOUSEHOLD CONTENTS

LR/K	K: "stifling as a tea-cosy", enamel food cupboard painted green and cream (rusty), "old black greasy-haired cooker crouched in the corner", wooden kitchen table with plastic cloth on, two chairs, plate rack, speckled brown oblong mirror over cracked sink that cldn't drain, slop bucket under sink carried downstairs and emptied in yard or street drain, linoleum floor and wallpaper, bath under the table, curtains, rope across ceiling, net curtains*, oil cloth on table, radio
P/FR	FR - "...a severe, supercilious room...": preserved for w/e: black piano, sofa, 2 easy chairs, bowl of fruit on sideboard between 2 windows, TV, lino floor, gigantic roses on grey wallpaper, white porcelain china kept here, bowl of fruit, yellowed photographs of dead people, open fireplace, 2 up-right chairs, carpet, settee, three piece suit (presumably the easy chairs & settee), net curtains*,
BR I	shared room mother and daughter "stifling and cramped": big wardrobe, small cupboard which stored Au's doll's clothes and film star pictures, bedside table piled high with magazines, dressing table with mirror, dolls pram, one bed took up most of room, broken fireplace hidden by pink sooty curtain, lino floor, flowery wallpaper, eiderdown, old shoes kept under bed, eiderdown, damp ceiling mapped with brown stains, net curtains*, alarm clock, musical box on dressing table, c2b, c2r
BR 2/3	na

Appendix One

DR.	na	
stairs/hall	shared: mat inside door, wooden stairs covered with linoleum, geen verlichting , post milk and newspapers left on the stairs, shared hall	
scul/K	na	
K.	na	
books	Mo reads magazines, books, Au joined library when young - into reading, Au read "Woman's Weekly", Au has tea chests full of books when they move,	
washing-equip.	white enamelled bowl: old one for dishes and clothes, tin bath for dirty washing, Slop bucket under sink to act as drainage, rope across ceiling and clothes horse for drying, electric iron	
k utensils	saucepan, kettle, bowls, pans, white china plates in K cupboard, enamel plater, Mo tried to match up knives, forks & spoons for guests, K knife, china pudding basin, vase, best porcelain china kept in FR,	
clean-equip	galvanised bucket and scrubbing brush, white enamelled bowl: new one to wash selves, old one for dishes, ibcol and soda (body and etc), milk for piano keys,	
space-usage	parlour was used at w/e and visitors, Au wd play in front room but had to wear coats in it during the week so cold, bed took up most room in BR, Mo and Au share bed and keep each other awake at night, K - has K furniture it but is used like a LR, 3-piece suit was arranged round the TV for viewing each week,	
items valued	Doll Fa gave her only allowed to play with it in FR where there was a carpet and it wdn't break if dropped- Mo v angry that it was broken, Au fond of piano because belonged to Fa and "it was the only part of him that I still possessed....", best porcelain china kept in FR, Mo proud that they were the first to have TV in the neighbourhood,	
origins	3-piece suit on HP,	cost

DOMESTIC ACTIVITIES

sun	Au collect manure for G'fa, Au polish piano in Morn, afternoons to park in summer when small, G'pars rest in afternoon, Mo cleans cooker, home work (for composition), listen to radio when G'pars rest had finished, Mo wd iron work clothes, prepare her pack lunch, arranged Au's school clothes,
mon	take dirty clothes to get washed,
tues	ns
wed	ns
thurs	ns
frid	carry the tin bath up the stairs, bath night, scrubbed step (G'mo or Au) & beat mats & clean WC, home work (for composition)
sat	home work (for composition), afternoon picture (Cinema), afternoon housework (cleaning^),
daily	6am alarm goes off, Au talk to G'mo before school, 5pm Au start getting dinner ready, Mo return from work 6pm, Au wd say good night to G'pars downstairs before bed, Mo read in bed,
tasks by mo	cleans cooker , ironing, knitting, carry bath up and downstairs, locked up after G'fa gone
tasks by fa	dead
tasks by au	cooking, collecting manure, shopping in hols, cleaned hall and wc, scrubbed step & beat mats & clean WC in hols, cook evening meal, polish piano, wipe up all water spillage after bath, locked up after G'fa gone

Appendix One

tasks by f	cooking, collecting manure, shopping in hols, cleaned hall and wc, scrubbed step & beat mats & clean WC in hols, cook evening meal, locked up after G'fa gone, polish piano, wipe up all water spillage after bath
tasks by m	-
tasks by non hoho.	G'mo looked after Au during holidays, sent washing out on Monday, G'fa lock up, local shop keeper mended electric iron or plugs

RELEVANT INFO NOT COVERED BY OTHER FIELDS

House decorated by professionals - whole upstairs striped - but soon everything became too heavy for the damp walls and rotten floors,

Feeling about ho: Mo describes it as a dirty hole, all rooms upstairs were small with furniture squeezed against the walls, sharing with G'pars awful - continually reminded that they were lodgers g'pars complained all the time at the noise they made, Mo envious when G'mo get offer of prefab, Mo wants modern K and BaR, G'mo looked after Au whilst Mo went out to work, after g'pars go the ho very empty and Mo and Au both nervous, Au thinks she wdn't care if the ho collapsed on top of them, after G'pars left Au too scared to go to WC w out Mo waiting in Scul,

Ho atmosphere: FR deathly cold during the week, "...a severe, supercilious room"

Furniture use: Au used gas cooker to heat K, Au used K door to warm clothes, Au stores her boots in tin bath under the table, uses tin bath as foot rest, backs of chairs, used for drying clothes, china pudding basin used for inhaling Friar's balsom powder, plate rack used for drying clothes, Au did homework on one half of K table, Mo used other half for ironing or knitting, bath brought upstairs so didn't have to bring it upstairs,

Boundaries: Mo cleans out FR and polished chairs when expecting guest, Au had to turn her back whilst Mo had bath (altho' Au washed her back), G'mo always interfering and trying to listen to what they were doing, Au told off for disturbing uncle, he cld play trumpet and jazz records as loud as he liked tho, downstairs hoho cld come into rooms when they were away

Family relationships and affections: Mo throws plates at Au and smashed them all, Mo and Au argue all the time

Domestic activities: LR hearth white washed every w/e,

Hoho budget: Mo had war widow's pension

Mo gets rid of newspaper after G'pars leave and replaces it with proper WC paper,

They reject two offers of flat from Co

Had to empty the bath bucket by bucket, TV picture wd go wobbly if you stood in a certain place,

Pet cat

Au writes description of K for school

Mo always went to bed when thought Au asleep,

Appendix Two

Status and the Allocation of Tasks

Type of tasks	Mothers			Fathers			Daughters			Sons		
	% of total mothers n = 128			% of total n = 124			% of total families n = 132			% of total families n = 132		
	Skilled	Semi- skilled	Un- skilled	Skilled	Semi- skilled	Un- skilled	Skilled	Semi- skilled	Un- skilled	Skilled	Semi- skilled	Un- skilled
Food preparation	48	72	41	18	32	17	21	27	17	5	9	4
Cleaning	45	50	45	13	23	30	44	48	33	21	21	17
Washing & ironing	42	38	50	9	0	9	19	30	29	6	9	4
Sewing/rug making	44	56	41	11	26	9	13	24	25	8	12	0
DIY/decorating	10	9	0	31	26	35	5	9	8	5	3	4
Care of children	27	16	45	27	32	30	24	27	21	5	9	8
Shopping & errands	23	22	36	9	10	0	35	42	42	24	21	25
Outdoor tasks	11	9	18	18	13	30	14	12	25	11	30	29

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