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Caroline Barker Bennett

SPEAKING AS WE FIND: The Experience of Women Workers in Tyneside Industry

Abstract

This study is based on material contained in conversations recorded in 1983-1984, between the author and nineteen women who worked, or had worked, in industry on Tyneside. The women left school and started work between 1934 and 1981. Their personal experience is related in the study to published and archival material on the history of women's employment in the north east during the period and to more general issues concerning women and work.

Part I deals with the women's experience of entering the world of work, many as shop assistants, and of how they came to move into industry. The limited employment choices open to them are discussed from both a regional and personal perspective.

Part II considers the economic and social background to the history of women's employment in the region during the period covered by the study.

Part III explores the women's experience as shop-floor workers, supervisors and shop stewards with particular reference to the clothing and engineering industries. It looks in depth at their experience in 'Jameses', an engineering works, and the effect on workers of its incentive scheme. A chapter describes the experience of those involved in setting up and working in a women's clothing manufacturing co-operative.

The final chapter draws out some conclusions from the study: how factory work is important to women in ways not previously fully explored; how, although the period 1945-80 offered working class women in the north east greater employment opportunities than before or since, their skills and abilities were not fully used. The major implication of the study is that training for women workers still needs to be taken much more seriously.

**"SPEAKING AS WE FIND" :
THE EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN WORKERS IN TYNESIDE INDUSTRY**

**BY
CAROLINE BARKER BENNETT**

**M. A. THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY & SOCIAL POLICY**

1987

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14 SEP 1988

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DECLARATION

None of the material contained in this thesis has been previously submitted to the University of Durham or any other university for any degree. It is the exclusive work of Caroline Barker Bennett.

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PREFACE

This study would not have been written without the help of the people who work in industry whom I have come to know in the course of my work as an industrial chaplain on Tyneside. I should particularly like to thank the women who shared their experiences with me in the recorded conversations which form the basis of this study.

I found the experience of taking part in the conversations and pondering the material in them subsequently was one of learning by stages. In the first place I was struck by the vividness of the reminiscences of those I talked with and moved by the hardships which many of them had endured and often taken for granted. It was only gradually that I became aware of how these personal stories were together making a sketch of regional experience. I hope that the reader will find following this process in the study as rewarding as I did in writing it.

This study has been written to tell something of the story of women industrial workers on Tyneside. I hope they will feel that it has been done faithfully. It has been written to show the capacities of women industrial workers so that these may be less easily underestimated than is often the case. It has been written to help widen the focus of feminist writing from a concern with middle class women's issues to include the issues facing working class women.

In addition to the women who helped this study so greatly through the conversations, there are others who have contributed to it. I am particularly grateful to Dr Bill Williamson, who supervised the study and encouraged me in its writing in many ways, and to Myra Eglington, who typed and word processed the script in difficult circumstances. I am also grateful to the following for ideas and suggestions : Canon Bob Langley, Rev Graham Howes, Lin Harwood, Professor Charles Handy, Miss Brenda Calderwood; to Miss Joan Straker for lending me material on the Co-operative Movement; to my colleagues in the Northumbrian Industrial Mission for giving me time for the study. I am grateful to Community Computing in Newcastle and Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service for word processing facilities.

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Caroline Barker Bennett
Newcastle upon Tyne
September 1987

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Why and How This Study was Written

This is a study of women shop-floor workers in the industry of Tyneside. It is based on recorded conversations with nineteen women who started work between 1934 and 1981. The conversations took place between the summers of 1983 and 1984. It is also based on my experience as an Industrial Chaplain on Tyneside since 1977 and in particular my experience of visiting "Jameses", an engineering company, where most of the women in this study worked, and "Marie Sutherland", a women's co-operative making clothing, where the others worked. My knowledge of the workplaces discussed was therefore not confined to what was said in the recorded conversations and I have drawn on this wider knowledge in the observations made in this study.

The aim of the study was not to reach statistically-proven conclusions by the scientific study of a sample of workers and their attitudes. The aim was rather to explore with women, whom I mostly knew well already, what had been their experience as workers since leaving school : what different kinds of jobs they had done; what kind of responsibilities they had held at work and how these had combined with their responsibilities at home. Accordingly I tried to include in the number of those I talked with, women of different ages and different experience at work (for example as super-



visors and shop stewards) and at home (single and married, those with and without children).

The conversations focussed in particular on their experience of working at Jameses and Marie Sutherland. Their experience at Jameses is of particular interest since they work in the traditionally male-shaped world of engineering but with the advantage of being represented alongside men, by a trade union with the traditional power of trade unions in engineering. In this way they are untypical of most women factory workers who work in predominantly female-employing industries with weak trade unions. The experience of the women at Marie Sutherland is of particular interest because they are engaged in running their own business and hence breaking out of the traditional mould of working-class women in the north east.

The study was, no doubt, both helped and hampered by my role in relation to the women I was talking with. It was helped by the fact that we knew each other and had a common frame of reference and knowledge of people referred to ; trust existed between us. On the other hand there were some constraints entailed in the fact that we had a continuing relationship and that I was not an impersonal researcher who would ask questions and then go away. I felt hesitation, for example, about pursuing issues about their family lives and relationships if they did not volunteer to talk about them. My request

had been to talk about their experiences as workers and therefore our conversations did not focus on their experience at home.

In writing this study I have been concerned about problems of confidentiality. How much of what they said would those I talked with be happy to have written down or made public, even given the fact that all their names have been changed? Was it proper to use as a basis for a study of this kind the friendships and relationships I had made in the course of a job which was that of being a minister and therefore implied both confidentiality and a disinterested concern for the person ministered to? This is not the place for a discussion of the myths and realities inherent in any concept of ministry. The point I am making here is one about the particular context in which this study was undertaken and the constraints and advantages this entailed.

My role in relation to the workplaces mentioned was that of visitor. I am free to come and go while the women in this study do jobs which entail staying where they are working at any given time. My observations of the factory world are therefore made from the position of an outsider who has to an extent crossed the barrier into the inside but who is not a part of it. The work of George Simmel and his examination of the role of "the stranger" describes a role close to that of an Industrial Chaplain : "The unity of nearness and

remoteness involved in every human relation is organised, in the phenomenon of the stranger, in a way which may be most briefly formulated by saying that in the relationship to him, distance means that he, who is close by, is far, and strangeness means that he, who also is far is actually near. For to be a stranger is naturally a very positive relation ; it is a specific form of interaction The stranger, like the poor and like sundry "inner enemies", is an element of the group itself. His position as a full-fledged member involves both being outside it and confronting it." (Simmel (1964) p.402). While the stranger, as outsider, is in a dangerous position in case of conflict because he can be used as a convenient scape-goat, he can also be valued because of the necessary objectivity he brings as a stranger : "he often receives the most surprising openness - confidences which sometimes have the character of a confessional and which would be carefully withheld from a more closely-related person. Objectivity is by no means non-participation.... but a positive and specific kind of participation." (op. cit. p.404).

Interestingly, what is said here relates closely to what the women who acted as supervisors and shop stewards said about their roles. This will be explored in Chapters 10 and 11.

To put it at its starkest, the question which my experience as "stranger" left me with, was : How is it that people can do the cramping, monotonous jobs which the women in this study did and yet not become cramped people? The shop-floor jobs that I observed women doing were often physically demanding, repetitive and undertaken in drab surroundings. Yet they themselves, while often tired by the effort required, depressed by the monotony and sometimes made anxious by the financial insecurity of their workplace, are not depressed or repressed people. The overall impression given by a factory is that of a place where a great deal of life is going on. Exploring this paradox in women's experience of industrial life was the underlying purpose of this study.

There are, as I have mentioned, features about the two workplaces focussed upon in this study which make them of particular interest - they concern women workers in the male world of engineering and women working in a co-operative. But behind these particular features is also the fact that the cultural setting of the women workers studied here was a particular one : that of the north east of England with its regional industrial history and traditions.

The region popularly enjoys a reputation for male chauvinism and a "macho" image, the tone for which was set by the heavy industry, employing exclusively male workers, upon which the region's economy was based from its

nineteenth century beginnings. Traditionally in north east society women have been seen as those who looked after the men enabling them to undertake the heavy work their jobs demanded. While to outward appearances the men of the region were the powerful figures, in practice the women were often the lynch pins of family and society, exercising financial control of their households and having charge of the upbringing of children. As we shall see in this study, mothers were key figures influencing the choice of jobs which their daughters went into upon leaving school; they were the reference points for advice and direction as the women took on new roles as wives, mothers and even shop stewards. In several cases they come over in what the women in this study said as being more important figures than their husbands. Since this is a study of women workers it may not be surprising to discover that mothers rather than fathers were seen as key figures. It would be interesting to undertake a parallel study of male workers in the north east and to see the relative significance of mothers and fathers to them. Because of her role in the family and hence her influence on subtle issues of behaviour and social role, it would not be surprising if such a study were to reveal that in many ways "me Mam" was as significant a figure for young men on Tyneside as she clearly was for many of the women in this study.

Williamson and Quayle, writing about the traditional industrial culture of the north east, refer to a series of newspaper articles on "The Iron North" which included

headlines like : "THEY BUILT THE WORLD'S BIGGEST SHIPS, THE WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL GUNS ; THEY PRODUCED QUANTITIES OF THE WORLD'S FINEST COAL". These epitomise the mythology which to this day dominates the north east's image of itself. "The mythology itself needs to be described : it is a rich source of material. The stories of struggle and exploitation and achievement all have their place in the repertoires of self images available to people in the area. They need to be described for different industries and communities for miners recall their past in ways different to those of fishermen or steelworkers. They must be recorded for men and for women too and for different generations..... The mosaic of work, occupations and culture needs to be built up piece by piece before its full pattern can properly be revealed". (Williamson and Quayle (1983) p. 14-15). The purpose of this study is to go some way towards filling in one of the unexplored areas suggested here. The women industrial workers of the north east have received little attention because their contribution has been dwarfed by that of men and thought to be unimportant because of the assumption that women's lives take their significance from their roles in the family .

There was, however, a problem when it came to finding material upon which to base research that would fill in this gap in the north east's industrial history.

The Invisibility of Women Industrial Workers in the North East

When I set out to discover published material relating to women's experience in industry in the north east, in order to set the oral material from the recorded conversations in a wider context, I found a difficulty. Material concerned with women shop-floor workers is hard to come by, at least in any written form. On the other hand it seems that as far as vivid memories are concerned, there is a wealth of material. The experiences of the women concerned in this study are an example of this but I found as I searched the north east for written records of the women who work, or worked, in the industries of the region that I was continually referred to people who would be glad to tell me of their experience. One man told me about a woman living in his street who had vivid memories of working at Vickers in the war ; people told me of the experience of their mothers ; others recalled their own experience, like a man who, as an apprentice at Vickers in the '30s, had heard the screams of a woman whose hair had got caught in machinery and who had been scalped. He had been afraid to tell his mother in case she thought he worked in a very rough place. On another occasion I asked a woman librarian where I might find material and said that I was beginning to feel that women were invisible. "Oh they are", she said, and immediately started to tell me of her experience in the institution in which she worked! When I contacted workers at the Benwell Resource Centre who were in the process of setting up an exhibition about Women & Work

they said they had had the same frustrating experience. Companies and trade unions seemed to have no material but they too had been given many leads to mothers and grandmothers who had worked in industry and could give graphic descriptions. Pressure of time meant that they had been unable to follow up these leads. I decided to restrict myself, as far as oral material was concerned, to what I heard from the women in this study.

The most vivid documentary material is in the well-known photographs to be found in the local studies libraries of the north east. These show women working on the fish quay at North Shields in the first decades of this century ; women working at the Cremona sweet factory in the early fifties ; women working at Reyrolles in the '30s with a foreman looking on - some things do not change! It is only in recent years that the interest in women's lives in general has led to an interest in women and work. On the whole, however, women as shop floor workers have not been the main focus of interest and the studies on this particular subject have largely been contemporary studies by women who took jobs in industry in order to carry out research. Such studies include : Girls, Wives, Factory Lives by Anna Pollert (1981), Women on the Line by Ruth Cavendish (1982) and All Day Every Day by Sallie Westwood (1984). Other studies are of particular current issues and situations like Judy Wajcman's study of the Fakenham co-operative, Women in Control (1983) or Angela Coyle's

Redundant Women (1984). If you go back ten years you find that material about women's experience of shop-floor work in Britain is sparse. It is also significant that none of these studies is focussed on the north east since it is not a region particularly associated with factory work for women.

The material that does exist was mostly sparked off by particular pressures at the time - the demands of wartime production and the need to recruit women for industrial work which led to the accounts of women's lives monitored by Mass Observation ; the concern in the early fifties about working mothers and the effects on children, coupled with the shortage of labour at the time. In the north east a particular issue immediately before the war and during the fifties was the difficulty of creating jobs for the men no longer needed in heavy industry ; the new light industries moving in to the new industrial estates tended to employ women since they could be paid less and were capable of performing the jobs in these industries. The pressure for equal pay which culminated in the Equal Pay Act (1970) and Sex Discrimination Act (1975) also brought attention to the question of women shop-floor workers.

On the whole, however, women have worked in Britain's factories largely unremarked. To an extent male shop-floor workers share this obscurity. The official histories of companies concentrate on the composition of the Board of Directors and any changes occurring there; on

technological discoveries and their implication for production; and on new building and increasing sales. In this climate it is interesting to find an article on A. Reyrolle & Co (in a series on the histories of Newcastle companies) in Newcastle Life for February 1963 with the following tribute to the workforce. "No manufacturing company can, of course, succeed without able workmen, technical know-how and sales initiative, and no one who has had the interesting experience of meeting Reyrolle's employees and studying its world-wide sales organisation can be in any doubt as to the reason why the company has succeeded. In the Hebburn factory are men whose fathers, and their fathers before them, worked on making switchgear and there is about the place a rare feeling of family spirit". (p.35). Perhaps the reference to family spirit is meant to indicate that some women members of families worked there too!

This is just an example of the way that women's experience as workers has until recently not been seen as a matter of significance. Company magazines which are more concerned with the lives of workers than are company histories only mention women when they are getting engaged to a fellow employee; leaving to get married, have a baby or retire; sometimes they feature in sports club news or welfare events. Serious articles about women as workers and how they feel about their work are absent perhaps because such articles would be likely to raise contentious issues of an industrial

relations sort and are therefore felt to be inappropriate by the management.

Company magazines are ephemeral publications and do not appear in public archives. One that happens to survive in the Northumberland Record Office is the Robin Hood Record for September 1952. This was the company magazine for Hood Haggies rope works at Wallsend. In an article about the golden wedding of Mr & Mrs J. Irving we find the point made that in works that did employ women, often whole families were involved. "Up to the time of writing we have had 154 years service from this family as set out hereunder. This is very often a feature of British industrial life, families residing near the factories, all the members follow the father's footsteps and enter the service of his employers." (This point was also emphasised by Margaret in this study in what she said about Maling's pottery in the '30s.).

The list of the members of the Irving family includes five men and four women. The women's years of service add up to 39. It is also quite likely that there were cousins and in-laws of this branch of the Irving family employed at Hood Haggies. Tyneside factories often contain a complicated network of family relationships. The writer of the article concludes by remarking, "Such records surely indicate some measure of good industrial relations and we are proud of a record which is, as yet, unfinished".

Perhaps the "good industrial relations" were in part the result of the pressures that families brought to bear on their members. Margaret, describing Maling's, agreed that "you were known" by the family you belonged to. "The family looked after them. You didn't have any training instructor in them days. It was either your cousin or your aunt or your uncle who taught you what to do". The sense of the factory as a place of community and lively human interaction is missing from the written material relating to industry.

In many of the studies of north east industries and of industrial development strategies women are often missing from consideration. Small instances betray this. For example, in Redundancy in Newcastle upon Tyne, January 1980 which is a study of the closure of Tress Engineering, mention is made at the beginning that "330 men and women were made redundant" (Newcastle Policy Services Dept. (1980) p.1). This is the only mention of the women in the whole study which goes on to describe the dilemmas faced by the men in finding new jobs. How many women were there and what dilemmas did they face?

Even at as late a date as 1968 we find in the October Voice of North East Industry an article on industrial safety entitled : "Industry Needs the Whole Man", that women are overlooked. "Why is the North worse for injuries than elsewhere?" the writer asks. Perhaps the answer is not unrelated to this tradition of "craft in their hands

and strength in their muscles". Nor are these strong and healthy northern men any less prone to strain injuries, which make up 25% of the reports to the Factory Inspectors than men of other (weaker?) regions." (p.29). The article goes on to give the statistic that factory workers in the Northern Region sustain 59 injuries per year for every 1,000 employed compared with the average figure of 36 per 1,000 for the whole country. Hidden in those statistics will be the figures for women workers' injuries but the way the article is written would have you believe that it is only men in industry who are prone to injury.

The "Hailsham Report" of 1963 - The North East : A Programme for Regional Development & Growth does take account of the fact that women are a significant part of the labour force only to dismiss them as being adequately covered by the figures for men. "The most obvious symptom of the north east's need for special attention has been its rate of male unemployment" (para 8 p.8) and in a footnote to this, "Lack of job prospects for women has not yet been such a serious problem; and for the future there is good ground for believing that the kind of measures needed in the north east to promote more employment for men must in practice lead to an adequate increase in opportunities for women too. For simplicity, therefore, the illustrative figures given are for male employment only".

(Hailsham Report (1963) p.8)

Another persistent and important assumption made in discussions about job prospects is that training is something really only relevant to men. In the section of the Hailsham Report about Training we find in paragraph 96, p.29, "For adults an expansion of training facilities in the region is needed to relieve shortages of certain types of skill and to ensure an adequate supply of skilled men as an attraction ~~to~~ new industry" (their italics). Challenge of the Changing North was produced in 1966 by the Northern Economic Planning Council which had no women members. Again, its discussion of training assumes that this concerns men only. (Northern Economic Planning Council (1966) p.21).

It may seem that some of the examples quoted here to illustrate how invisible in written records are the women factory workers of the north east, are trivial and the sources cited are rather lightweight documents. This is true but it is also the case that the trivial can reveal underlying important attitudes and assumptions. As I have said, documents dealing with issues of women's employment were hard to come by. The more serious works were not concerned with the subject because it was seen as a rather peripheral matter unless it impinged on questions of male employment or, still more, unemployment.

The Oral Material

Because of this lack of written material the oral material in this study may be seen as being of historical and sociological interest, and I have therefore quoted what the

women said about their experience at some length. Most of the material drawn from the recorded conversations is related in the following chapters to particular themes : how the women became workers and their experience of particular aspects of industrial life. As a complement to that approach, which relies on extracts from what the women said about their life histories, an account of Vera's whole working life is included later in this introduction.

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In Historical Sociology, Philip Abrams writes, "All varieties of sociology stress the so-called "two-sidedness" of the social world, presenting it as a world of which we are both the creators and the creatures, both makers and prisoners; a world which our actions construct and a world that powerfully constrains us. The distinctive quality of the social world for the sociologist is, accordingly, its facticity - the way in which society is experienced by individuals as a fact-like system, external, given, coercive, even while individuals are busy making and re-making it through their own imagination, communication and action.... The two-sidedness of society, the fact that social action is both something we choose to do and something we have to do, is inseparably bound up with the further fact that whatever reality society has is an historical reality, a reality in time." (Abrams (1982) p.2). He goes on to affirm that sociologists are properly concerned in this context with "micro-history" : "History, the interaction of structure and action, is not of course something that happens only on the large stage of whole societies or

civilisations. It occurs also in prisons, factories and schools, in families, firms and friendships... And even in these small-scale social settings, teasing out historical processes, the sociology of becoming, is for the sociologist the best way of discovering the real relationship of structure and action, ... What we discover when we treat small social settings in this way is merely a history in which the detailed interdependence of the personal and the social is accordingly that much more easily seen. The fact that we are talking about personal concerns rather than about social revolutions, about, say, the child in the family rather than the working class under capitalism, or individuals becoming deviant rather than societies becoming industrial does not call for a different type of analysis." (op. cit. p.6).

This study was carried out in the spirit of what Abrams is here affirming. In it we are asked to listen with care to the ordinary experience of women who have worked, sometimes for many years, in the industries of Tyneside. They themselves were aware of what Abrams calls the "facticity" of the social structures, such as family and workplace, in which they have lived and acted. The reader is perhaps likely to be even more acutely aware of how much the options for work and life were limited for the women in this study by the geographical region in which they live and the historical moments in which they were born. Yet they are not merely ciphers acted upon by the contexts in which they live. They are actors who have worked to make sense of

their experience and, in some cases, struggled to survive it.

In the recorded conversations which, except in one case - Phyllis - took place on a single occasion, the women were looking back and recounting the story of how their working lives had developed. The stories they told no doubt gathered coherence as they went along and interpreted their experience as well as recounted it. This is something that all human beings do and it is a process subject to mood changes and one in which new experience puts old experience in a new light.

For the oral historian this subjectivity is part of the "facticity" of the task. But in some ways it reveals, in a very apparent way, what in more academic history can be cloaked, that "history" and perhaps particularly the social history of ordinary people does not deal in absolutes. Our interpretations of past experience, what we call memories, are bound to reflect subtleties of feeling and fact mediated through the passage of time. Memory is both individual and collective.

What is offered in this study are some personal memories worked on by the author in an attempt to see how they reflect and reveal the larger historical and collective experience of women and employment on Tyneside from the early 1930s to the early 1980s. Because this field of work has been so little explored, what is contained in this study should be seen as very much preliminary

work. More work would be needed before the particular subjectivities of memory and interpretation on the part of women and the author could be seen in a more fully researched and documented perspective.

Vera's Story

In Vera's story, which now follows, we hear about the life of someone whose experience was unique and who responded in her own particular way to the circumstances and challenges which faced her at different times of her life. But at the same time we are aware that Vera's life was very much shaped by historical and given circumstances, "facticity" in Abrams' terms. These circumstances included : being born in North Shields in 1921; having a mother who worked on the Fish Quay there; being single and available for work, though not fit for military service when war broke out; marrying a man who was a shipyard worker and continuing to work full-time because of not having children; taking opportunities for employment generated by government initiatives towards regional industrial development after the war and eventually benefiting from new employment legislation.

These circumstances were mediated for Vera through the close community and family-centred life of North Shields and the expectations of north east culture that the care of the elderly shall be the responsibility of families and, within families, of women.

Vera was one of the oldest women among those interviewed. She spoke with great fluency, verve and decisiveness about her life in spite of the fact that she was suffering from an ear infection which had exacerbated the deafness she now suffers from. She was born in North Shields in 1921, a town she still lives in today.

Vera's story, while being the very individual story of a woman of determination and spirit, is also a story which exemplifies many aspects of the lives of working-class women in the north east in the period she describes and hence of the lives of the women in this study.

First, the options open to her for work when she left school were very limited. The question of staying on at school did not arise and the choice was between domestic service, factory work of a pretty tough kind, or the Fish Quay. Her description of the extremely difficult working patterns and conditions which this entailed is tempered by her warm appreciation of the comradeship and capacity for enjoyment among the workforce - a comradeship found most typically in basic industries.

"When I was a girl I lived at the Fish Quay end of the town. Me mother worked in the kippering - that was the yards where you make the kippers. Well before I left school, when I used to finish school at four o'clock, naturally I used to go round to the yard where me Mam

worked and I got to see how the women were making kippers. So, being inquisitive, I started having a little go. Well, in those days the only thing that there was in this town was either the Fish Quay, "the smoke house" as we called it, Hutton Haggies (the Rope Works) which was out, and Tyne Brand. I had no fancy for Tyne Brand - or service. No, service was a thing I had never ever gone for because it takes I'm not house minded - to a point. So it was the Fish Quay. So I decided that was it. So I left school on the Friday at 4 pm and I got started the Saturday morning, the following morning, on the Fish Quay".

Vera left school at fourteen so she started on the Fish Quay in 1935.

"In those days you went in as a learner which was, you had to do all the menial tasks, all the humping and carrying, and then you got to handle the herring themselves... They bring the herring in and they're loaded up on to benches, split open, the innards removed. Then they're put on to what they call a tenter stick and it's a stick with a series of hooks on to which you hook the herring, back to the wood. Then they're taken and they're hung in what they call kilns, "houses" as we used to call them. They're smoked, they're smoked more or less overnight. They're brought out of a morning and they have to be packed in boxes."

"Well, then, I started at 14 as what they called a
"twopence halfpenny learner. Now that was, you got
twopence halfpenny an hour for your work. Now you only
worked when the work was there. You weren't on a set
wage. You only got paid by the hour, so it meant 'No
work, no money'. Well, in those days, dole, that was also
only a pittance but if you worked one hour of that day you
couldn't claim dole for that day. Your one hour had to
suffice. Failing that, if there was no herring in, you
went and you signed the dole, for which you got a day's
dole. But there was a snag to that as well because you
had to have three clear days before you got anything. So
the way it worked out it was pathetic really. I mean
you'd go to the dole and you'd come away with maybe's a
shilling, as the money was in those days. You got paid
when you finished on a Saturday. Now that pay, it was
whatever time you finished on a Saturday. Now it always
seemed to be in those days (whether it was the boats
wanted to be in for the weekend) - but most of the herring
boats used to come in on a Saturday. And I've worked from
Saturday morning six o'clock start...(and you must work the
herring up that the boss has bought), and I've seen me two
or three o'clock in the morning when we've been coming
away from that Fish Quay, because the herring must be
worked up. Really it was hard going. But having said

that, the type of women that worked there were a jovial lot, and it didn't matter when you passed the yard, you could hear the women singing."

"As you progressed through this work you got to be from a twopence-halfpenny learner - your wage was increased by a halfpenny an hour according to how you picked the job up. The more experience you got, if your boss was good he would give you another halfpenny an hour. But we discovered, once we had a little bit of experience, it was more beneficial to try for a job somewhere else and you'd go as a halfpenny an hour more. Because you were sick of waiting for this fellow giving it you, you know! And you worked up till you were a fourpence an hour learner. Oh, you were doing very well! And then you graduated - the full money was sevenpence an hour in old money. Now that was the highest money you could get. So it was trying to get into a yard that could get plenty of work and you were all right."

Vera went on to describe how hard the life was : "There was an awful lot of hardship to the point where women were pregnant, married women. Now I've worked in a yard where a woman was standing working. She's taken her labour, the boss has had to put her in the lorry, take her home.

Within a few hours that woman has had her baby. Within a few hours, we'll say a day, that woman has been back working because times were such in those days - no work, no money. The baby was brought to work with her in the pram and it used to be a communal pram. The one pram used

to be passed from one, you know, if somebody was pregnant - "Keep on to your pram"! And the pram was bought and, mind, if you had a good boss he would let the pram stand in the office to keep the baby reasonably warm. And the mother, when the baby needed feeding, she used to have to go and wash her hands, remove her oil skins, sit and feed her baby and there it went on."

"I mean there's nothing that can compare with the Fish Quay. The environment that you worked in. You stood in yards where, because of the nature of your work, the heating was limited so it was a very, very cold place to work in, which has been in a way bad. You had to wear rubber boots all day. Nearly all the women that have worked there have ended up with varicose veins and all this type of thing, with working with the frozen fish. It affected people, a lot of people, with rheumatics and that sort of thing".

"... when you worked on the Fish Quay here you never knew when you were going to work or when you were going to be off. Because you had to work when the work would be coming up. Just one little for-instance. The Princes's Cinema (it's the Crown Bingo now) we used to love if we could possibly make it on a Monday all the girls used to go to the matinee. Actually at first it used to be a little bit of a dodge. Well, if they came for us for work - we're at the pictures. The firm cottoned on, and one day, I'll never forget it. We were at "Gone with the Wind" and it

came up on the screen - all our names! And we had to report to the front foyer and when we went it was the boss who was standing there and he says, "Come on, the lot of you". Apparently a boat had come in with an exceptional load of herring. We had to go home, change and go down and work. I'll never forget that because we worked from about, what, three o'clock in the afternoon by the time we got home, got changed, on to the Fish Quay. We worked till about 4 am. We worked right through. Now the thing was, it didn't matter how late you finished in the early morning, you still had to turn out again for 6 o'clock. And I always remember I came home, 'course me mother was worried about how late I was, and that, came home and the boss was a little bit lenient and he says "Well, don't come back until 7 am under the circumstances." We had about four hours and I knew that to go to bed would be fatal so me Mam give me me breakfast, got me on the settee, and back to work again. But somehow or other once you got to work you thought nothing of that sort of thing. The only thing that peeved us was that it was "Gone with the Wind"! We made a pact with the boss. Of course we all ranted at him for having done this to us. He says, "I'll tell you what I'll do. Seeing that you girls were so good to do this for me, I'll let you take your turns, and I'll pay for you and you can go back and see "Gone with the Wind"". Because I think it was on for two or three weeks. And that was the way we got over the thing.

But I'll never forget "Gone with the Wind", of all things. Because it's been on tele a couple of times, or even if I just hear it mentioned and go in the library and see - I'll never forget sitting there in the Princes!"

Vera was fortunate in getting a job in a "travelling shop" and so she extricated herself from the uncertainties of the work on the Fish Quay :

"Now they had some yards, the bigger firms, they had smoke houses in different parts of the country and it was easier to take these women and men to that yard than to bring the herring up the road. So you tried to get into what we called "a travelling shop", which was a one where you used to travel. Now I was in Great Yarmouth, Hull, Grimsby. As the herring moved around the coast so you moved with it, you see. Now the beauty of that job, you were on a set wage, which in those years - and I'm going back now... Actually I was in Gourock working the day that war broke out and I was then on a wage of 30/- per week, which was a great thing because you got that 30/- whether you worked or not. You had to have that 30/-, and as long as the herring were there you worked there. And of course as they moved on again you'd go from Gourock to Mallaig. So as well as having this job you were seeing a little bit of the country at the same time."

"We used to go into digs. More often than not there used to be four girls - either two or four. We used to have what we called a 'housey purse'. Now we used to each put six shillings a week in the housey purse and six shillings a week each to the landlady for the room. If you had a nice canny landlady, if you bought your food she would cook it for you coming in. But if you had an indifferent landlady well, you had to run in on a dinner time, do something and then, evenings for your evening meal. But the point was you finished at 6 pm. You never worked over 6pm unless there was overtime which was beneficial. But that was very, very rare that you got overtime because the way the herring used to come in you could normally work - you had enough work to keep you going from six in the morning till six at night."

"Now Mallaig. When we used to go to Mallaig, there they only had one train a day to take the herring out of Mallaig. It came in by sea by the herring boats. It went out by train because then there was no way of getting into Mallaig other than by the train or by the sea. You couldn't go out by car because they hadn't advanced with their roadways in those days you know. So we had to start work there at five o'clock in the morning. Now while we lived in Mallaig we lived in .. they were like a type of hut. They had the old fashioned galley stoves so it meant if you were starting work at five o'clock in the morning, you took your turn of getting up, you had to light this

fire before you got a cup of tea. Because there was no electricity in these huts they were all paraffin lamps or what have you. Now that made that a hard job in that respect, but on the other hand you were working with girls who were a happy lot.... ...When you worked away in those travel shops you see, more so in Scotland, the herring boats never go out on a Sunday night. So on a Monday morning you'd go in and you'd pack up the kippers that you had done on Saturday. You used to start work at 6 am. Well, about 9 am they were all packed up and on the waggons and on their way so the rest of the day that was your day off to explore...."

"What you sort of lost on the swings you gained on the roundabouts, because it was a happy environment plus the fact that you had a job, that was the thing... When we used to go to Mallaig there wasn't anything. There was no picture halls, nothing. There was two public houses which we couldn't afford to go into really. But to compensate that, one of the lads that worked with us, he had one of these small accordions. There was a small farm near us in Mallaig and they had a barn and on Saturday nights we used to go up, and the lads used to clean the barn out and we used to have the greatest dance there. Mind, everybody that worked in the yards used to go there and you used to have a great night. But we could even just go on the wharf when we finished at night and the lad used to come with his accordion and that made up... In fact in those days you didn't need a lot to entertain you.

Plus the fact that we used to rise at about four o'clock in the morning. If we could get a couple of hours up there it used to be great. It was hard but it was satisfying. But at the time that you're working it you never think about it. It wasn't till later years when I left it and went into the factories then the comparison came in."

Vera's description of her life before the war emphasises the huge importance that having any kind of regular job represented for people on Tyneside in the thirties. It also reflects the cheerful solidarity in adversity and the communal nature of working class life in the north east at that time.

When the war came, Vera was not fit for military service because she had been, as she said, "hospitalised for a while with a T.B. abdomen". Since she was apparently clear of the disease she was regarded as fit enough to work in munitions.

"Well, we were working at Gourock so four of us managed to get into munitions. The rest had to go into Services and they kept only the older women for to work in the yards. That was a little bit of an essential because it was foodstuff. I went to work in the Greenock torpedo factory which suited me because I loved that part of the country.

We lived there in hostels. Well then the wage rose to, oh, I would say about £2. 15/- a week which was a good thing. That was a start, and of course as the war advanced it was risen a bit because you had unions and one thing and another then. And the money gradually rose, not a lot, but enough to meet your needs. I was there till the war finished. Now in there, it was more or less work like James's, something similar, making caps for shells. But it was more or less capstan work, power presses; more or less the metal section of James's, it was something similar to that you know. And I worked there till the war finished."

Vera's experience of war work in factories reflects the improvements brought about in wages and conditions, partly as a result of trade union pressure and partly because of the work of industrial welfare officers and government initiatives. These movements for change were successful because of the desperate need for armaments and other supplies for the war effort and the shortage of labour to produce these. These improvements continued in the period after the war. Vera, looking back over her experience said:

"I was from 14, and I started in the factories when I was 21. Things were so much easier in the factories. When I first went in the factories you started at 7.30 in the morning and your finishing time was 5.30 p.m. Now that

whittled down to 7.30 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. Well, that made an awful big difference on your day. When you worked in factories you had proper toilet facilities which were a good thing; you had proper tea breaks, which was something we'd never had on the Fish Quay. You started at six in the morning. You got half an hour break for your breakfast. To break again before dinner time, before twelve o'clock, was unheard of, but on an odd time if it was exceptionally cold the boss would let someone make a cup of tea. But you had to have it standing, so you can imagine a mug of tea in among the herring and you were having your filthy hands. But when you went into the factory you had your hands washed and you sat down and you had your cup of tea and your cigarette. Oh, things changed enormously! And you started to have a little bit more say in factories. If you didn't like the way the foreman was treating you or something like that, you could go and complain either to management or union and something was done about it. But prior to that, in the Fish Quay, if you had a complaint to the boss he would say, "Right, you're finished", and there was nothing you could do about it - you were finished".

After the war, Vera's experiences of factory work reflect the industrial history of the north east. The heavy industry associated with the work of "the Die Cast" declined, and so she was paid off. Industries with branch

factories established in development areas like the north east tended to retract their base in times of difficulty - The British Thomson-Houston accordingly transferred its work back to the parent factory in Coventry. Government policy and the rising demand for consumer goods in the 50's and 60's encouraged light industry to establish itself in the north east. This was partly to provide jobs for women in the area after the war. Hence Ronson's building their factory in Cramlington and Vera's recruitment into a hairdryer division. Vera also benefited from the government legislation designed to protect workers (Redundancy Payments Acts 1965) and from efforts to reduce unemployment (the Job Release Scheme). These external forces shaped Vera's life significantly.

At the end of the war, Vera returned to Tyneside :

"I came back home. Well then, I wasn't so keen to go back on the Fish Quay after having been in a factory and found that working from 7.30 in the morning to 5.30 at night, that was your day over. so then I decided, right - they were just starting to build the Estate up at West Chirton - I thought 'I don't think I want to go back on the Quay again because it was a hard life' - it was really hard, you know. And I thought, 'I'll try the factories'. And I got a job in the British Die Casting. Of course I was there for about seven years which was similar work to the metal side of James's again."

"There was a pay off. They took you - last in, first out, but I was lucky because the British Thomson & Houston was further down the road. I was lucky inasmuch as I came from the Die Cast and I got the whisper that they were starting one or two girls for the power presses. So, on my way from work, I went in and was lucky and I met the Personnel Manager as he was coming out to go home. However, I had an interview on the Monday morning. I got started, so I went into there and I was with the B.T.H. power press work".

I asked if this was skilled work. Vera : "You see, women are never skilled, not in the sense of men. There were no apprentices in that light engineering. It's only this last few years since the equality that a woman has been allowed to go in for an apprenticeship. But in those days, as long as you were capable and you did a good job you kept going. Plus the fact that it was piece work, which was a great incentive. From the Die Cast the money was pretty good there. But when I got into the B.T.H., having done the same work during the war on big power presses, that was the job I got there. So I more or less went in as skilled - inasmuch as a woman could be skilled - I was 'an experienced operator'".

"B.T.H. made parts of aircraft but Coventry was our head and we made lots of components that were sent to Coventry

to be assembled. So it was more or less the component side that we did and then it went on to the parent factory.

Well, I was there about 14 years, made lovely money, a grand job. Then again, a few of the girls I had worked on the Fish Quay with and travelled with, they were there as well. We more or less brought a little bit of the singing lark into it you know, and it worked out very well".

"Well, unfortunately the work, the aircraft side of it, was getting very, very bad and the A.E.I. took it over. We were put into one small part of the whole factory to do small components, the sort of finishing off. And then it came the crunch that everything was going back to Coventry. So we were the first women - or part of a factory, in the north east - you know when the redundancy came on the thing. We were the very first factory to be made redundant with payment".

"Now I was lucky inasmuch there again. We were given a good notice. We were given notice from the January. Because I remember we went back to work after the New Year holiday and we were told then that, as from our notices working out, our Division would be closed down, thereby being made redundant. So I was there I think it was, till the April. However we finished there on the Friday. We had to go down to the dole on the Monday and put our cards in. Now when we went down to the dole on Monday we got the chance - Ronson was opening a big factory at Cramlington, but till that was ready they wanted a small

division here for to make hairdriers. So there was about twelve of us. We got interviews for the Tuesday morning for this hairdrier department. We went, got the interview. As it happened we finished work on the Monday, started work on the Tuesday morning. So I was straight - I mean it doesn't happen now - but then, things worked out very well for me. We went in, we went training, making these hairdriers. Well, it turned out, I fell in, they wanted a chargehand. During the first month they must have been watching out and they decided I was the one, so I got the chargehand's job. There was a chap above me and between the two of us we ran this hairdrier division at West Chirton. They had 54 girls working there, which was good. But you can get one or two girls in that 54 who can make life very, very unpleasant for you. But I got over that because I rather liked the job, plus the fact - well, then I was 48 - 47/48 year-old, and I thought for me to be made Supervisor I felt a little bit chuffed about it! We knew when we started, mind, that this job was only going to be for two years because they were building this big factory at Cramlington whereby they wanted their electrical toothbrushes, and shavers, hairdriers, everything, under one roof, which was feasible ..."

Industrial and economic change and government initiatives shaped Vera's experience of work in important ways, but

personal and family influences shaped it even more powerfully.

".... well, as the time was coming for the factory to be finished, they asked me then, 'Would I care to go through to Cramlington, train some of the girls there?' Well, I did that daily, but unfortunately for me I was a terrible traveller, hopeless. From being a kiddie I was always bad ... However, I was offered the Supervisor's job in this department. Really I was reluctant to turn it down because I liked it. Everything about it. They even went to the point - I said 'Travelling, no way - no way'. And they were very good, and you see at the time the shipyard was getting a little bit dodgy and there was a chance that me husband would be made redundant and things were really at that bad pitch. But I said I couldn't go to work on a morning knowing I had to face that journey back home at night. So they said, 'We can even get you a house on the Cramlington estate'. I says, 'Ah, it's one thing me moving house for me husband's benefit. But, I says, 'No way, if he can keep his job in that shipyard, he's going to keep it, and no way would he travel'. So of course I had to turn it down."

The fact that her husband's attitudes caused her to have to turn it down illustrates how the traditions of north eastern life are more powerful than the ideas of industrial planners and managers. Clearly she was upset

at having to give up this job and had no heart for applying for another. But a few weeks of being unemployed were enough to show her that she did not like to be without a job. Clearly, her life at work was very important to Vera. She had no children, which was a sadness to her. She said, "I love children, and I've always tried to help people who have got children. Same with elderly people. I mean, the way things happened with me mother - there was me own father, me mother, and me stepfather, and I had the three to nurse. So I said, 'Ee, the good Lord puts you on earth for some purpose and obviously that has been mine'".

In saying this, Vera reflects the strong sense of responsibility for caring for elderly relatives which is part of the north east's tradition. But although Vera here interprets the purpose of her life in terms of being there to care for her older relations, and not in terms of her working life, when it came to a choice she found that looking after her mother was, on its own, not satisfactory. She needed the stimulus of work probably more than the money that it brought.

Because she had no children of her own, the question of whether to have a job did not arise for her in the way that it arises for many women. Perhaps, surprisingly, her husband does not seem to have felt that he should keep her, or that for her to have a job would be a slight on

his capacity as a wage earner. This question probably did not arise since she had been working consistently for so long before they married and because they no doubt expected that when they had children, this would settle the question. The only time when the question of whether to have a job arose was when Vera had to turn down the job as Supervisor.

"But I was at the stage then when I thought, 'Ee, well, I could do with a break'. 'Course my mother was getting older, she needed a little bit more attention, so I thought 'No, we've got to stay in this area'. So again, they closed the plant down and I thought, 'Well, I'm going to have a couple of months on the dole'. I was on the dole, oh, I would say a month. I thought 'A month, it's enough for me', having been used to being working all the time. So a friend of mine worked at James's and she said, 'Why don't you come and have a go up there?' Well, again I think it was past experiences, I got the job at James's. So I came off the dole after only a few weeks more or less, and here I get started at James's. I was there till I retired!"

"I used to finish me day's work, and then it used to start! I'd go straight to me mother's, do what had to be done there, come home, collect shopping, see to the evening meal, prepare lunches to take to work next day. So

me time was pretty well taken up. Weekends.. we used to get out quite a lot on a weekend because I would rather during the week come in and do me housework at nights; do what me mother had to have done at nights, if I possibly could, leaving the weekend free to do, you know, the social side of it."

"In James's, mind, I loved it! I liked it. I got to the stage Caroline, where, as time was getting on, I had to go part-time because me mother was in very bad health. Now, I worked that so that there's a friend of mine - she had two young children and she couldn't get out to work. So I saw Personnel and the Foreman, and between us it was decided that I should go part-time. So what I did, I got me friend to come in and see to me mother on a morning, while I went to work. Well, me wages I used to come home with, I used to split that down the middle, and it meant that I still had my bit job, and it was giving a little bit job for Betty, who couldn't. So that worked very, very well till eventually me Mam died. And the foreman put me back on full-time again, and I was there until I came out on Job Release. I came out at 59".

"And that was it. I just sort've been retired and enjoying it since then, as much as the healthwise part of it lets me you know. But I am ... I've sort of got myself involved in one or two little things... a couple of old dears - I used to live down the street you know in the

flat - a couple of old dears down there. I was popping in and seeing to them and things like that. And one of them went to the Willows, and I made it a point of going there and seeing her you know. But taking it by and large... and you see all the years when I did work I used to pay the big stamp so consequently when I came out on this Job Release, and went from me Job Release straight on to me retirement pension".

When Vera's mother died it was a "terrible thing" in her life. She had had to nurse her for four years, during which time she became senile and like a baby to deal with, in addition to being stone deaf. So when she died, "it was like a child going out of the house". At the last, she went into hospital for what did not seem a serious chest condition, and died within four days. Vera found this very difficult to accept, and at first felt great anger with the hospital for having let this happen.

"Once the funeral and that was over, I couldn't get straight back on full time and I was coming home on a lunch time and, oh, the thoughts that used to go through my mind. I couldn't get myself organised in me mind somehow as to why she had died and, I did, I went through a pretty rough time".

At the end of 10 months, Vera herself had a serious heart

attack and very nearly died. A few weeks later her step-sister had a heart attack and did die. When Vera was recovering, her doctor helped her to come to terms with her mother's death by giving her a "rollocksing" and saying, 'After all, Vera, your Mam didn't die a bad death, and you managed to cope while you had your mother. If this had happened when she was alive where would you have been then?'

"He helped me through, the way through that because, ee, it was bad, Caroline, those months. I never thought anything of it while I had me mother and I was doing for her. I had to do it. I was her daughter and I just did it. But it wasn't till I lost her.. and that few months ... I was left there and I felt high and dry".

After the heart attack and getting over it ... "I had an entirely different outlook on things and even when people say to me, 'Have you not got any family?'".

"Ah, no, the Lord didn't choose to give me any children but at least he's given me good friends. And I do firmly believe that, because I'm very fortunate. I've got, I would say three ... - don't sit over me, very seldom I see them, but they're genuine friends. It's just a case of picking the 'phone up, and they're there and they help when they can".

In her retirement, Vera has enjoyed looking after her neighbour's little girl and going out on expeditions with her in the school holidays. This has given Vera some of the enjoyment of being a grandmother. It has also enabled her neighbour to go out to work - the cycle of Tyneside's women's experience of work is begun again.

Vera, looking back on her life, describes unique personal experience but, in another sense, she speaks of the experience common to women on Tyneside at the time. Her memories of the hardships of the thirties are tempered, probably particularly in hindsight, by memories of the close community amongst working class people at the time : people sang at their work and the communal pram was passed on from one mother to another. Particular events and objects such as these become charged in memory with a kind of symbolic significance. The colliery shop described by Audrey in Chapter 6 is another example. Describing Tyneside in the thirties people speak of how doors were left open so children could run in to the homes of the extended families of the street to be comforted and fed by whoever's Mam was there. The collective memory of Tyneside is that in those days the poor shared what they had and that it was only in the more affluent period after the war that a more privatised approach to life grew.

Vera's experience of community and the assumptions about collective behaviour which arose from it, might be said to underpin her perceptions of later experience. Her approach

approach to trade unionism, for example (discussed in Chapters 10 & 11) was essentially one which tried to reproduce the collective caring of the community in which she grew up. She did not see Trade Unionism in terms of confronting and balancing the power of capital and hence leading to conflict with management. She resented those shop stewards who acted as individual power brokers. In her view shop stewards were "there to represent the worker. I used to resent if our shop steward would go in and have a discussion with the foreman and it was signed, sealed and delivered in the office without it being discussed with the worker." When she was a supervisor at Ronson's, Vera, as we shall hear in Chapter 10, took a hand in getting a trade union structure off the ground which was based on the idea that most problems could be solved by discussion and give-and-take rather than by confrontation.

In relying on the concept of community Vera again speaks for Tyneside where memories of community are a powerful ingredient in the area's self-image and hence in its current practice. Vera's approach to trade unionism reveals much about its roots in the area and about a prevalent strand in its practice which tends to moderation rather than militancy.

If in one sense Vera speaks for Tyneside, in another she speaks specifically for North Shields. The fact that she came from this town associated with the fishing industry,

meant that working on the Fish Quay was one of the options open to her, as working at the Pelaw Co-op factories, at Maling's potteries or Reyrolles were for the women who came from other districts of Tyneside. For although the underlying cultural and industrial assumptions are common to the whole of Tyneside, the fact that the women in this study came from particular districts meant that particular work opportunities were natural to them.

Summary

It is the intention of this study to be both faithful to the personal experience of the women upon whose accounts it is based and, at the same time, to reveal the ways in which this personal experience gives us insights into wider issues and understanding about women's lives as workers in British society in the mid twentieth century and specifically about their experience as workers in industry on Tyneside.

Nineteen women contributed to the study by allowing conversations to be recorded (or in one case noted). In 1983-84 when the conversations took place their age groups were as follows : three were in their sixties, three in their fifties, five in their forties, three in their thirties, two in their mid-twenties and two were twenty and under. Twelve were married or living with a partner, four were single, two were divorced and one was widowed. Five lived alone. All had worked in industry for a significant period of their lives.

The subjects covered in the recorded conversations fell into the categories into which the parts of this study are divided. The first part, "The Experience of Becoming Workers" deals with how the women moved from being school-leavers into being established workers. This was achieved in several cases by starting as shop assistants and later moving into industry. Others, especially those who worked in the clothing industry, became industrial workers straight from school.

Part II steps back from the personal material arising from the conversations and fills in the historical background to this material. It examines published and archival material on the economic, industrial and social history of the north east which relates to women's employment during the period (from the early 1930s to the early 1980s) covered by the study.

Part III, the main part of the study, explores the women's experience as shop floor workers in industry and their views and experience of management and trade unions and of working on piecework schemes. The major focus is on the clothing and engineering industries but the women's experience in other industries is included.

Part III concludes with a chapter on the experience of those who worked in a workers' co-operative.

The study ends with a chapter drawing together some of the themes which have emerged in the course of it.

PART I

THE EXPERIENCE OF BECOMING WORKERS

CHAPTER 2

LEAVING SCHOOL AND STARTING WORK

Introductory

This study is concerned with the experience of adult women workers and primarily with their experience of shop-floor work in industry. However, as an introduction to this I began the recorded conversations upon which the study is based by asking the women about their experience of moving into the world of work when they left school. I asked what jobs they had gone into and what careers advice they had had. I did not ask about their experience at school and so this study does not include material on "Schooling for Women's Work" - the title of a collection of essays edited by Rosemary Deem (1980). This and her book Women and Schooling are concerned to examine the education girls receive and to show "that sexual divisions, in the process of bringing up children carried out by schools, are of crucial importance both to an understanding of the position of women in capitalist society, and to a comprehension of how the division of labour between the sexes is maintained." (Deem (1978) p.2)

Although in recent years, with the rise of the women's movement, increasing attention has been given to how education contributes to sex stereotyping in our society,

very little attention has been paid to the question of how working class girls make the transition from the world of school to the world of work. On the whole the subject has been subsumed into the more general question of how girls are socialised into their roles as homemakers, wives and mothers. Recent studies of how girls respond to unemployment (C.Griffin, 1985; Walker & Barton 1986) have shown how powerful are the forces sucking girls into childcare and domestic chores in their homes. In their research on how unemployed young women in the north east spent their time, Coffield, Borrill & Marshall found : "most of the women were absorbed into family life; domestic commitments became their primary concern". (Coffield (1986) p.63)

It is not accidental that so recent a study of the transition from school to work as Learning to Labour (Willis 1977) should have been concerned with young males. At the centre of the study's concern is "the important concept of labour power and how it is prepared in our society for application to manual work. Labour power is the human capacity to work on nature with the use of tools to produce things for the satisfaction of needs and the reproduction of life (Willis (1977) p.2). Put in those terms the subject becomes a male concern. The "reproduction of life" referred to here is not the nurturing of the child in the womb and the care of the child once born. It is producing "things" and using

"tools". Women's role in these fields has been a subsidiary one as has men's in childcare.

Christine Griffin's book Typical Girls? (1985) resulted from a study of Young Women & Work in Birmingham which was consciously "set up as a sort of female version of Paul Willis's research on the school to work transition for young white working class "lads" (Willis, 1977). It aimed to follow a group of young working class women from school into the job market, looking at the influences of gender and family life on their experiences." The study is concerned with young women in Birmingham who left school in 1979; whereas this study is concerned with women on Tyneside who left school between 1934 and 1981. The scope, locus and style of the two studies is therefore very different. Nevertheless, several of the findings reported in Typical Girls? correspond to the issues which came out of what the women in this study said about their experience.

Of the nineteen women in this study, seven had experience of working in shops before they took jobs in industry. The pull between office and factory which the young women studied in Typical Girls? experienced, corresponded closely to the pull between shop and factory which the women in this study experienced : "One of the most important ways of defining a good job for a (working

class) girl was via the distinction between office and factory work. The latter was rejected as boring, insecure and unpleasant by parents, teachers and young women : 'not a nice job for a girl' Office jobs had a more glamorous image as clean, secure work which gave young women the chance to 'dress nice', even though they might not pay so well as some factory jobs." (Griffin (1985) pp 100-101). The image of jobs in shops held by many of those in this study when leaving school was very similar.

Griffin (p.94) was surprised at the number of the young women she met who saw the Police and Armed Forces as desirable jobs. "The age limits and entry requirements for joining up combined with the disapproval of parents and teachers meant that few of these young women would actually end up in the police or the forces." (Griffin (1985) p.98). Brenda, in this study, said that she had wanted to go into the Police or the Prison Service. Her eyesight, in the case of the Police, and parental opposition, in the case of the Prison Service, prevented her (see p.93).

Griffin also points out the importance of Saturday jobs and informal family networks in determining where girls get jobs. Only Yvonne, in this study, got a job where she had worked as a school girl, and this was after a year's training in working with horses, after which she went back to the stables where she had worked before. Nancy was the

only other who mentioned that working in the shop where she had been working on Saturdays was an option for full-time work. She felt under some moral pressure to do this since "the manager was really upset about it because I left."

The point made by Griffin about the importance of informal job-finding networks of family and friends was certainly borne out in the experience of the women in this study. Such networks were particularly important at the beginning and end of the period covered, since jobs were then in shorter supply, but it in fact applied throughout the period in the experience of those I talked with.

In summarising the findings of the Birmingham study, Christine Griffin writes, "Studies of the so-called 'transition from school to work' have tended to oversimplify the whole process of getting a job, underestimating the importance of the child labour market, informal job-finding networks and young women's domestic commitments. Apart from moving from school into the full-time labour market, young working class women were also managing social and economic pressures to get a man. I have understood this in terms of their simultaneous positions in the sexual, marriage and labour markets." (Griffin (1985) p.187)

In the accounts which follow, we shall hear from the women I talked with about their experience of moving from school to work and thus into the adult world; how they got their bearings in the world of work and began to make some choices of their own, albeit within a limited range of opportunity. As we shall see, although the women in this study were leaving school in the apparently very different worlds of Tyneside in the thirties, the post-war period and the recession of the eighties, their experience included a strong common core. Nearly all would have said of their workplace what Margaret said of Maling's pottery in 1939, "It was just a place you went to".

The women in this study left school and started work between 1934 and 1981 and they all left at the minimum school leaving age. Despite the span of about 45 years, the opportunities open to them were not all that varied. It was only the youngest who found any difficulty about finding work. Even in the thirties there were jobs for girls, even if it meant going into service or swallowing your pride and taking a job in a factory like Tyne Brand (a canning factory), or the Rope Works - this was a notoriously tough place for women to work and those who did so were known as "Haggies' angels".

As we have heard, when Vera left school in 1935, the choices open to her in North Shields were "either the Fish

Quay (the 'smoke house') as we called it; Hutton Haggies (the rope works), which was out, and Tyne Brand" or, of course, going into service. Since her mother worked on the Fish Quay it was natural that Vera went there. "So I left school on the Friday at four o'clock and I got started the Saturday morning, the following morning, on the Fish Quay."

Those who left school in the fifties and sixties found a labour market needing their services in retailing and factories, especially in clothing and in the light engineering works on the new industrial estates.

Careers Advice

What kind of advice from the Careers Service, or before it from the Youth or Juvenile Employment Service would have been available to the young women in this study? Until the 1973 Employment and Training Act, local education authorities had a choice about whether to be involved in the Service which was otherwise entirely the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour. On Tyneside, Newcastle Education Authority had a strong commitment to being involved and had been so since 1911. Durham and Gateshead LEAs joined in 1948 and Northumberland not until 1974. Apart from the rather more person-centred approach which the involvement of LEAs was likely to bring to the Service there was the fact that, where they were involved,

access to schools was easier to arrange. The Ministry of Labour had to seek permission from the Director of Education for its officers to interview young people in school.

Between 1947 and 1950 Newcastle Education Committee produced a series of booklets entitled, "Trades for Tyneside Boys." The subjects were : Engineering, Shipbuilding, Furnishing, and Coachbuilding. In the foreword to the first volume we find the following good advice : "It is most unwise to drift into acceptance of the first vacancy offered without considering what it demands from the boy in the way of qualifications and what it offers in the way of prospects. Choice, not chance, should direct him into employment." Only one "Trades for Tyneside Girls" was produced (in 1950), on Laundering, Dyeing & Cleaning. In view of the assumptions about girls and employment at the time, it is not surprising that the foreword did not stress the importance of choosing a job with good prospects. Instead what might be felt to be a rather dredged-up enthusiasm for the trade in question was offered : "For many girls there is a special attraction in working with articles of clothing. Many factory workers find their own part in the whole productive system is so small that the job itself has little intrinsic interest. Laundry workers, however, have the satisfaction of working with articles of personal wear or household use

and can take a genuine pride in achieving a high standard of cleanliness and finish." The Education Committee had been going to produce a booklet on Retail but the appearance of a national series of careers booklets made this unnecessary.¹

On the face of it, the employment market for young people before and after the Second World War was very different. Kenneth Roberts in his book about the Youth Employment Service, From School to Work, writes, in the section on the thirties, "School leavers who were fortunate enough to have relatives or friends in influential positions in industry were often able to fit themselves up in the more desirable types of jobs that were available, but the many young people who did not possess such useful contacts would be constantly presenting themselves at the juvenile employment bureaux. In such circumstances, giving detailed vocational advice and guidance to young people who were still at school was hardly a practical proposition. The juvenile employment officers were faced with much more urgent problems. In any case, since it was known that school leavers would have difficulty in finding any work at all, there could be little point in encouraging them to make their minds up carefully about exactly what types of employment they would like to

1. I am grateful to Miss Brenda Calderwood, former Principal Careers Officer for Newcastle, for information included in this section.

obtain. Young people who were seriously seeking work could not afford to be selective." (Roberts, (1971) p.38). Writing in 1971, Roberts would not have known that what he was writing about the thirties would be applicable to the situation in the north east in the eighties. He contrasts the situation just described with the situation after the war : "Employers have been obliged to offer decent prospects and conditions of work in order to attract young people. Blind-alley and casual employment have largely disappeared from the adolescent scene".... (op. cit. p.41)

In fact whenever the women in this study left school the situation as far as careers advice was concerned, seemed to have been very similar. The operation of the Service did not seem to have changed greatly between the time that Margaret left school in 1939 and when Pat left in 1981.

Margaret reported :

"We did have people come to ask what we would like to be when we were leaving. Each one was interviewed individually and then they'd ask you, 'Would you like to be typing or hairdressing or such as a domestic?' Although they asked me if I'd be a domestic and I definitely said 'No. Emphatically, No!' But I've ended up that way!"

And Pat said :

"Oh aye, we got careers advice. But what I wanted they didn't take lessons in it. So I never bothered taking any exams and I started in my factory on the YOP two days after leaving school. I got let out on the Thursday afternoon instead of the Friday. I went to the Careers Office straight away and I started on the Monday. It was just a YOP I got put on. I wanted painting and decorating but they didn't have it."

Pat started in a clothing factory and has since become a machinist. Clothing factories have been a constant employer of women in the north east. June left school in 1944 : "Careers people had just started to come to the schools then. And the teacher said that I was good at sewing in class and she suggested that that's the kind of work I should do. So I got a green card from the Careers Woman who came to the school to interview... And I started Pelaw... that's where I served me time."

Nancy left school in 1958. Her mother came with her to the Careers Office."but the man says there's nothing really I could go in for like specialising in nursing because I didn't have any qualifications." However, "There was millions of jobs, just for the picking". Nancy had a choice between "a job in the sweet factory with the rest of the girls out of me class" ; a job at C & A ; a job with a printer annd bookbinder which a friend wanted

her to go to ; and a job at the grocery store where she had a Friday night and Saturday job. The manager here "was really upset about it because I left." But her mother had a decisive influence : "But me Mam said, 'No, you're not. You're just going to the sweet factory for the sweets. I don't mind you going to work in C & A's but bookbinding... there's nothing particularly ... I would rather you take up a career that you could always fall back on and earn yourself some money and do something to help yourself'. So she made us go to Clay's (a clothing factory) and I got a job there."

When I asked Jeanette if she had had any careers advice before she left school in 1950, she laughed and said, "Oh no! First I went to Catholic School, which taught in those days a lot of religion, Caroline, you see. And you weren't really encouraged in any way because the most thing they wanted you to be encouraged to be was a good Catholic." Living in Felling, as she did, the Co-op factories at Pelaw were an obvious place to go to work. "Everybody where I lived went to work at Pelaw", "where the Co-op factories stretched right along." People worked "either in the tailoring, the shirt-making ; I think there was a food part. There was blankets and sheets and there were all different things - oh, there was handbags, and suitcases. They made everything there. Well, me mother was absolutely horrified at the thought of us going into a

factory or anything, you see. So I worked - I fancied myself you see - in a nice... a shop, not a grocery shop, something nice. So I went to Binns. It was quite easy to get in at the time."

The Influences Affecting Choice

Their mothers very often were a decisive influence on where they ended up. Alice left school in 1945 just after the war ended. Her mother wanted her to work in an office and her first job was in the local office of what is now the DHSS. "But I got me own way at the finish. Most of my friends were in sewing, things like that and, I don't know, I'd rather fancied doing something like that. I was always good at making things." Like Jeanette, she got a job at a department store in Newcastle, in the dressmaking workrooms.

Brenda, leaving school in 1957, didn't get her way with her mother. "I fancied being a - you'll laugh when I tell you this like - I fancied being a prison wardress when I left school and I wrote away for the information. But it was Mam who wouldn't let us go. She said, 'Some queer characters get in there and you're not going to be punched around and badly used.' So needless to say, it all went into the fire." Instead a relative spoke for her and she got a job in a Co-op greengrocery. She could not remember getting help from the Careers Service. "No, I mean now

it's fantastic I think the way, you know, kiddies can go and get help and taken and shown around places and try things, and they can get loads of help with different types of jobs. I mean then, nobody ever bothered, probably because at that time there was stacks of work."

If mothers were the most decisive influence, family, neighbourhood and school tradition were also important. Rachel, leaving school in 1968, went to work at Jameses straight away and has stayed there ever since. "We went there on Careers Week when I was at school. Me sister worked there and so I wrote in before I left school. I got an interview and I got the job. I left school. I was left school about a fortnight before I started working." She couldn't remember having other jobs suggested and it seems it was a matter of course to go to the factory which was just across the road from the school. The factory's Training Officer was a school governor for many years and when Rachel started, four other girls from the school started at the same time. She did not mention if any boys started apprenticeships or unskilled jobs at the same time, but it seems quite likely that they did.

Julie also followed family tradition when she left school in 1964 and went to become a machinist. This was not because of any particular interest or aptitude.

"Actually, I wanted to be a hairdresser. But when I found

out how much the wages were going to be, I changed me mind!". She would have got £1.10s. per week as a hairdresser, as against £3.6s.8d. in the clothing factory. How did she choose clothing? "Well, I think I just sort of done what me sisters done, you know. They'd done the same thing and I thought, "Well, if it's good enough for them, like, it's good enough for me, sort of thing."

Sally also followed her sisters, starting work in 1966. Her initiation into work had started before this when she was fourteen and was taken by her sister to join NATSOPA (National Society of Operative Printers & Assistants). Her sisters were in the print. "So I was forced to join the Union when I was fourteen 'cos I never wanted to be a printer, hated it. All me sisters were. I went straight into the printing trade. I left school on the Friday night. On the Monday morning I was away with me bait in me hands, up the street, me Mam crying and waving and what have you! So I started a kind of apprenticeship at Cale & Sons, the printers on the Quay Side."

Unlike the other women, Yvonne had a clear determination when she left school in 1975 - to work with horses. "I knew I wanted to do that from when I was young. I always liked horses. I've ridden since I was five. I just knew that I didn't want to do anything else." She had lived near Winchester as a child in the country where there were

horses. But, her father having died, by the time she was ending her schooldays she lived in north Northumberland. Her first job was training to be a girl groom in some hunting stables in the Borders. She heard about the job through a friend who gave her a lift to the interview by "the head man of the stables". By this time, Yvonne "had been with horses a lot of years" and had worked part-time in a riding school, so she was given the job. She started immediately and it was only after she had been there a week that her mother came to see if she wanted to stay. "We had a little cottage but it wasn't very good. There was no carpets on the floors and when me mother saw it she didn't want me to stay! But I wanted to, because I wanted to work with the horses you see. There were six girls - three in each bedroom."

The Limitations of Choice

Many of these accounts show the tug the women felt between their family's desire for security and respectability and what they might personally have wanted. But on the whole it seems there was little friction, perhaps because the options cannot have seemed very great. Many left school at the end of one week and started work at the beginning of the next. Phyllis, one of the oldest women in the study, left school and started work on her fourteenth birthday in 1934. The four shillings she earned as a maid-of-all-work was vital to the family finances as her

father was out of work. She ran home twice when it got too much for her, but her mother took her back, saying that she couldn't leave without another job to go to. I commented on this, that at least she was needed as a worker and that her experience was very different from that of a young relation who was currently going through a long period of unemployment. The next week when I saw her again, she said, "Last week when you said.. I thought about it afterwards.. that even.. I was needed even for that small thing. It wasn't that I was needed. It was the money that was needed."

Since she started work in the thirties this was more the case with Phyllis than it was for those who started work in the more affluent post-war period. In spite of this, one gets a strong impression from these accounts that the people I was talking with were seen by schools, careers service, and family, as inevitably part of the unskilled workforce and the choice boiled down to factory or shop. I do not think that this is an adequate description in any way of the women that I know and of their capacities and potentialities as human beings.

In effect the educational and social system of the country failed to offer them great chances for self-development, whether in times of low unemployment or of high. Their opportunities for development as human beings have come

through their experience of being workers, through relationships of all kinds, including experience as mothers; through trade union practice and education; through going on holiday; and through what they have gained from such things as television, reading, and evening classes.

How these developments occurred will emerge in what follows. It is important to remember how much of all this grew from their being able to enter jobs as young people leaving school. It was through this experience that they began to mature into adults. Young people faced with long periods of unemployment and therefore with little or no money, find many of the avenues to maturity and a place in adult society, blocked.

CHAPTER 3

BECOMING WORKERS

Reactions to the First Job

Some of the women remembered the business of starting work as a transfer to a tougher life than that of school. Rachel, starting straight away at Jameses in 1969 felt : "Ee, I'll never stick this because getting up dead soon in the mornings, you know. First few days I felt like crying 'cos I was that tired. But it just grew on you. I'm just used to it." What were her first impressions of the place?

"Well, I don't know, really. I just stuck it and that was it. You know what I mean? Well I never thought, like, I thought, 'Crums, I think I'm going to be a dole wallah here' you know, 'cos I thought, 'cos they told you 'Well, it's hard work' and that. But when you first went there you didn't go on piecework till you were eighteen. I was a service operator and you were pushing the barrows up till you were eighteen when you could go on piecework. And I just stuck it." Perhaps she was helped to stick it by her sister who had worked in the factory for some time already, and by the fact that she went there with friends from school. Situations where you did not know anyone were described by several people as being hard to bear.

Brenda also had a physically demanding first job. "I went to work", (in 1957),"in the Co-op for just over twelve month, in the greengrocery. It was supposed to be a sales assistant but I think I was that tall and hefty I got all the heavy humping work of sacks of potatoes and crates of bananas, and I was more just a filler-cum-packer of shelves more than a sales assistant, you know. I can't ever remember ever being on the counter at all."

On the whole, those who went into shop work enjoyed it. Audrey, starting work in 1952 said, "From I left school I went into a shoe shop, the Co-op. That was a good job in them days, the Co-op. You got a job at the Co-op, you got a better wage, you see. So I was in the Co-op shoe shop and I worked there till I was about eighteen and that was when I got engaged, and of course I decided I'd work in a factory to get some more money. So then I went into Willises (in 1955) and instead of getting £3 a week I got £5."

Jeanette, speaking of her three years at Binns, (1950-53), said, "I loved it. I was in the children's fashions. It was lovely". She had day release once a week "for speech, believe it or not! For speech, arithmetic and English. We went to the College of Commerce. I liked it. It was good. I was in the Children's and at Christmas we got sent to work at a counter that sold toys".

Monica, leaving school in 1958, went to work in a department store in Byker. She enjoyed it because it was "a proper family business" and "quite homely". "It was a real busy shop then. They were always having sales". She was helped by the fact that she went there with three others from her class. After two years she moved to a very traditional shoe shop in Wallsend. The owner was the manager and "on a Monday morning there was a timetable and each week you were on a rota and you had to dust every shoe box in the shop. Open them up. Check that the pair inside was one size and then put clean paper in and then move all of the spaces down where they had been sold". The assistants were not allowed to talk or eat and they had to wash the chairs, and the floor, on their hands and knees. "He was very clean about his shop. He catered for all the family from the babies up to the grandparents 'cos a lot of the shops don't do that now. It's all fashion. He didn't have much trend in there!" In spite of this regime Monica enjoyed working there. "I liked the shoe shops because you could get a pair of shoes every week - pay weekly." She left to have her first child.

Learning & Surviving in the World of Work

Acquiring the discipline and know-how of particular jobs and workplaces is obviously an important aspect of the experience of entering the world of work. This came out most strongly in the accounts from those who went into

factory or production work. When Julie started at the clothing factory in 1964 she said, "I hated it. I couldn't stand it. For the first, I would say, five or six weeks, I cried every night when I went home and I used to say to me Mam, "I'm not going back. I can't stand it". And she said to us, she said, "If you find another job you can leave that one". When she started, several other girls started at the same time but she didn't know anyone. "You were at everybody's beck and call. You had to run around after everybody, which I wasn't used to doing. I mean even at home I didn't sort of pull me weight which I should've done. Course, you blame your mother for that, don't you? You're not made to do it! But I think that's what I didn't like about it, you know, people saying 'Do this, do that, do the other; get us this, get us that'. I just didn't like that part of the job. At first I just didn't think I fitted in, you know, but after a few weeks I got used to it."

As we have heard, Vera also had to work her way in when she went to the Fish Quay in 1935. First she had to learn skill and speed and then she was able to move from one employer to another.

Sally did not enjoy her apprenticeship in printing starting in 1966. She gave a graphic account of how she felt about it. On the way to work she "used to have to

pass the doss house and all the tramps, you know, at seven o'clock in the morning. It was terrifying! I stuck it out for nearly two years, and then broke. Your first couple of years you're just a general dogsbody, you know. But you had to learn how to set the machines up, put the rollers in place, the type in place; papers, you know, the reams of papers, what have you, washing them down, going for typesets. Getting the compositor to check over and what have you after you had printed them. But as I say, you're just a general dogsbody standing over people watching them, which I didn't like, plus it's very boring. Because you used to have a machine the size of a living-room, you know, and you had like a little ledge to walk round. And you used to have to get inside of it and things like that. But you used to have to watch it and you used to be sitting. It was little dark rooms, and you were just bored to tears and I would look up sometimes and the paper was sky high to the ceiling where I'd never been watching it, and it had just ravelled and ravelled. And I just didn't like it."

This experience seems to have had a nightmarish quality, but Sally did complete her three year apprenticeship by moving to another company, where she also learned bookbinding. "I liked the book-binding side of it - that was good. You not only numbered pages, you collated the pages. The only thing you didn't do was your own guillotine work. You used to hand stitch them in their

leaves, collate them, bind them, gold bond, you know. But it wasn't very often we were let loose on the gold bond because it was very expensive!"

The experience of starting work as being a step into the adult world was most clearly expressed by Alice. Although she did not really want to work in an office she enjoyed her job as a clerical assistant in the Ministry starting in 1944. "I was going to pass exams to be a C.O. (Clerical Officer) but I didn't stay long enough for that. It was just more or less helping out - change of address (PATBs), and things like that. I enjoyed it. Of course I was young and you know the novelty of working and so forth." When she moved to the dressmaking section of a department store : "I used to go down with the head designer and, oh! I used to feel ever so important because I had a litte band on me wrist with pin cushions on and the tape measure and I was ever so important! And we used to fit them and take all the measurements down, and that was my job - writing down all the measurements". She left after a year and a half because the only other young girl left. "That didn't suit me then. I wanted to be with younger ones."

For both Vera and Margaret it was not a matter of the adult world of work being a step away from the family, for both went to join members of their families at work. Vera

went to join her mother on the Fish Quay in 1935 and Margaret went to work at Malings pottery in 1939. Except for one of Margaret's younger sisters "the whole family worked there" - parents, sisters and three aunts. "It was just a place you went to. The family looked after them. You didn't have any trainee or training instructor in them days. It was either your cousin or your aunt or your uncle who taught you what to do." So the teaching of the disciplines of work and the conventions of the workplace were in the hands of other members of your family and no doubt the management relied upon this system.

To an extent, this system is still in operation today when in the face of high youth unemployment a company will be inclined to take on the sons and daughters of existing workers. I have heard other workers being critical of these parents because the children have developed bad habits of shoddy workmanship or bad timekeeping. The importance of families in job-finding and training was also found to be important in Griffin's study of young women in Birmingham in 1979 : "The families of young working class women played an important role in their job-finding through informal contacts in local workplaces. Employers were wary of taking on school leavers, even as relatively cheap labour, but they were more likely to do so if there was some adult (preferably a relative) who would vouch for and discipline the young person if necessary." (Griffin (1985) p.88).

For those who went into the clothing trade the big issue in relation to becoming a worker was "getting on a machine". This had to be achieved by a process of persuading the boss. June, starting work in 1944, was put on doing tacking to begin with. "You had to be sixteen before they would let you go on the machines, but I used to sneak on the zig-zag machine. When the foreman wasn't there one of me friends used to let us have a try. And they were a bit stuck for a canvas hand - it was making the canvases that go inside the jackets - and I asked Mr. Wood, like, I says, 'Do you think, Mr. Wood, I could go on the machines? I've been here nearly two....' (I wasn't sixteen, like, about fifteen and a half)... And he said, 'you cannot use the machine'. I says, 'I've been on a few times. I haven't told you, like, but I can do a canvas'. He says, 'Oh, can you now?' He says, 'Let's see you, like'. So I run a one up, like, and I let him have a look at it and he says, 'Oh, aye, that's not bad'. Well they were stuck for a canvas hand 'cos she was off sick. So he says, 'Go on then, I'll let you have a go for a while - see how you do'. And I was on the machines ever since."

Pat, on her YOP scheme, went (in 1981) to the factory where Pam was already working. Until she was put on a machine, Pat did not enjoy it much and used to take days off. "Like, I started off on clipping. I was only on there for half a day and then I went on putting the

pattern, drawing the pattern on to a pocket. I used to get bored with that after a bit, like, and once I've done something I lose interest in it straight away, me. So then this lass that was next to us, she used to iron the pockets. Then she started making the belt loops so I used to go up with her. Then I got making the belt loops and cutting them. I got that job. And then, when I was bored with that, I started staying off again. And then I was packing this one day and they says I had been working hard so they tried us on a machine. And after that it was all right, I just kept going.... She (Pam) had been there longer than me but I got put on a machine first. They didn't give her a chance".

Caroline : "So why was that?"

Pam : "Because I was on clipping. There was a canny few on clipping, like, but.. dunno...they just kept us on clipping. Then I started nagging him that I wanted to go on a machine, and so a couple of others started nagging him for us, and I got put on one."

When June started in clothing in 1944 she was paid £1. 4s. 9d. She gave her mother £1 and had to pay her fares out of the 4s. 9d. "I never knew me father to work till the war started." He had worked as a baker in a bakery factory as a young man and then in a steel works that had closed. Her mother took in washing and washed for a butcher and his family. "Me brother and I used to carry them all back ironed in a basket. We used to get an apple!

Those were the days!" Her mother used to get the family's clothes from a second-hand stall. "And they were good, because they were off - like what you would call - the rich people in Whitley Bay, 'deceased clothes', you know? And me mother used to wash and do them all up and that." When the war came a bomb factory was built on the site of her father's allotment but at least he got a job there! He would have been aged 63 in 1940.

Pat and Pam, living in the different social conditions of the 1980s, found managing on the £25 allowance hard. Pat lived with her aunts who were cleaners in the shipyards. She gave them £10 a week. "I used to try and save up a bit from one week, and then save up a bit from the next week until I had enough money for to buy a pair of jeans, like. It was the only way you could do it because it's just terrible on a YOP".

Pam said, "Me £10 board and £2.50 for me Mam, and me tabs,* you really couldn't afford even for to buy new clothes 'cos you only had about £10 left to yourself on a week... I had a part-time job on a Saturday, working in a shop and I used to get money from that. I think that's how I done it."

*cigarettes

When Pat was taken on as an employee she got £34 flat at age 16 in 1982, £42 at 17 (1983) and £48 at 18 (1984).

Julie, who hated the first weeks in her clothing factory, found she enjoyed it after she got on to a machine. After the first three months on the factory floor learning the ropes, she should have gone into a training school but her supervisor "decided she would learn us herself and I sort of got on the machines quick. And she taught us everything really, and after that I loved it. I was there ten year." She enjoyed the challenge of piecework : "Once I was 16 (in 1964) you went on to piecework, and so every day was a challenge. You started that day with nothing. You had to .. sort of .. make your own money then. 'Course £4 and £5 a day then was a lot of money. You were top wage earners if you were making £20 a week, £25 a week. You were then the higher income bracket, and I could make it no bother. 'Course I had to work hard, mind." The hours were 8 a.m. - 4.45 p.m. and there was a lot of opportunity for overtime. "You could work every Saturday if you wanted." Julie did so often. After ten years she just gave her notice in for no reason. Even looking back, she was not sure why. "I was married then, like, and I thought mebbe's a little rest from work. I couldn't! I was off a week and I got another job."

Nancy had a much easier time settling in to the clothing factory that she went to in 1958. "There was quite a few

from our school started. I was put the first day on the button machine and the girl showed us how to do the buttons, ee.. and I got carried away. I thought it was fantastic!" After spells on the buttonhole machine for men's pyjamas, and on the trousers for the men's pyjamas, "the manageress for the Marks & Spencer's team came down with the boss and she was looking for decent machinists for to be Marks & Spencer's girls. 'Cos if you're a Marks & Spencer's girl they thought they were above the pyjamas and the shirts. So they took me up to the elite and from there I was just a Marks & Spencer's sewer". There she made girls' pyjamas, baby-doll pyjamas, "mostly gym blouses and everything had to be spick and span. 'Cos you're a Marks and Spencer's sewer and once you're accepted as one of them that's it. You can go to a factory and tell them you're a Marks & Spencer's sewer. I'd like a bit of card to say I was, but I haven't got one."

About 800 people worked in the factory. "It was a huge factory. It was airy, and the music just used to be on a couple of hours a day, so we used to have to sit and talk all day to pass the time and tell stories, and if anybody went to the pictures, everybody else got to know about it. I was there till I was 19 and I got engaged and I had to pay for me own wedding" (because of the ill health of her parents) "and I didn't know what I was going to do about it because the money wasn't very good and the

bonus was nothing really." In the end she took a job at the Plywood factory, which turned out to be an unpleasant contrast to the clothing factory.

The descriptions given here of becoming workers testify to the powerful impact that starting work had. Sometimes it was an enjoyable experience but Rachel, who said she "just stuck it" epitomised the feeling that many conveyed, of being plummeted into a situation in which they felt powerless but to which there was little alternative. If they had had a limited choice of what kinds of work to go into, they had little choice once they were inside about determining anything about the particular jobs they were given to do, the positions they worked in or work patterns. Any idea of some kind of career development as being possible was really absent. Apart from those in clothing who hoped "to get on a machine" or those who waited to be old enough to get on piecework, there was no suggestion that the present had to be endured because it would lead to a brighter future. The feeling was nearer to that described by Simone Weil (1951) : "When an apprentice gets hurt, or complains of being tired, the workmen and peasants have this fine expression ; "It is the trade which is entering his body"". (Waiting on God ; Fontana (1971) p.90.)

It was only by keeping a sharp eye open for opportunities

that the women were able to exert some power over their situation and move to more advantageous positions either within their workplace or by moving to another. June had to wheedle the foreman into allowing her on to the machines (this came out in the tone of voice she used when describing her encounter with him). Vera, on the Fish Quay, played the system by moving from one yard to another and Sally took advantage of the power of print workers to move from one firm to another.

The First Moves

There were those who settled into the first workplace that they went to but for others there came a time when they looked about them and decided to make a move, although this was for a variety of reasons. Both Audrey and Nancy moved into factory work that they didn't enjoy to earn more money when they got engaged. Alice took the opportunity of the closure of her branch of the Ministry to move into the dressmaking work that she fancied and her mother had reservations about.

Brenda moved after a year from the greengrocery, not so much because of the nature of the work itself but because the shop hours were interfering in her social life. "A lot of the friends that I knocked around with, they had factory jobs and they didn't work on a Saturday, and with w' having these motor scooters at the time, which was all

the go, they wanted to go away for weekends... I found that I was either the bugbear of them not going anywhere because I couldn't get a Saturday off, or they got to the stage where they used to go, and I... used to, if I wanted to go, I had to go, like, to Hexham on me own and that, later on on a Saturday night, which seemed to take the thrill and the fun and everything out of it 'cos they had been away in the morning and put all the tents up and, you know, I think you miss best part of the fun and the carry-on by then. That was what made us write after the factory job."

Although she enjoyed her job at Binns, Jeanette moved after three years to a high-class grocer's shop, where a friend of hers worked. There she was given a lot of responsibility for dealing with money and the wages.

After her six months training period at the hunting stables, Yvonne had to leave. She went back to work at the stables in Northumberland where she had worked before. "It seemed funny coming back to there. They seemed like little ponies!" She was only paid £10 a week (this was 1976) and her board. The work was only seasonal so she would have had to move after the summer. In fact she met her future husband when he came for a holiday in a caravan on the site belonging to the stables. At the end of the summer it was arranged that she should go to live with his family in Wallsend. Thus she had to leave the work with

horses that she loved and had been trained in, and took a job in Jameses after a spell of eight weeks on the dole. "I was quite pleased when I got a job there. It was totally different. Me mother said I wouldn't stick it!".

Vera, having got as far as she could in the work on the Fish Quay, took an opportunity to see wider horizons when she joined the "travelling shop". Her experience of travelling round the country was an unusual one for a girl from Tyneside. It was in this way that she was in Gourock when war broke out and was conscripted into a torpedo factory.

For some of those who were working when the war started it proved to be the opening to a wider life. Phyllis had already managed to escape from domestic service and got a job in a cafe in Whitley Bay, first as a still-room maid and then as a waitress. She volunteered as a dining-car attendant on the railways in the war. Thus she broke into a world of working with men and was paid a man's wage. When dining-cars were taken off as food got scarcer, buffets were substituted, run by the men and Phyllis was sent to be a station hand and booking clerk at Percy Main station. It entailed having to climb the gantries to clean the signal lamps which her female colleague refused to do so Phyllis had to do it for her. It seems ironical that it was felt that women could do this job and not serve on the buffets! Eventually she volunteered for the

forces and went into the army where she learned to drive - a useful skill which got her a job when she was demobbed.

Margaret, working in the pottery, saw the wartime advertising films for the Land Army. "I just thought that joining the Land Army was seeing new worlds." However, it proved to be a struggle to be allowed to go since her employer had to sign the form to let her go. "By heavens, they wouldn't let me out of that Malins' pottery!" Eventually she got her way and was sent to Bedfordshire - "I thought it was abroad then!" "Across the water you were abroad!" (i.e. across the River Tyne).

These experiences of travel were very unusual for the women in the study, most of whom have lived and worked on Tyneside all their lives.

The accounts of becoming workers that have been given in this chapter demonstrate the strong orientation to disciplined hard work which is part of the culture of the north east. Although this culture is determined by the nature of male employment in the area, the expectations of what being a worker entails are shown here to have been assimilated by the women as well. Julie hated her first job in a factory but was told by her mother that she had to stay until she found something else. Rachel, too,

described the process of becoming a worker as largely one of learning "to stick it". The discipline of going to work; being part of the world of work; receiving a wage which is the passport to some adult freedom in the life of a young person, were all fundamental to the experience of being a young worker described here. Significantly, it was only Pat on a YOP scheme who spoke about "staying off" work. Here we see, perhaps, the first suggestion, in the 1980s' world of high youth unemployment, of the breakdown of the assumptions about a working culture that were so clearly held by the older women in this study.

If belonging to the disciplined world of work was traditionally a necessary constituent of belonging to adult society, so belonging to adult society in turn determined the course of the working lives of the women in this study. Brenda took a job in a factory to fit in with her social life as a member of a scooter group. Two took jobs in factories to earn more money when they were getting married. The general assumption was that they would all get married and have children so their lives as workers were of secondary importance.

The social implications of the jobs the women did and the interactions between their lives at home and at work will be further explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

SHOP & FACTORY - THE PULL OF DIFFERENT WORLDS

Suitable Jobs for Girls

Some of the women went to work in factories at the beginning of their working lives; others moved into factory work later on. Whenever they made the decision to go and work in a factory it was an important one.

For one thing there was, and probably still is, a social stigma attached to factory work or, more precisely, to factory workers. This came out in the pull towards shop or office work that the women felt when they were first choosing jobs. Their mothers, who were such a strong influence on them, were often reported as being against them going into factory work and encouraging them to go into offices or shops. What were the criteria which were influencing them? Not financial ones, for when they took jobs in factories they got more money; not a concern for career prospects : the only person who mentioned career prospects in a positive sense was Nancy's mother, who vetoed the sweet factory because, "You're just going to the sweet factory for the sweets"; didn't mind her going to C & A; was not keen on bookbinding, though for unspecified reasons; and encouraged her to go into clothing because it was "a career that you could always fall back on and earn yourself some money and do something

to help yourself". The likely unspoken thoughts here were that she assumed that Nancy would marry and have children and that in the event of difficulty or disaster she would probably be able to get a job in clothing. The shortage of labour in that industry was such that special provision was sometimes made for mothers with young children. In one sense, Nancy's mother was right. Nancy was always being asked to come back to work once she was at home with her children and she did start work again when her children were young but fortunately this was not on account of disaster or great financial hardship. It was more that people's expectations had changed and, by the Sixties, it had become more usual for mothers to work to provide what would have once seemed luxuries but had become essentials. But this is to get ahead of ourselves into issues which faced the women at a later stage of their working lives.

Probably Nancy's mother was typical in her unspoken assumption that Nancy would work for a time before getting married; that she would leave work to look after her children and that it would depend on the circumstances and Nancy's inclinations and those of her husband whether she would go back to work once her children "were up". This explains some of the attitudes and choices of the women and their families in the section "Leaving School and Starting Work". The image of shop and office work was a

glamorous one as Griffin (1985) points out. It was seen as a clean job where you could wear nice clothes and be noticed. It might improve your manners and social skills as you learned to serve customers and relate to other staff. Jeanette was sent to learn Speech, which underlines this aspect of shop work. You would meet a variety of people with the comings and goings of the life of office or shop, and you might therefore meet a nice boy your mother would approve of your marrying. The hours would be regular. Although for some of those who took shop work, at least some of these things turned out to be true - Audrey did meet her husband, who worked in an adjacent department of the Co-op. For others it did not. Jeanette had to work such long hours at the second shop she went to that her fiancé began to object. Brenda found that the shop hours conflicted with the social activities she shared with her friends who worked in factories and worked different hours from hers. For her, too, shop work turned out to be heavy, dirty work.

In fact it was Brenda who came the nearest to going into a job with real career prospects when she explored the possibilities of going into the Prison Service, or the Police. The Police would not have accepted her because she wore glasses, but it was her mother who would not let her pursue the Prison Service because she might be "punched around and badly used". In this, her experience corresponded with that of Clare, one of the young women

who contributed to Christine Griffin's study, "C.G. :

'What do your parents think of you wanting to try for the Police? Or do they want you to?'

Clare : 'My dad does but my mum doesn't. She wasn't too happy about the idea. Hard life, she's frightened I'll get beat up (laugh)'. (Griffin (1985) p.94). Brenda came from a mining family, which might well have held some of the traditional views associated with that industry in the north east, that the men keep the women and the women in turn look after the men, keeping them fit for the demanding work of the pits. To be much concerned about a girl's career might well not have seemed appropriate.

Tyneside Cultural Assumptions

We touch here on some of the particular characteristics of the north east, its cultural assumptions and its industrial traditions which will be explored in Chapter 6. The post-war changes in the traditional employment structure of the north east - the declining importance of its heavy industries and the development of light industry on trading estates - could sometimes emerge in sharp personal experience as in the shock felt by Nancy and her father when they discovered that she was making more money in the Plywood factory than he was making in the shipyards. "Much more. Me Dad couldn't believe it. He was making £12 and I was making £15". This was in 1964/65.

While to someone from outside Tyneside, this might just seem a piece of obvious 'writing on the wall' indicating the decline of the traditional heavy industry of the north east, to insiders, like Nancy and her father, it was a sign of the world turned upside down. "The Yards" have always been the pride of Tyneside and the staple, along with heavy engineering, of the skilled work for the men who live there. The run-down of traditional industry and the depletion of the workforce runs like a silent river behind the stories of the women described in this study. Three of them - Brenda, Audrey and Jeanette - had fathers who were miners. They worked in pits at Wallsend and Felling, which are now closed. Many had close relatives who worked in the shipyards - Vicky, Nancy, Sally and Rachel (a cross-section of the age groups) all had husbands who worked in the Yards. Pat's aunts with whom she lived, worked there as cleaners.

An analysis of the occupations of the husbands or partners of the nineteen women in the study shows how closely they are tied to the industrial and cultural nature of the north east. Seven of the nineteen were single, widowed or separated; of the rest, two had husbands who were unemployed; four worked in the shipyards; four were time-served in engineering companies, of whom three were working using their skills while the fourth could not get skilled work and was doing unskilled work for the council; one was the manager of a working-men's Club and one was

working for a building firm in his trade, having been made redundant from the shipyards.

So the cultural inheritance of the women and the experience of many of them in their own families has been the physically demanding and skilled work of traditional Tyneside industry. Seen against this background we can better understand the desire to be removed from heavy, dirty work which the pull towards shops represented and the desire of families that their women-folk should not have to labour in factories just as they might wish that their sons might not have to go down the pit. But we can also better understand another strand which comes out in these accounts - the pull towards the down-to-earth warmth of factory workers and the respect for the productive nature of industry as against the service nature of shops. While families might have reservations about daughters going into factory work, sons going into industry on apprenticeships would have been congratulated even though these would be the prelude to hard and dirty work.

The Worlds of Shop & Factory

Several of the accounts described the worlds of shops and of factories and the ambivalence which those who moved from one to the other felt.

Audrey, having started work in the Co-op shoe shop had a spell at Wills' cigarette factory in 1955 before going back into shops again. It was not the factory work itself that she disliked, but other aspects of the experience.

"I didn't like Wills's. I hated it. I couldn't.. I was very shy in them days, very quiet, and I found that going from a shop, where you were like a family, into a factory where there was maybe fifty girls working on an assembly belt.. I just didn't connect with any of them. Whether they thought that I was trying to be a little bit posh because I was quiet - which I wasn't you know, I was just shy - and I didn't seem to be able to get on with any of them.... Most of them were like me, they had had other jobs, but they had been factory girls. Then I felt they were a rough... you know, and I just couldn't get on with any of them. I used to speak to them all, and be pleasant, but I couldn't make a friend and I felt really out, out of touch with them. Because in the shop we were all very good friends, the girls that worked in the shop. We used to go out together and go to each other's houses. But in the factory I just couldn't make a friend. I think if I'd made one friend I could have stayed, but I stayed there for nine months and I didn't enjoy it at all".

"At Wills's then, you had to start off in what they called the Stemming Room. You had to make a quota each week which I did, you know, I could do all the work. That was

stripping the leaves and your hands used to swell and get very sore. It was hard work but I could do it. But it was when you went for your lunch. I always felt as if I was pushing in with somebody that didn't want us. I didn't feel right. I wasn't comfortable working there at all".

In those days - "What happened was each floor went at a certain time in the morning up two or three flights to the canteen. They all went together like cattle! And sit down and eat your meal, you know, your toast or whatever, for your breakfast as quick as you could, and then all run back again. Very, very strict it was, very strict. If you went to the toilet and you were in the toilet more than a minute or so, the door was banged on and you had to get out!... There used to be an old dragon in the toilets... She used to shout : 'Get out of there!' you know. I wouldn't like to tell you what she used to shout! Well I thought it was terrible, you know. I had never come upon anything like that in the shops. The manageress in the shop was lovely. She was like a mother. If you had a cold she used to give you a dose of Condey's Crystals, or whatever, to make you better, you know, and when I went in the factory it was just entirely different and I just didn't fit in at all."

I asked if people had gone out together from Wills, and whether there was much in the way of social activities there. Audrey thought there probably had been, but "At Wills's I would say it was the only place I've really not got involved in anything... whether it was because I was eighteen and, as I say, I was quite shy then. It might be hard to think it now, but I was then quite shy! And I just didn't get involved, plus I was eighteen and I was engaged and of course when I went home I was wanting to go out with my boyfriend. So I wasn't really interested in going out with them girls. But I found Wills, of all the factories I've worked in, I would say it was more like a prison camp than anywhere else - very, very strict. If you didn't work on a Saturday morning, then you had to sometimes bring a doctor's note in to say why you didn't come in, you know. It was really strict, which I think I could have taken but as I say, I didn't mix with the girls at all. Unless I just started with a bunch of girls that were a bit rougher than the normal ones. But they weren't very nice girls and I wasn't used to language and things like that. You used to get a lot of swearing and.. at the time I just wasn't a factory girl. I think factory girls have changed you know. I think now you get factory girls when I was younger.. usually a girl in the factory was 'common'!" Audrey laughed. "This is the way people used to say 'Oh, she works in a factory, she's common'" (said in a superior tone). "Granted they all weren't common but they were rougher than the girls I had been

used to working with in the shop, and this is what gave me such a shock. And I don't think they cared very much for me because I think they thought I was a bit posh you know! Which I wasn't. I was quiet and shy.. I didn't think much of the experience of Wills' at all. It was one of the worst parts of working, Wills's. I don't look on that as being a happy time at all."

Audrey tried to get her old job in the Co-op shoe shop back but there wasn't a vacancy. She put her name down in case one came up and took a job in Bon Marché on Wallsend High Street. "They started me in what they called the Mantle Department - ladies hats and coats, dresses, shoes... The wages were terrible, but I hated Wills's so much I went there. I think the wages were only £2.10s. which was half the wage, but I really disliked Wills's so much I didn't care." She worked for a Buyer. "She was a proper dragon. Oh! but in her way she was very kind to me but she was very, very tough you know. What she said was law. If she said 'Scrub that floor', you had to scrub it, you know. Although you worked in a shop you had to do exactly what she said. But I actually got on quite well with her and she put me in charge of the jumper department. I had all the nice jumpers to stack up and pretty blouses to sell and I quite enjoyed working there. But I had only been there about a year when I got a letter from the Co-op asking if I would go and work in their

chemist's. So of course I jumped at the chance because I liked - the Co-op wage was better. So I went into the chemist, and I loved the chemist. I think of all the jobs I've ever had, the chemist was my job. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I enjoyed the nice smells and I enjoyed the nice... the travellers used to give you little gifts of soaps and lipsticks, and I just enjoyed it. I thought it was a really good job, that. But I was only there six months when my old boss in the shoe shop asked if I could go back to her because she needed someone to help out in the men's department. Well actually I didn't want to go because I liked the chemist better. But of course she had got on to the Secretary then, and he said I had to go. So then I went back to the original job again in the shoe shop which I liked, but I preferred the chemist.

Caroline : "How could he tell you that you'd got to go?"

Audrey : "Well that was the way it was in them days. You had no choice. There was no Union to speak of. I mean we paid w' Union dues but we never ever.. I couldn't even tell you who the Union person was, you know. The Secretary was in charge and if he said 'You go over there', there's nobody you could ask to help you".

Audrey enjoyed the chemist because of her involvement with customers. "You met so many more people. The chemist's was always busy from nine o'clock till.. sometimes if you worked till seven it was busy all the time so you were kept busy, which I liked. And you had so many variations



of things to serve, plus people who used to ask our advice and it was nice to talk to people who'd say, 'Now which cough bottle's the best, pet?' you know, and things like this".

This account of Audrey's would have borne out just what the women and their mothers would have expected to be the case : the contrast between the prison-camp world of the factory where people were shouted at and felt like cattle, and the shop world, where your boss gave you cold cures and the atmosphere was that of a family; the contrast between the quieter, more friendly girls in the shop and the rougher, swearing girls in the factory. Even now, thirty years later, looking back on the experience, Audrey still thought of the girls as rough. She recognised that she herself had changed but still felt that factory girls in general had changed as well.

To the reader it may seem that the world of the shop was not so clearly to be preferred to that of the factory - you could be ordered to scrub the floor of the shop and you could be posted from one job to another against your will, even in the Co-operative Society, which presumably saw itself as having the welfare of its staff as a priority. The canteen facilities at Wills have always been very good of their kind, and the shop world provided no equivalent, but that was no compensation to Audrey who

preferred the small-scale, intimate world of the shop and the contact with customers, to the large, impersonal world of the factory.

Jeanette had a varied experience of shopwork before she went into factory work. After three years in her first job in the department store, someone she knew got her a job where she worked, in Brough's, a grocer's in the centre of Newcastle. "When I started" (which would have been in 1953 or 1954) "it was decided by someone that I would be better off in the office because there was only one woman there and she was about - I thought she was about ninety! - but she must have been about fifty-five, and a young girl. And they put me in. And she was very good. She taught us the wages and the income tax and all the invoices for the shop and she was really good. And she left straight after so I was there on me own with the young girl".

Caroline : "With all that responsibility?"

Jeanette : "Ee, yes. I used to have to take all the money to the bank you know... all the money from all the tills of a night had to be right... I mean it wasn't self-service like nowadays. Everybody had to write a bill. I mean even if you got, like, half a pound of butter you wrote a little bill and the duplicates were kept and all the duplicates had to reckon with all the money in the till (I used to go home reckoning up!). All by hand, I mean all by head, there was no calculators. It was just

reckoning up. You wrote the bill out and you kept the duplicate. Now as they finished the little booklets they were kept. In one day in another book, this thin book duplicated as well, I had to write every single price that had been done that day. And on one page there was fifty and I had to reckon every page up...and all those pages were torn off and sent to Head Office with all the bills what people had wrote. It was a terrific task!...If I made mistakes I had to find it. And I mean sometimes to do the day-before's bills used to take me till lunchtime the next day. And if I made a mistake I used to have to take longer and of course when Wednesday come I had the wages. And then the bills for the things that came into the shop. I was in a perpetual state of harrassment."

This heavy responsibility was not recognised. "I only got the money what they got in the shop, that's all I got. And I mean the money we took that I handled every day and took to the bank - banked it, balanced the books with the wages and the tax and balanced the lot! And you know, if it was, like, a shilling out, I mean, you'd think I'd committed a crime. And a pound! I mean, you dare be a pound out! I mean, I've seen me spend sleepless nights because I'd lost a pound.... I mean it was hard. That was the hardest job I've ever had".

Caroline : "And I bet that must have ingrained into you an ability you've never lost."

Jeanette : "Oh, that's how I reckon the wages up at work, you know. I do that pretty good - and the tax, when people

can't understand their tax. The tax has never changed - how they work it out - you still have the book and the week, how much you can earn".

So the skill learned in this demanding job in the shop is now put to use in her role as a shop steward and in working out her own and others' earnings under a complicated piecework system.

"I got engaged, but I used to have to be always working late because I always had all these books to do. It used to be six o'clock and seven sometimes by the time I got the jobs I had to do in the day done, plus if anything had gone wrong the day before. I mean sometimes I'd got out on time, not a lot." Her fiancé' .."went mad because first of all I never met him on time, he was always having to come and look for us. And he thought what I done, the hours I worked, was absolutely ridiculous for the money I got. And I was twenty-one and I was getting £4 a week.... So really I left because of that. And I left and I didn't really have a job. But jobs - you could get them so easily!".

By 1957, Jeanette had got married and she got a job in a grocer's at the end of the road where she lived."It was only a small shop and it only had the manageress and this woman I knew.. she lived near me ... and a girl I went to school with, and me. But the Manageress was bad-tempered

and she hated my name, Jeanette, you see. She said 'I won't call you Jeanette, I'll call you Jean.' And I said, "Well, please yourself 'cos I won't answer you". So of course she called me Jean and I never answered her. And she used to say 'Girl' to us. So I didn't stay there. That was me worst job; I stayed just about four month."

The local food Co-op was advertising for assistants and Jeanette went there. "And I really liked it there. But it was funny there because you had to weigh everything in the Co-op in those days. There was great big sacks of flour and great big sacks of sugar and when you weren't serving you had to weigh all these things and you got really good at guessing a pound. And you done that, and of course the Co-op was very busy, I mean it was really busy. But the manager was... we shut at five, we shut prompt five because he used to have to get home and get his dinner to get to the pub, because he was alcoholic and he used to drink brown ale at work! Well, I enjoyed it there and I was married and the girls were all about my age and two of them I had gone to school with, because, (the area where she lived) was then a very small place you know. It was just like a village more or less then. It was before they built .. all the flats. I mean, nothing like that. It was fields and I used to walk through the fields to work... I was never off, never in the time I was there... Until this Wednesday. We used to finish at four o'clock on a Wednesday and I had gone home

for me dinner. We got an hour. I used to walk home, which used to take twenty minutes. Twenty minutes, twenty minutes back, and I had twenty minutes in the house. And me mother-in-law lived next door to us and, ee, I must have looked terrible because she come up and said, 'You're not going to work?'. I said, 'Ee, I've got to, got to'. And it was raining, and she says, 'Ee, you must stay off' and she gave us whisky (I don't know what she thought the whisky would do!), but I'll never forget, she gave us this whisky and I was sick and I felt terrible and she said 'You can't go to work' and she says 'You get to bed'. And I went to bed. The next day, like, I was so worried about this manager. I knew he was bad-tempered, and I thought 'I must go to work', and I felt desperate. And I went and I said to him, 'I'm sorry I was off yesterday. I was poorly'. And he said to us, 'I hope wherever you went you got soaked'. And I said, 'I was in bed', and he just walked away. So I was upset and I thought, well, I had been there two years or three, and I thought, I've never lost one day, never late. So I gave me notice in, and I didn't have a job, but jobs you see were so easy to get."

One of Jeanette's sisters, Mary, had worked in more than one factory and was in the process of changing her job. She had got an interview at Osram Lamps on the Team Valley Industrial Estate. Jeanette said, "A factory! I wouldn't work in a factory". Jeanette agreed to go with Mary to

her interview. "And of course the Personnel said to me 'Do you not want a job?'. "Oh", I said, "I wouldn't work in a factory. And he said 'Why?'. And I said, well they're dirty and everything. And he said 'Oh? Would you like to see one?' And I said, well yes, I wouldn't mind. So he showed us round the factory. Well, I was really amazed because it was spotless. It was - really. And it was, lovely - lovely. So he said 'Well, you've got a job if you want a start', so I thought well, I'll give it a try. Anyway, I started and it was the best job I'd ever had. And I found that the worst for swearing and calling people behind their backs was Binns... the next was Brouchs, listening to the girls who served in the shop. And the place I didn't hear any bad language at all was the factory, where they were mostly, I suppose, youngish married or unmarried, girls".

Jeanette's wages in these jobs were about £6.5s. at the Co-op, which was about £1 more than she had got at the local grocer's and £2 more than at Brouchs. When she went to Osram's she got £8, which was a flat rate you got keeping up with the conveyor belt. This was in 1958/59. Looking back on this Jeanette said, "Of course the wages in shops was absolutely disgusting. It was! And they could make you work. I mean, you didn't get overtime, Caroline. I mean, I could stay till seven o'clock and not get a penny and I had been there from nine - from half-past eight - I started at Brough's at half-past eight.

And I mean I could be there till seven, half past seven, but I never ever got overtime. I never got any money. And sometimes if you reckoned how many hours you had worked in a week, I had worked sixty. I had been there sixty and I only ever got £4.

Jeanette's experience of the world of shops was in some respects similar to Audrey's. They both enjoyed being involved with selling articles they liked themselves : Jeanette the children's clothes and toys, and Audrey the nice jumpers and the cosmetics and cures in the chemist's. Both suffered from the authoritarian and sometimes tyrannical attitudes of their bosses in the shop world where there was no union to support employees and no management structure which effectively supervised first-line managers. That was the negative side of the small-scale, family atmosphere side of shop life which Audrey experienced more than did Jeanette.

The ability which Jeanette displayed in the financial responsibility she took on at Brouchs seems to have been entirely taken for granted from the moment that, in a haphazard way, "someone decided" that she should go into the office. The fact that neither she, nor anyone around her suggested that she should pursue her abilities in book-keeping, once these became apparent, by taking night classes and seeking other jobs using her skills, seems in

line with what we have already noted : that the expectations of the women themselves and all those with whom they were involved, were circumscribed. At the time when she was doing this job she was about to get married. No doubt it was assumed that she might very well leave full-time employment for ever and that if she had a job it would only be of secondary importance to her role as wife and mother. Any thought of developing her skills to build a career would not have occurred to anyone.

It is noteworthy that, perhaps because of having held such a responsible job, she was not prepared to put up with the rudeness of the manageress in the grocer's who would not use her name, nor with being insulted and unjustly suspected by the manager of the Co-op. She had the confidence to leave, but whether she would have felt able to do so in a climate where jobs were less easy to come by is a question. I am reminded of a conversation I had with Jane, aged 24 in 1984, when she worked in the same department as Jeanette at James's. Before coming to James's in 1983, Jane had worked for $4\frac{1}{2}$ years in a fast-food business. She was paid to work from 6 p.m. till midnight, but it usually took longer and Jane often did not get home till 2.30 a.m. There was "no union, or nothing like that. If you mentioned 'Union' you'd be out the door." In the present climate of lack of jobs, Jane felt she had to put up with the low wages and unsatisfactory conditions because there was no

alternative. When eventually she heard, through her mother, that James's were wanting people, and got the job there, she was amazed at the working conditions and the union's ability to raise issues with the management. She described the change in her feelings by saying, "I feel employable again".

Jeanette had the advantage of being in an employees' market when she was a young woman. The Personnel Officer at Osram's was needing workers sufficiently for it to be worth his while to try to dispel the anti-factory prejudices that Jeanette held. She could feel "I'll give it a try", knowing that if she did not like factory work she could go back into a shop. In fact, in spite of having a frightening accident while working there, she stayed until her daughter was born. Since then Jeanette's jobs, apart from a shop job when her daughter was very small, have all been in factories. She had become what Audrey called "a factory girl".

Someone who would probably say of herself that she never became a "factory girl" but only worked in factories when circumstances compelled her, was Joyce. It was wartime conscription that took her from the world of the shop - in her case a dairy at Tynemouth - into the world of the factory. Not surprisingly she did not enjoy it for she was conscripted into the dreaded Tyne Brand. She worked

on the paste floor, putting lids on the tins of meat and fish paste and on another floor putting labels on tins. Joyce disliked working there very much for several reasons. Firstly, "The smell. The fact that, you know, the smell gets right into your skin. No matter how many times you washed, if you went out at night-time and started to get warm, you know,..phew, you could smell it coming out of your hands, and I didn't like that. I didn't like, really - largely the type of people I was working with. I just didn't like Tyne Brand at all. You know when I was young, if you worked at Tyne Brand you were the lowest of the low, literally. It was only the... very, sort of.. very rough kind of people that worked at Tyne Brand - and rough they were. A lot of them came from South Shields during the war and they were rough. They were rough. But there were some nice people worked there, but I didn't enjoy it at all... Largely it was the way they talked; not necessarily what they said but the way they talked, you know, very broad. That grates on me... Another thing I found difficult was having to wear clogs in the factory. Everybody had to wear clogs and I didn't like that. But it wasn't difficult work at all. You had to work hard but, I mean, you know, that's fair enough."

Joyce ended up getting seriously ill and was off work for about three years all together. She really wanted to work with children and succeeded in doing so. After working as a Nanny in the south she came home to Tyneside to look

after her mother in the early 1950s. "I took a temporary job at Ronson's until I could get the kind of job that I wanted. I was there seven years until I saw an advert for working with mentally handicapped children and I applied and got the job and stayed twenty-three years". Her experience at Ronson's was much happier than at Tyne Brand..."because they were very selective in their staff. Everybody that worked at Ronson's at least had to be clean and they wouldn't take anybody who didn't care or didn't want to work and a lot of them were married women. They paid very well but, as I say, like all American firms, they wanted their pound of flesh. You really had to work from the moment you went in to the moment you came out. You couldn't talk - well if I ever did I was always caught. But they were quite pleasant people to work with, and for. It was when they started building these Industrial Estates."

It is perhaps significant that Joyce's more positive experience of factory work took place in the setting of a new factory on an industrial estate. She drew a distinction between the kind of people who worked at Tyne Brand in the war and at Ronson's in the fifties. Jeanette's introduction to factory life took place in a factory on an industrial estate in the late fifties. She enjoyed the experience and commented on the lack of bad language and the fact that the women who worked there were

mostly young and married. The industrial estates were established in the north east immediately before and after the second world war to bring alternative employment to the area to compensate for the loss of jobs in the traditional industries of the region. But they were also planned to bring to the region employment opportunities for women, which, as we have seen, were not very varied before the war.

What both Jeanette and Joyce are therefore describing is this new workforce of young married women. Perhaps they were rather different in their attitudes and style from the women who worked in the traditional women's factories like Tyne Brand and the Rope Works. There was also the fact that the economic situation was improving and the whole climate surrounding working women, and especially married working women, had changed greatly since the thirties. Neither Jeanette nor Joyce were women who expected to work in factories but both found themselves doing so. In this way they were, perhaps, representative of the post-war woman factory worker on Tyneside.

On the other hand, one cannot help wondering whether the change was not almost entirely an interior change, that those who ventured into the factory world underwent in themselves. Prejudices about factory workers are not entirely a thing of the past, and their positive qualities and the advantages of factory life are only discovered by

those who are willing to join in. Brenda's tribute to these qualities is a fitting end to this exploration of the conflicting pulls of shop and factory :

"I used to hear a lot of people, including me own uncle (who was a great believer in the church, like!) who used to say, 'Oh, you'll not like a factory. The people are horrible; they're coarse, they're...' - I mean, I have heard, I mean I still hear it from people when you say you work in a factory. And I'll be honest with you, the time I had in the two shops - give me factory people any time. They're down-to-earth, they're not selfish, they're very kind. And I just think they're a different type of people. I don't know how people can get the idea that factory lasses are coarse and horrible and vulgar and rude. All right, you might get the odd one or two but I mean you cannot class a whole factory full of people because you've got one or two bad people. But I still prefer yet, factory people to shop people. It's amazing the amount of things that they do, you know, to help things, charities, help different places and all that. You never find that going on in a shop. I find, as I say, that I was only in shops about 18 months, 20 months all together, but I still prefer factory people. Even now, if Jameses shut down, I wouldn't go back into a shop."

CHAPTER 5

CHANGING JOBS

Personal Choice in Social Context

This chapter will explore why the women in this study either chose, or were forced, to change their jobs, looking at this subject from their personal point of view. Their reasons for moving ranged from financial and family considerations, through issues of personal relationships and practical difficulties at work, to the stark ending of the job.

This personal experience was, however, taking place against an historical background. Factors influencing the women's situations as they made these personal decisions included : whether it was war or peacetime; the range of openings available to women in the region; the state of the job market at the time; the legislation governing dismissal and redundancy payments currently in force; and the power of trade unions in the particular workplace at the time.

Once into the world of the factory, what led the women in the study to change jobs and move elsewhere? The chance to earn more money was obviously important, as it had been for those who moved from shop to factory.

Money

Like Audrey, who went to Wills to earn more money when she got engaged, Nancy (when she got engaged) moved from the clothing factory where she had started work, to a factory making plywood. She went there in 1964 after one or two attempts to get a job at a bedding factory. "Every time I went up, the vacancies had gone... so I went to the Plywood factory and I worked there and I hated it. It was like working outside in the street, and there was cars like tractor things going around and it was dark and noisy and filthy and they put me on a real filthy job - spreader ... the glue! I had to wear a mask. I had to wear boots, these wellies, and this overall right away down, and this pinny on, and a mask for the dust off the wood. Sometimes the glue had different glue - and the smell! And it was, like, catching huge big pieces of wood and plying them together - two ply, three ply, four ply - like knitting all day!"

They fed it through the spreader then "a girl and me would catch it and then turn it different ways, it all depended on the length, fling it, and another girl would catch it, put it down and make the plys up. And then, when we'd made so many we couldn't get any more on the load, we used to have a sit, and wait for the men. We used to wait ages for the men 'cos they were right lazy. So if you worked hard for an hour to get your load, you could sit for half an hour waiting for them to come and shift it and put it

in the press. And ha' yourself a cup of tea and things, sitting amongst all the dust and muck - and smoking. I mean I wasn't used to people just sitting smoking on the job. I mean the woman that used to shove the wood through used to have a cigarette in her mouth all the time. And I thought, "they're a right catty lot here". But I was making more money than me Dad, who was working in the shipyards. Much more. Me Dad couldn't believe it. He was making £12 and I was making nearly £15." After about three months of this Nancy left "because I couldn't stand it."

'Good' Jobs and 'Bad' Jobs

However after a short spell in a knitwear factory, Nancy "heard there was somebody leaving, retiring off the number three spreader. That was the brown glue, which wasn't so bad as the white. So I went and asked George for the job back and he was quite dumbfounded and he says, 'Seeing as you've asked you can go.' And I was quite happy on there because I knew the girls and they were nice, a nice set of girls, different altogether, and the woods weren't such big bits of wood to hump around. And I was there till I got married in 1966 and in the summer then they decided to close the factory 'cos Formica had taken over. So that was the first time I was ever made redundant, and the only time I've ever been finished in a job. So me Mam says, 'Well, have yourself a few weeks off.' But I was bored

and the dole was offering us jobs at Haggies (the "Rope Works") and at the Tyne Brand, and I thought, 'I'm not that type of person', you know. So I went back sewing for a girl I knew at the cushion factory and I hated that. So I just stayed there a few weeks and I went back to Clays and I got on the nice nighties and things and the money had changed then. In fact everything had changed round, the piecework and everything, and I loved it. And then I fell pregnant." So she left to have her first child.

Nancy clearly managed to survive, and even to enjoy, doing some pretty unpleasant jobs but it was not easy to guess, before she told me, which she had liked and which she had not. For example, when she left the Plywood factory the first time, and went to the Knitwear factory, she liked it to start with, and then her feelings changed. "I was making good money there and I liked it, and then they found out I could do the waistcoat pockets and I got the waistcoat pockets all the time. It was a much smaller firm, about twenty machinists, and you all had to take your turn and they just didn't take their turn." She decided to go back to the Plywood which, on the face of it, would have seemed a much more unpleasant option.

Relationships at Work

What people experience as boring work is not always easy to appreciate for someone not actually doing the job. In

this case, presumably the waistcoat pockets were in some way a fiddly or tiresome job and perhaps they did not pay well. But another very important theme which emerges in many of these accounts of settling in to a work situation, is that of the extreme importance of making friends, of having an easy relationship with those with whom one is working. Audrey felt that if she had made a friend she might have stayed at Wills; Nancy liked her second job in the Plywood largely because she was working with girls she liked; Joyce enjoyed Ronson's more than Tyne Brand on account of the people she was working with.

Job & Identity

Another important point which Nancy's account brings out is that although she had become a skilled machinist - a Marks & Spencer's girl - through her first job, she evidently did not think of herself as exclusively that. She tried for jobs in the bedding factory and went off to the Plywood twice, interspersing her jobs there with a job in her own trade in the knitwear factory. This was on account of the relative wage levels and reveals that women who are skilled in a traditionally female industry like clothing, are paid at such low rates that unskilled work can sometimes be more profitable. No doubt at times the same has been true for skilled, time-served men. But, on the whole, thanks partly to the power of the craft unions in negotiating wage rates, a skilled man will think of

himself as a welder, turner, or electrician and will seek a job in his trade in a way that Nancy and the other women in this study would not.

June's experience illustrates this. She left her job at the Co-op tailoring factory at Pelaw in 1949 to go to Reyrolles : "It was me friend used to work in Pelaw with us. We were both in the sewing trade together. And the money was very poor and the money was good in Reyrolles. So me friend left. She got me coaxed six or seven month after, 'cos she always had more money than I had. And she'd say, 'You're a fool sticking this rag trade June. You want to come in Reyrolles.' - 'cos I mean you could just go and get an interview and get a start. I mean it wasn't, 'Will I get in?' So I went and had an interview. I'd never been in that kind of trade before but I liked sewing the best."

She was forced to leave, because the oil gave her dermatitis. After this she went back to the Co-op tailoring until her first child was born in 1958. Indeed after this she went back there five or six times as well as doing a season in an hotel. She knew the bosses and the girls, although a lot of them left as time went on. She summed up her feelings by saying, "It seemed because that was my first job, that was the place that I belonged. I always felt I could go back there." The friendships existing between women working in the clothing industry

are a very important factor. People moved from one factory to another because of personal contacts.

Julie also tried to move out of the clothing industry when she was eighteen in 1967. She tried to follow her sisters who had moved from clothing into what was then the Morganite factory "because of the money you see. They could make good money. Now, I went for an interview when I was eighteen, same as they did. Now I didn't get the job. I don't know whether it was because of me long finger nails or what. I couldn't pick the little screws up." So Julie returned to clothing, and all her jobs have been in that industry since.

The person who changed jobs most frequently was Sally. After completing her apprenticeship in printing and bookbinding, her first move was to De La Rue's in 1969. She had been being paid £12 a week after coming out of her time but De La Rue's, where her sister worked, "were starting women on about £30 a week, which was marvellous money, you know, so everybody sort of dashed over there." After a "strict interview", Sally got a job as a re-numberer of the foreign bank notes they were making. "You had to go into a training school for a few months to learn all the different types of numbers and the foreign letters. That was interesting in itself but once you got on the factory floor you were in little cages, and every

different department had different coloured overalls and they had cameras on one side of the wall looking down scanning you all the time." This was for security.

"So every morning you were allocated your work and you had a little black book and you had maybe piles of a hundred notes where, when they've been printed, they've gone wrong... and you're sitting in the cage and you re-number them. If you spoil it, you've got to knock to be out of the cage, knock to get into the other cage where they have unmarked money without the numbers on. Show them the thing. They take it off you. They take your name. It's a right clart - very high security. You used to get paid on how many notes you numbered. Very, very primitive machines they were. It was like a little press. You put your own type in, your own numbers." Different sections were allowed to go early on a rota, "so they had a chance of an early bus". "Well, they had the security guards outside at the gate, and on my early nights I always got searched, so I never got an early bus in all the time I worked there. So I don't know - I must have looked a right rogue, so I used to get searched all the time... so anyway, being a bit of a - what's the word for it? - anti-establishment type person - I got up one day off my machine and the cameras were facing us, and I did a tap dance! I walked over to the supervisor and said, 'Right, I'm putting me notice in'". Sally had been there just over a year. "So that was the end of that for all it was

good money." She would have agreed with Audrey, who said of her time at Wills, "I found money isn't everything."

After this, Sally worked her way through all the printers in the centre of Newcastle. "I've been to that many printers I really don't know in what order I've been to them. It wasn't because I didn't like work, it was I just didn't like printing. So when I used to get bored, I used to think, 'Oh, I might as well see some more faces'. And all you used to have to do was, if you didn't like the job, on the Thursday I would ring the union office up and say, 'Have you got any jobs going?' "Can you start Monday?" And I used to put me notice in and leave on the Friday."

After a time she started to work in the evenings as a barmaid at Balmbra's Music Hall and stayed there longer than anywhere - five years. "So what I used to do was, I used to leave the house at half past six in the morning. Me Mam never seen us till twelve o'clock at night because I used to work overtime till six o'clock." She used to walk up to Balmbra's where the manager used to leave her tea out for her and she used to open up. "I was young and I just thoroughly enjoyed it because I wasn't one for going out, and I would never have met people really - apart from all the jobs I've had!"

Sally was married for a short time to a man she worked with at a printer's. When her marriage broke up she left the printer's and went to live on the other side of the river in a flat. She got a job at Waddington's on the Team Valley industrial estate. "That was the happiest job I ever had... you never had a chance to be bored". They made labels for Schweppes bottles and Heinz beans and Silvikrin. They also had to inspect for faults and used to say of the Silvikrin girl, "Oh, she's got scabby legs". Another facet of this job which Sally liked, but which was also a reason for leaving, was working on a conveyor belt carrying paper from the warehouse. "As they were coming through, they used to get varnished and they started to pile up at the other end you see. So nobody liked the job because of the smell of the varnish. Well, in other words it was like glue sniffing! I mean I wasn't actually going out to do it, but if I could get on that machine I used to always volunteer you know, because the smell was just absolutely magnificent! That was shift work, 6 a.m. - 2 p.m., 2 p.m. - 10 p.m. So I used to like it. The girls were smashing." However after a time, Sally decided to move down to Lincoln, where she found a job in a Smith's crisp factory.

Sally said from the beginning that she did not want to work in printing. This, combined with the easy availability of jobs, made it difficult for her to settle down anywhere in the early part of her working life. It

also seems that she found the work undemanding and not equal to her energies. Once she started at Balmbras she became happier.

She explained what appeared an arbitrary decision to move to Lincoln by saying, "I just been down once, and I liked it. And I felt there was nothing up here. You know, I just felt life wasn't doing anything for us. It was just at a standstill and I was in a rut. So I just got on a train, and moved down to Lincoln." This was a very unusual step for someone born and bred on Tyneside (as Sally had been) to take.

Rows at Work

At least one of the printing jobs Sally left was on account of a row with a forewoman. The forewoman "was always picking on this girl, this little timid girl, one-parent family, her father was bringing her up, tiny little thing she was, little ginger girl." Sally, who was "really one for outspokenness" went to the girl's defence. "I got ahold of the foreman. I was going to punch her. She never picked on her again, mind. But she made my life a misery, so that didn't last long."

But, on the whole, those who worked in factories and had conflicts with the management, did so in a context where they were supported by workmates or by the union, and

therefore the conflicts were less likely to lead to someone leaving a job than was the case in the more intimate setting of the shops where conflicts such as those Jeanette had with her supervisors were difficult to resolve, except by resigning. An exception to this was the case of Phyllis, who left Field's toffee factory after a row caused by the fact that the management were bringing in a young lad over her head when she had been the supervisor of a department for a considerable period of time. We will return to this incident when we are discussing the experience that women in the study had of being supervisors.

Audrey, in her account of her four years (1961-65) as a part-timer at Jameses described how she sustained conflict with management but found being moved to different departments unsettled her enough for her to decide to leave. "I always liked working at Jameses, although it was hard and you were tired. As a factory goes, you know, it suited me and the money was good... I worked there for about four years part-time. And then it started to get a little bit slack and they started to put you in different departments, the part-timers. The only thing was, the part-timer hadn't any rights there. The full-timers had all the rights. Maybe I could understand that. But the part-timers, if they wanted to move you five times in a day you hadn't to say anything. The union didn't do

anything for part-timers at all. I always remember one instance - it's a wonder I didn't get sacked! But we worked mornings, and so many girls worked afternoons.... And Saturday morning was a big help to your wage when you were part-time. And there was about six of w' worked in the morning and we found out that the afternoon girls were always being told on a Friday afternoon that they could work a Saturday morning, and we never got the chance." They suspected this was because a relative of the supervisor was on the afternoon shift.

"So of course, the morning girls were complaining and complaining, mumbling on, you know. So I said, 'Well, it's our own fault. We should ask about it. There's no harm in asking.' It was no good going to the union because the union didn't want to know about part-timers". It was decided that they would all confront the supervisor together. "Everybody was frightened of him because he was a horror, and he didn't care what he said. He used the language, you know... So we all went, but no one was going to be spokeswoman... so of course I had to". He greeted them by saying gruffly, "What do you want?". "I said, 'We just want to enquire why we aren't getting the chance of a Saturday morning.' Crikey, I never heard anything like it. He exploded. He started to wave his arms around, and shout and bawl. So I thought, 'I'm not taking this. I don't take this at home.' So I said, 'If you don't mind, we've only come to ask a question and we'd

like an answer.' The supervisor stormed off and fetched the manager, a gentle and older man. He was a lovely fellow. And he came out and said, 'Well, what's the matter girls?' So we told him. He said, 'Well, I know nothing about this', he says. 'I leave that to Mr - '. I says, 'We're aware of that. We just want to know why we're not getting the chance'. So of course he went and got the records out of the office and the records showed that there was certain girls getting more overtime. So, of course, that didn't get me into a good grace at all with (the supervisor). But we did get the chance of a few more Saturday mornings... but then the work got poor again and they started to shift the part-timers and the place they would put you was the Flash." Audrey disliked this because nobody would show you how to do the job. "They were so busy making money that they didn't want to know about you." She sat on one occasion for half an hour trying to take two parts apart with a skewer. "There must have been a way". The supervisor came down and only said, 'You're doing it the wrong way.' So I thought, 'I don't like this.' Anyway we were put back and forward into the Flash for about a month. And at the time me Mam and Dad had taken a little colliery shop over at the corner of the street... of course me Dad was a pitman at the pit. Me Mam took it over, she found it was getting too heavy for her. So at the time I wasn't very happy getting moved up to the Flash. I liked the Despatch, but I didn't like the

Flash. So me Mam said, 'Well, why don't you come and help me? And I'll give you what you're making at Jameses. But of course the hours would be a bit longer.' We split the day up. But then, of course, we had newspapers, and we had to be there from half past six sometimes in the morning. So it was a longer day, but it was just round the corner. And it would fit in better with me because (her son) was at school by then. So of course I put me notice in... But possibly if they hadn't been moving me around I would have stayed there. But I just didn't like this, I didn't know where I was going to be each day, and it unsettled me."

The close interweaving of home and work life so typical of the north east comes out in this account. It is interesting that Audrey called her experience at home to her aid in her confrontation with the supervisor when she thought, 'I'm not taking this. I don't take this at home'. It is also interesting that the two managers in their two different styles dealt with the women in ways that they would not have dealt with a group of men : the first tried to frighten them off from making a complaint by bluster and shouting; the second treated them as a father, or perhaps grandfather, with a group of unruly little girls. This second tactic was revealed in the soothing and slightly wheedling tone of voice that Audrey suggested that he used.

Even though Audrey got no support from the Union she did have at least silent support from her workmates. Those who worked in domestic settings as cleaner or nanny were in an even more intensely personal environment than those who worked in shops and their sense of isolation was even greater. Phyllis as a fourteen year old maid-of-all-work in 1934 started work at 7 a.m. She had to scrub the front steps as the first task of the day, light the kitchen range to provide hot shaving water for "the Master", and then make the breakfast. On one occasion the family used the dry sticks she had arranged for lighting the range, to light their drawing-room fire the night before. She was left with no kindling. This was too much for her and she ran home, only to be brought back by her mother. This might seem a trivial reason for trying to leave a job but the impression Phyllis gave of her experience was that this was the last straw for her in a situation where she was always physically tired and in which she felt powerless and taken advantage of.

Joyce's first job as a nanny was "three weeks of sheer hell" in a family where the wife proved to be an alcoholic and where the husband, an ex-Methodist lay preacher, amused himself by trying to get the strict Methodist, Joyce, to drink wine. Joyce was the only person in the study who could be said to have left a job because of sexual harrassment. This was when, at the age of 24, in

1946, she had a job as a housemother in a children's home. "I was the youngest foster mother there, so I came in for all the gossip. Everybody watched me, everybody gossiped about me. It was ridiculous. If one of the foster fathers came into my house for whatever reason, which they had to do because one was a plumber, another was the joiner, so if I wanted anything doing they had to come into my house." This led to gossip. Another thing that led to gossip was that the laundry man spent more time in her house than any other because it was the last house he visited within the home, and because of the system it meant that he had to wait in her house while she unpacked the clean laundry and packed up the dirty laundry. "Would you believe that some of the foster parents used to time that man at my house!" The final straw came when Joyce came home late in a taxi and spent some time talking to the driver who had fought in the same regiment as Joyce's brother in the war. The next day remarks were passed about this, and Joyce felt, "I just can't take this any longer", and left. Unfortunately it was from this experience that she moved to the "three weeks of sheer hell" as a nanny.

Pregnancy & Childcare

Of course a frequent reason for leaving a job was because of pregnancy. That was straightforward enough but the problems of trying to combine childcare with a job were

complex and could lead to the women leaving jobs that they enjoyed. We will return to this issue.

Redundancy

Since this is a study of the north east it is not surprising that many of the job changes or losses that occurred to the women were as a result of redundancy, sometimes because a factory was being closed. Of the nineteen women I talked with, nine had had the experience of being made redundant, some on more than one occasion. As we have already heard, Nancy was made redundant in 1966 when the Plywood factory was closed as a result of a company takeover. Vicky was made redundant twice from light engineering companies. The first occasion was in 1954, when she was paid off after seven years, and the second was in about 1968 when a factory she had worked in for fourteen years transferred its operation back to the parent company in Coventry. In a third situation, she left rather than be transferred to a new factory in a town about ten miles away from where she lived. Those made redundant from James's were those with the longest service. Mary was made compulsorily redundant in 1980, after sixteen years service; Phyllis volunteered to go instead of someone else in 1977 after twenty years; and Margaret went in 1980 after thirty years. She went, in a sense, voluntarily because the lack of work in the factory was making life for her as a supervisor very difficult.

But she found coming to terms with unemployment far more difficult than she anticipated. Both Mary and Margaret eventually got jobs as hospital cleaners, hence Margaret's remark about the Juvenile Employment Service asking her in 1940, .."if I'd like to be a domestic, and I definitely said, 'No, emphatically, no!' But I've ended up that way!"

Those most vulnerable to redundancy from closure were those who worked in clothing. Between 1970 and 1980 : Alice worked in two clothing factories that closed; June, Pat and Pam in one. Those in clothing were also often employed in small factories that they could see were going downhill. They sometimes decided to jump before they were pushed. That was how Alice came to go to Shirley Kendal's in 1978. When she got to this newly opening factory ... "it seemed to take off, and I thought 'Oh, this is going to last for a good while, this'. It seems to be - the sort of things they were making were the sort of things that were selling."

But it was only open for a total of eighteen months.

Employment Changes in the Region

This phenomenon of the new clothing firm opening, and soon afterwards closing, with the resulting lack of continuity of employment for clothing workers, was really the main impetus behind the setting up of Marie Sutherland as a

workers' co-operative in clothing. Both Alice and June were working at Shirley Kendal's when it closed and were among the founding members of Marie Sutherland. It represents a brave attempt by Tyneside women workers to set up their own company and thus to have a greater measure of control over their working lives than was the case in the situations, whether in shop or factory, described by the women in this study. An account of this experience may be found in Chapter 12.

The greater part of this study is concerned with the experience of women on Tyneside, who left school and underwent their formation as workers, in the period between 1945 and 1975. In that period unskilled jobs in industry were easy to come by for women so there was no great worry about finding another job if you wished to leave your present one. It was only the oldest women, who had experience of the job market before the second world war, and the youngest, who were entering the labour market in the eighties, who were concerned about getting a job at all. Indeed this really only applied at the end of the period when full-time jobs in industry were closing down. In the thirties women could get full-time jobs of some kind. The spectre of unemployment, however, haunted those whose memories went back to that period. Phyllis, for example, giving in her notice at the sweet factory in 1956 had applied for a job at Jameses before she left, "because the instinct of being out of a job was still there." But

this instinct was perhaps more on account of remembering the general climate when her father, like June's, was out of work for years, than on account of her own experience.

So what were some of the public factors which formed the environment in which the women in this study were seeking jobs and being workers? The next chapter will examine this historical background.

PART II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

CHAPTER 6

EMPLOYMENT FOR WOMEN IN THE NORTH EAST - THE INDUSTRIAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

The Thirties

The dependence of the north east on four traditional heavy industries : coal, shipbuilding, steel and heavy engineering has entailed a tradition in which women have not been a large proportion of the industrial workforce, unlike, for example, the north west, where women have worked in the textile industry. In 1931 the proportion of women and girls in the insured labour force in the North East Coast Region was 13.8% as compared with 27.8% for Great Britain as a whole (North East Development Board, (p.64) 1936). By 1939 the figure for the North East Region was 18%, U.K. 28%, although the figure for Tyneside was 23%. (Northern Industrial Group (1949) Table 80 p.135)

Although the four traditional industries of the North East have been in decline since early in the twentieth century - with important remissions in wartime - they still employed 35% of the region's workforce in 1959 (compared with 40% in 1921) (Northern Region Strategy Team 1977, Vol. 2 p.12). As early as the 1930s efforts were made to introduce alternative industries into the region notably, as far as Tyneside was concerned, with the building of the Team Valley Trading Estate begun in 1936. By September 1939 this employed 2,520 people (McCord (1979) p.228), about half of whom were women. This employment balance on

trading estates between men and women continued after the war as their development went on. This caused mixed feelings to those intent on replacing male jobs being lost in the traditional industries.

Factory work for women in the north east before the Second World War was therefore in short supply. As Vera and Joyce testified, in North Shields it was a choice between the unpleasant work in Tyne Brand, the canning factory, or the tough work of Hood Haggies' Rope Works. Some women were employed in engineering in companies such as Reyrolles and George Angus and others in companies like the Co-op and Maling's potteries which produced goods for retail sale.

We get glimpses of the employment situation for women in Newcastle in the pre-war period covered in this study (1934 onwards) in the Minutes of the Women's Sub-Committee, set up under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour. The Women's Committee regularly received information about the numbers of women placed in jobs by the Newcastle Employment Exchanges. For example, at the beginning of our period, at their meeting of March 3rd, 1934, "the Assistant Secretary explained that although owing to the opening of several Departmental Stores during the six months ended January, 1933, the number of placings for the last half year showed a slight decrease, the figures for the whole of 1933 showed an increase of 894 as compared with those for 1932. During the last few months,

one furniture store, one confectionery shop and a central Picture Theatre had been opened, and all had recruited labour through the Employment Exchange."

By 1938 the number of unemployed women was beginning to rise. Perhaps because of concern over this the Committee was given the figures of totals, rather than merely the decrease/increase since the last report. On September 5th 1938 the total number of unemployed women in the areas covered by the four Newcastle City exchanges (Newcastle, Heaton, Elswick & Walker) was 2,229. This represented an increase of 213 since June 1938 and an increase of 131 since the previous September. "Concern was expressed" by the Committee "at the upward trend of unemployment not only in Newcastle upon Tyne but throughout the country". The Committee was also told that there were "27,000 women and girls in insurable occupations in Newcastle (New Bridge Street Exchange Area) as revealed by the Exchange of Books Action in July 1938; of these 3,200 were engaged in the Hotel & Catering Trades, 1,050 in the Printing Trade and between ten and eleven thousand in the Distributive Trades." (Minutes of meeting on October 26th 1938).

The major concern of the Committee in the pre-war period was, in the words of Item 42 of the meeting on May 16th 1935, "Domestic Work : To discuss steps to be taken to encourage girls to take domestic training." They had already discussed this subject thoroughly at their meeting

in March 1934, when Mrs. Platt, a member of the Committee representing the National Union of General & Municipal Workers, reported on an interview with "apparently suitable girls for training." The result she described as "disappointing". Out of 45 girls interviewed only one was prepared to consider a course of domestic training.

"Among the reasons for refusal" Mrs Platt reported, "were:

- i) Expectation of resumption of factory work
- ii) Unwilling to leave home
- iii) Fear of reduction of household income by undertaking training
- iv) Non-insurability of domestic work. "

"There was also", Mrs Platt thought, "a certain amount of tacit opposition to what was regarded as official pressure, although she, Mrs Platt, did not see how the offer of domestic training could have been made more sympathetically and convincingly than by the Officer present at the interview."

At the next meeting (May 7th 1934) Mrs Wilson, another member, reported that following the previous meeting she had addressed a meeting of forty applicants on domestic training. She "considered many of the girls were suitable for domestic work, but the majority of them, especially the factory type, did not show any keenness to enter this kind of employment although they had been unemployed for some months." Her reference here to 'the

factory type' underlines what was said in Part I about the social stigma attached to this work.

The concern with domestic work expressed here was reflected in the experience of three women in this study who left school before the Second World War - Phyllis in 1934, Vera in 1935 and Margaret in 1939. Only Phyllis became a domestic. Vera obviously felt that the fact that she had not done so needed explanation and said, "I'm not house minded". Margaret specifically mentioned that the Juvenile Employment Officer had suggested domestic work to her and she had replied, "No. Emphatically no!"

Phyllis' experience as a domestic was not happy and she ran away twice. In 1934 she was paid four shillings a week at the age of fourteen as a maid-of-all-work in Tynemouth. Echoing the third reason given by the girls for refusing to take training in domestic work, Phyllis said, "it was the money that was needed". It is interesting to set this in context with some information which Mrs Wilson gave to the Women's Committee at their meeting in November 1936. She "mentioned that an agency was operating in the town" (Newcastle) "and solving the servant problem for a number of people by supplying workers by the day or half day at a fee of five shillings or 3s. 6d. per day, respectively, without food, and appeared to have no difficulty in obtaining workers." Presumably this was the charge made by the agency to employers so we do not know how much was passed on to the workers.

In their view the Women's Committee and the Employment Exchanges were doing all they could to solve "the acute shortage of domestics, and perpetual surplus of unsatisfied demands for this class of labour". (Minutes of Women's Committee 23.3.37) "The members were of the unanimous opinion that domestic work would become popular, when girls had definite on and off duty, eg like hospitals and Institutions." (Minutes of Women's Committee 11.6.36).

The Committee was concerned in the management of a Homecraft Training Centre which ran three month courses. The reports received give us an insight into the social conditions of the time. At the Committee's meeting on January 25th 1939, "The Superintendent reported that several girls had been absent for short periods due to colds. Extra nourishment had been supplied to the trainees by giving them hot cocoa and milk." At the next meeting on April 26th it was reported that, "There was only one case of a girl of poor physique and extra nourishment was being given to the girl concerned." We can set this alongside a point made at the main Employment Committee meeting on May 5th 1939 in a discussion of the work of local Training Centres, "the marked improvement which usually took place in the health of the trainees", was noted. "This type of training was proving to be a most useful piece of social work." The Employment Committee had shown concern about the plight of those who had been out of work for five years.

It is interesting that in this discussion, taking place on the brink of the Second World War, they should be seeing the work of training centres as beneficial for social rather than industrial reasons - a link with the Community Programme of today.

The local shortage of domestic labour must in part have resulted from the efforts that were made during the thirties to arrange for girls from the north east to take domestic jobs in other parts of the country. Captain Euan Wallace in the chapter on Durham & Tyneside that he contributed to the 1934 Ministry of Labour : Reports of Investigations into the Industrial Conditions in Certain Depressed Areas, adopts a congratulatory tone in describing what might be called a "Deserted Village" policy :

"Perhaps the most encouraging feature of the local situation is the success which has attended the transfer of girls to domestic service outside the area. Of the 9,807 girls trained at the Domestic Training Centres under the Ministry of Labour, only 1.9% are still registered as unemployed. In addition, large numbers of girls already experienced in domestic service have been transferred to situations in other districts through the agency of Employment Exchanges; and Mrs Cuthbert Headlam has also been successful in placing approximately 7,000 girls and women in domestic employment - a result which reflects immense credit upon the organisation which she has set up. Durham girls have now acquired such an excellent

reputation as domestic servants that the demand exceeds the supply, and in some villages it has been found that almost every girl over the age of fifteen has left the village and found employment elsewhere." (para 62 p.94) (Ministry of Labour 1934).

The policy here applauded has a "jobs at all costs" feel about it which has been echoed in some recent proposals for legislation and initiatives such as the removal of the Wages Council protective provision in relation to young people (1986) and the Young Workers' Scheme (1982 - 85). It shared some of the features, which concerned Mrs Platt, about the practice of recruiting girls from Tyneside during the thirties to work in the NAAFI at Catterick. She was concerned about the practice of compelling girls to go under threat of loss of benefit. She told the Women's Employment Committee at their meeting on June 11th 1936, "My personal attitude has been, that where parents have objected to the work on the grounds of a girl's immature outlook and experience, that objection should be allowed. Needless to say, no applicant's objection could be considered, if they had had experience in a public bar, cafés, or some types of shop etc., always assuming there was nothing to prevent them leaving the district." Her concern had led her to make a visit to Catterick in February 1936 and she submitted a report to the Committee from which I have just quoted. She was reassured by her visit : "I have felt much happier since I knew of the very close scrutiny that is exercised in

selecting suitable applicants." She was impressed by the "large airy kitchens, and convenient equipment"; some of the sleeping quarters even had central heating which in 1936 must have been in sharp contrast to the homes from which the girls came. She was further reassured by the "refined" atmosphere of the social club at the Camp and by the fact that an "N.C.O. is constantly on duty in each café during the open period." She went on, "If I have any criticism to offer, it is that hours are excessive. From 7.30 a.m. - 9.30 p.m., with $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours off duty during the afternoon, plus $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours meal breaks is in my opinion too much for such heavy work." Unfortunately she did not report what the girls were paid.

The Post 1945 Period & The Effects of Women's Work in the War

While efforts to find employment for girls by exporting them out of the region were seen as laudable in the thirties, certainly, at least in retrospect, there was a recognition that the lack of opportunities for women was a regional problem. This was an important theme in discussions about the future industrial structure of the region at the end of the war. For example, Mr F G Hanham, Northern Region Controller for the Ministry of Labour & National Service, spoke to the Newcastle Employment Committee at their meeting on January 28th 1947 : "On the question of labour, it was necessary to estimate the post-war additional employment opportunities required", in the light of the "unemployment position between the wars --- On the men's

side special allowances have to be made, for example, for the call-up of men to the forces : on the women's side, taking the region as a whole, under-employment in the Region between the wars, due to the limited opportunities, was an important factor.

Before and during the war large numbers of women and girls had to go to other parts of the country because of the limited local opportunities." (Newcastle Employment Committee Minutes 28-1-47). He went on to speak about taking work to the workers and said that 3-4,000 men and women would be needed for the Ministry of National Insurance. This did indeed prove an important new source of employment for women. The Women's Sub-Committee were told at their meeting in April 1947 that 1,000 were employed at the Headquarters of the Ministry of National Insurance Headquarters at Longbenton.

This acknowledgement of the importance of providing openings for women must in part have been brought about by women's contribution during the war. In the Northern Region between 1939 and 1943 28,000 women went into Engineering, 21,000 into Chemicals, 13,000 into Metal Industries and 4,800 into Shipbuilding (Northern Industrial Group (1949) p.36). None of the women in this study was included in these figures. Of the three old enough : Phyllis went first on to the Railways and then joined up; Margaret went into the Land Army. Only Vera went into wartime industry but this was in Scotland. She chiefly remarked on the

improvements in wages that occurred through the war.

This study does not, therefore, attempt to evaluate the changes brought about by women's wartime experience to their social position and employment opportunities after the war, a subject dealt with in Summerfield (1984). However, some contemporary documents give us indications of how the issues were being discussed at the time.

At the ideological level, women's involvement in non-traditional work as a result of the Second World War, gave rise to widely differing interpretations. On the one hand, for example, we find Joan Thomson in a Marx Memorial Library pamphlet on Women in Industry published in 1942, (Thomson, 1942) quoting Lenin : "Without tearing women away from the stupefying domestic and kitchen atmosphere it is impossible to secure real freedom, it is impossible to build a democracy, let alone socialism." (p.5). She went on : "Hundreds of thousands of women are now being torn out of the 'domestic and kitchen atmosphere' and are learning to organise themselves in Trade Unions, to represent their comrades as shop stewards, to work selflessly for a common aim. In this there are immense opportunities for the development of initiative and the bringing out of the different capabilities of each individual. New vistas will be opened up to many women whose abilities have been frustrated and thwarted, new talent will be discovered and encouraged. To many women who have felt lonely and helpless the victories that can be

achieved by organisation will come as a revelation, and they will never again feel that they are standing alone" (p.5). With the same apocalyptic vision she maintained that, "Men, with their stronger traditions of trade unionism, are doing much to help organise the women and bring up their rates of pay to the same level as their own. The old craft traditions of some unions, which divided skilled from unskilled, and caused jealousy and disunity among workers are being gradually displaced, and there is a drive going on inside such unions in favour of the admission of women." (p.14). A more cynical view would be that if men were supporting women's right to equal pay it was because they wished to protect themselves from being undercut.

Joan Thomson's idealistic views on men's response to women's advent into wartime industry as "dilutees" is not supported by Penny Summerfield (see Summerfield (1984) p.154 ff). As to equal pay, Summerfield points out that according to the "women's schedule" of wages, "women's work was paid at a national minimum time-rate which was, throughout the war, significantly lower than the male labourer's rate." "... though the women's rate rose during the war to 56s. in 1944, it was still well behind the 75s. 6d. minimum ... paid to men." (op. cit. p.169). Vera, in line with what is noted here, said that her wage rose to 55s. by the end of the war, but for her this was good money compared with the 30s. she had earned in 1939 as a fish filleter.

From a different political perspective from Joan Thomson, we find Gertrude Williams in Women & Work, (1945) writing, "Most women are not very interested in their work and look beyond it to the future when their "real" life will begin. They are unwilling to bear the anxiety and strain which are likely to accompany posts of responsibility and are impatient of devoting to their work the interest and concern which they realise, even without making the thought articulate, can be better invested in the leisure time occupations connected with finding a husband and preparing for a home." (Williams (1945) p.22). For the same reason she concluded, "By and large it is true to say that skilled occupations are outside women's scope" (p.19). She goes on, "Even now during this war when many customary barriers have had to be removed and there has been much public acclamation of the readiness and skill with which women have adjusted themselves to do a thousand and one mechanical processes on which they could easily have been employed before if anybody had thought of trying them, there has been a marked reluctance to up-grade women workers to posts of responsibility, despite the acute shortage of workers for minor managerial posts - supervisors, foremen, charge hands, etc. While this has been principally due to the inability of men in authority to jolt their minds into such unaccustomed grooves as to be able to envisage women filling such posts, it is not entirely so. Most women shrink from responsibility, and must be persuaded to try their powers before they gain any confidence in their capacity." (Williams, G. (1945) pp 34-35).

Within these two responses to women's role in wartime industry we can see the seeds of the debates that have gone on since that time. It is surprising that Joan Thomson, writing from a Marxist perspective, should have underestimated the structural problems facing women wanting to bring about change in their position as workers. In fact the power of male vested interest opposing change has been as powerful in working class structures like Trade Unions as it has in the professions, such as the church, law and medicine. Real equality of pay has still to be achieved for women in Britain in spite of legislation and the work of the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Gertrude Williams in her contention that women "must be persuaded to try their powers before they gain any confidence in their capacity" foreshadowed much of the effort of the women's movement in the eighties in consciousness-raising groups and assertion training. Her assertion that "Most women are not very interested in their work and look beyond it to the future when their "real" life will begin" - the "real" life of husband and of home - foreshadowed the debates of the fifties about working mothers and "latch-key children".

As far as the north east was concerned, the drafting of women into industry during the war, though massive, still did not stretch the region's resources to its limits. A special meeting of the Newcastle Employment Committee, which had suspended its meetings when the war started, was

called "at the request of the Minister" on April 28th 1942 "for the purpose of considering the extension of part-time employment for women." Having considered the known activity rates of women and other available information, the Secretary summed up the Committee's views : "On the information available it appeared that the time had not yet arrived in this area for the employment of women on a part-time basis to be stressed". (Minutes of Newcastle Employment Committee 28-4-42).

In spite of the increase of women in the labour force in the North East Region during the war, the percentage still did not reach the national average. The figures were :

Table 6 : 1

	<u>Changes in Female Employment 1939 - 47</u>		
	<u>1939</u>	<u>1943</u>	<u>1947</u>
N. E. Region	18%	31.1%	24%
U.K.	28%	39.5%	30%

(Northern Industrial Group
Table 80 p.135 (1949))

The Northern Industrial Group in their 1949 Survey of Industrial Facilities wrote, "Consideration of female labour raises the general question of the balance between male and female employment throughout the Region. It will be noted that comparison has been made with the national average. This does not imply that the proportion of females in the insured population should necessarily conform with that for the country as a whole. It should probably be slightly less. The North East is not a region in which factory employment of women is traditional among workers, the

practicability of women working is reduced by the prevalence of shift-working in the male-employing industries and the incentive may have been reduced to some extent by higher wage rates among men and greater security of their employment than in pre-war years. Nonetheless there are areas, particularly coal-mining areas and some rural districts, in which it is probable that the potential female labour supply has never been fully utilised even during the war and in which a considerable female labour supply is at present available." (op. cit. p.137).

A year later, in 1950, the North East Development Association in : The Northern Region - A Further Review of Employment Need in Northumberland, Durham and the North Riding of Yorkshire, were noting that while the national figure for the percentage of women in the insured workforce had remained at 30%, in the Northern Region it had dropped to 23%. Almost half the women who had first become insured during the war had continued, "many of them working in the new factories and extensions built since 1945 under the Distribution of Industry Act. Similarly the decline of some 16,000 in the number of insured women since 1947 probably represents a continuation of the normal trend of decline from the wartime peak, though in view of its large size relative to the national changes it may well be indicative of the continued operation of the old objections to women working." (North East Development Association (1950) p.14).

Pre-war suppositions about women and work were not confined to such old objections. It was still assumed that domestic

service would be a primary employer of women. At the first meeting of the Women's Sub-Committee of the Newcastle Employment Committee, when it was re-constituted after the war, held on April 9th 1947, it was announced that "a National Institute of Houseworkers" was to be set up in Newcastle. It eventually opened in 1949 with places for 18 residents and 18 non-residents. To some degree the vision of "housecraft" now held had moved with the times and it was now seen to involve the use of electrical gadgets. An exhibition of Women's Achievement in the War was held in London in October 1945, as part of celebrations to mark the twenty-first birthday of the Electrical Association for Women. Sir Stafford Cripps, opening this exhibition, was reported in The Times (12.10.45.)

(Thomson Newspaper Archive - Women Electricians & Electrical Engineers) as saying that the standard of living in the country depended importantly "upon the happiness of the housewife and mother. There is no reason why we should try to perpetuate her life to toil as a domestic beast of burden with never a moment to herself, and with no opportunity to develop her own individuality as a citizen." He went on to say that, "He had seen women working in the construction of Bombers solely responsible for the most intricate and highly skilled electrical jobs. Girls who could do those jobs could do any other in the industry". So far so good, one might think. But the month before, on September 26th 1945, The Star reported, "Vacancies for many thousands of women and girls in the electrical industry when it is established on its peace-

time basis will provide openings for demobilised service women. They will go into jobs for which women are specially suited, and no question of their competing with ex-servicemen will arise. In the radio industry thousands of women will be needed for wiring, light construction, and other skilled work, while the provision of much-needed telephone equipment will offer scope for many more." (Thomson Newspaper Archive op. cit.).

So women would not get near the sole responsibility for highly skilled electrical jobs they had done during the war. A month after the exhibition celebrating women's achievements the Electrical Association for Women announced the setting up of the Caroline Haskett Trust "for practical and technical training in electrical housecraft".

Endowments had been collected for two purposes : first, "Girls of real promise, some leaving school, others already engaged in electrical housecraft-work, will receive scholarships and maintenance at important domestic science colleges teaching on such a standard of technical knowledge that the girls can enter for the Electrical Association for Women Certificate and later hope to be awarded their Diploma. The second object is, as soon as world conditions allow, to endow travelling exhibitions by which women can study domestic electrical education and research abroad." (I.B.S. 25.11.45 (Thomson Newspaper Archive)). This vision of housework turned into a science was spelled out in more detail a year later in a careers article encouraging girls

to take the E.A.W. Certificate. "The syllabus includes generation and distribution of electricity, how a house is wired, lighting, cooking and refrigeration, motor driven appliances, repairs, costs and tariffs." (Evening Standard 19.11.46) (Thomson Newspaper Archive op.cit.). Girls who qualified were promised a wide range of jobs. "And if you marry in the meantime, you have wasted nothing. Just think of your value as a wife who can re-wire the house." (op. cit.) Just think indeed!

The Fifties & Sixties

In fact, women in the post-war period were not so much destined to get jobs as "housecraft scientists" as to get jobs producing the labour-saving devices which their wages, in time, enabled them to buy to use in their own homes. This point is brought out in an article, "Some Reflections on the Role of Women in the Tyneside Economy :

"After the war, the growth of lighter industries on the new industrial estates - the new branch plants, encouraged to come to Tyneside by regional policy measures - brought jobs for women in assembly work and the clothing industry, for example. To some extent, as well, women were becoming more able, for a variety of reasons, to go out to work. It had not only become more "acceptable" but also more possible as families became smaller, heavy male manual work became less prevalent and labour-saving facilities like laundrettes (and then washing machines), gas fires and processed food became more widespread. Women were

engaged in jobs which, a little ironically, enabled other women to go out to work - women worked in nurseries and schools, assembled the new household labour-saving machines, worked in food and clothing factories. These elements helped free the female "labour reserves" of Tyneside which large companies moved in to employ. Even so, the extent of the growth in female economic activity should not be overstated : by 1951 only 31% of Tyneside's workforce comprised women - and this percentage had not changed at all ten years later, by 1961." (Hardill & Robinson (1986) p.4).

Because of the underlying weakness of the industrial structure of the north east, dependent, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, on its four traditional industries, successive governments in the post-war period adopted strategies to encourage the renewal of the industrial base of the region. "It was not until the late 1950s with oil replacing coal as a major fuel and the coming on stream of the modernised economies of Europe and Japan that the full impact of the underlying structural weaknesses in the North's traditional industries became apparent. In the next 15 years massive job losses occurred in these industries - for example 117,000 jobs disappeared in mining, 25,000 in shipbuilding, 13,000 in metal manufacturing between 1958 and 1973" (p.3 Goddard 1983). The regional policies offsetting this process were successful. "Between 1958 and 1973, ... total employment in the Northern Region had fallen by only 4,000

jobs." Most of this gain was in Service Industries (73,000 jobs gained between 1966 - 1976) (op. cit. Table 2 p.22).

The Culture of the North East - Change & Continuity

Before going on to consider the trends in women's employment in the seventies and eighties, we will consider how the post-war changes in industry and society affected the people who lived in the north east. We begin with Audrey, one of the women in this study, who describes, in the course of telling of her work in a colliery shop, something of the old north eastern culture associated with the coal industry and the impact that pit closures made on communities. She went from working at Jameses to help her mother who was running the local colliery shop and was there from 1965 - 1967, during which time the pit closed.

Audrey began her account of the shop by describing what impact going to work there had on her as a person :

"The new era of the Colliery Shop - that opened me out to a different person all together. Because if the pitmen didn't change you, you just couldn't have coped.

They.... I was still quite shy. But you weren't shy after being in there six months because those pitmen didn't care what they said to you! They were great, honest they were.

But I think my personality changed completely, through them, because there were so many characters came in that shop.... they used to come in for what they called their "'baccy" and their snuff and of course then, that shop was run on tick, and you had a big "tick book". But what bothered me was when I looked at this tick book. I mean they used to come in from a Monday and pay on a Friday when they got their pay. They weren't normal-like names, like Frank Adams and Bill Coates. They weren't names like that. They were : "Cotcher", "Bandy", "Young Limp".

Well, I said to my mother, 'How on earth do you recognise these people when they come in?', you know".

"It's just use".

"Well, there was mebbe 600 men on that book from the colliery, and "Capstan F" ; there would be "Young Tadger". I wished I had kept that book when I think about it. It was a part of history. And another thing, when they came in they were always in a hurry. They came up for their shifts or they came out from the pit and they

didn't want to wait. So you had to watch up the road and you saw Young Tadger, say, coming, and you knew he smoked Woodbines, 20, so them twenty Woodbines were on there ready. And behind him was mebbe a fellow called Captain, and he smoked Players. So the twenty Players were on there ready - on top of the row of sweets. And they came in and they didn't speak or anything, most times, coming home. They would just say "Ta", "Ta" (thanks). They didn't wait or didn't ask. Well, that was a lot to remember! You had that down in the book as soon as you'd put them on the sweets, you see. And honestly speaking, it was an experience! You had to be very, very quick.

And then at Christmas, it was the funniest part, because they used to... pitmen are funny men - they're not the kind of men that'll go in a shop and buy their wife anything. But they used to come and ask us to do their Christmas shopping! And they used to say, 'I want a slip for my wife'. (Audrey imitated their gruff, embarrassed tone). 'Well, what size is she?' 'Well, a little bit bigger than you'. 'Well, what colour?' 'Oh, please yourself. There's £5 - don't pay any more than that'. And we used to have to go to the Wholesale and get whatever they wanted. And they used to come in : 'Oh, that'll dee. I divvent want to see it. Just wrap it up. Just get a bit paper. Write the card oot'. And this was the kind of thing you did in that shop. Honest, it was great!

It was great, that shop. We really enjoyed it".

"I remember at Christmas - you had quite a lot to put up with off them as well. You had to be broad minded. At Christmas they all wanted to kiss you. It didn't matter if they were fifteen or ninety. That was the way it was! Well, as I say, I was a bit shy. But they didn't mean anything by it. They used to pay their bill and they used to shake your hand and kiss you - rough you know. Some of them had beards and everything and I used to hate that. I used to say to my Mam, 'Will you come down?' And she used to say, 'Well, they don't mean anything'. And they didn't. It was just, they were rough and that was their way of saying "Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year". And they wanted to buy you a box of chocolates. I used to say, 'No, no, didn't want anything'. But with some of them you had to, because if they'd had a drink.. you know 'Oh, why no?'. So we used to have to, and they'd say, 'That big box of chocolates up there'. They used to give it and say, 'That's for you, pet. Happy Christmas'. Very, very kind, some of them. Of course, as well, if they were half-topped they wouldn't move out of the shop and you were waiting to get shut, and you had to be diplomatic you know."

Caroline : "It demanded a lot of different things, that job, didn't it?"

Audrey : "It opened me out no end. Definitely changed me from somebody that was... I never had much confidence. I was quiet and shy. It definitely opened me out. You had no choice. I mean if you were in there on your own of a morning, there would be a shift come up at nine o'clock, and they were all quite youngish blokes, between nineteen and twenty-five - and you knew - you could see them coming down, five or six of them - and you knew you were going to get a ribbing. They used to come in and say, 'By, you're looking lovely this morning, pet! Fancy a date the night?' And all this kind of thing - just "carry-on". But I used to blush terrible, and of course they did it because they knew I used to blush. So eventually I got used to it. It just stopped. It helped me no end, because I was always a little bit self-conscious an' that, but you hadn't to be, with them. And if you met them outside anywhere, you were like a long lost sister."

"And then you used to get the odd one used to come on a Friday. Instead of coming in to pay their bill, would go straight into the pub in the field... and of course they'd come rolling past two hours later, you know, stick their head round the door, with their cap on, 'I'll see you next week Mrs. Johnson. I've spent a bit too much this week - all right hinny?' My Mam always said, 'Oh yes, it's O.K.' They always paid. But that is the kind of shop it was. It was a friendly shop."

Caroline : "What happened... - I mean there must have been the odd one that didn't pay, so what did you do about it?"

Audrey : "Oh, there was. Well, you see, they couldn't get past the shop. They had to pass the shop. There was no way they could get anywhere around it to get home....it was funny! You knew the ones that weren't going to pay because, as I say, from our door, of the shop, you could see right up the road to the pit. So it was the young ones usually that wouldn't pay. The older ones - if they couldn't pay - they'd come come in and say, 'I'm hard up this week, can you wait?' And we used to say, 'Oh, yes'. Because we knew they would come back. But the young ones! You'd see a group of young ones coming down, and you knew the one in the middle wasn't going to pay, because you could see the other ones getting in front of him, you see! And there was a lamp-post halfway down and they used to stand behind the lamp-post, like this, thinking you couldn't see them! And of course, my mother was a character in herself, and she used to got out and say, 'It's all right Willie, or Tommy, or whoever it was. We can see you. If you're hard up just come in and say, and we'll wait till next week.' 'All right, Mrs. Johnson, I'm sorry'. But we had some laughs - very, very kind people, the pitmen. Our Harry, when he was younger, he used to sometimes come from school, come in the shop till I went home and, especially if it was pay day, every pitman that

came in gave him a shilling, or a two-shilling piece - 'There you are, son'. I've seen him go home with a pocketful of money. And I used to teach him not to take money, you know. And of course they'd say, 'Take no notice of her! Here, son, it's off me'. And they were all 'uncles'. He had hundreds of uncles. And on Guy Fawkes... The kiddies in Queen's Road used to always bring a Guy up to our shop, because they knew the pitmen wouldn't pass them. Very, very kind - hard working, and hard drinkers, and rough, you know. I mean, I've seen them go into the Club and come out of the Club and have a fight on the green, and then shake hands and be friends again. But very, very kind people - salt of the earth - the pitmen."

"Some of them lived at Durham. Some of them were from pits that had closed down and they came in buses. Now, the busmen that brought them from all these little country places, used to come in the shop and have a cup of coffee. And of course all the people from the bus came into the shop, 'cos they knew the bus drivers were in. It was a little gold mine! I can remember that when my Mam and Dad bought it they paid £1,000 just for the goodwill, and it was only a little wooden hut."

The previous owner had made a lot of money, but unfortunately for Audrey's family, the pit closed in 1967,

only two years after they took the shop on, and they lost money over it. Audrey tried to carry on the shop as a general dealers, but without the pitmen it didn't pay.

"Nobody thought the pit would close. It was just a pity the pit closed, because it was a marvellous feeling in that shop. You couldn't describe it. It was just a way of life that went, and it was very, very sad when it went."

"The only way you got involved with the wives, was if the men were off sick and the wives came up for their wages. They would come in to pay their bills and you got to know whose wife was who, but very few. You used to often get the younger wives up with their kiddies, to catch the men to take their pay off them before they went into the Club. So you met one or two of the younger ones and you realised which younger ones hadn't very good husbands, 'cos you could see them arguing on the corner, trying to get their money off them before they went in and spent it, you know. You saw all the ways of lives. You also had the element of people coming up and borrowing money off you. They used to come up and say, 'I've got the electric bill in and my wife can't pay it. Can you help us till next week?' And of course we used to say, 'All right'. We used to lend them £5 or £2, and on the Friday when they got their pay they used to pay it back. So you were involved with their lives, you know. You used to help

them out a bit and they were good customers to us in return."

The close involvement with the men of the pit of course extended to times of tragedy. There were three fatal accidents during the time that Audrey worked in the shop. The last was on the day the pit closed, when one of the deputies was killed by a large stone falling on him.

"They worked in groups, these men, and the men had worked together for years, so they were like brothers...and the chap who was working with him... he came in our shop and actually my mother gave him a drink. He was in a terrible state. He had stood there when it happened, you know, and he was crying - we were all crying - because we knew him. And that was the last day that the pit ever worked. You would think that that had had to happen. Another couple of hours and he would have been out of that pit for life. He'd worked there from he was fourteen. He'd be about fifty-two. And that was terrible. You felt as if you knew them, like your own family.... "

.... "What the custom was then, whatever bill was owed on that book was crossed off. That was the way it had always been in that shop. And when the widows or whoever came up to pay the bill, that bill was never taken off her. It was just one of them things that had happened, passed on from shopkeeper to shopkeeper."

This description of working in a colliery shop gives us a glimpse of that important constituent of life in the north east - the culture and communities created by the coal industry. What comes out of the description is, first of all, a picture of a very settled way of life in which work and community were interwoven; but secondly how this was already beginning to break down, apparently unforeseen by those involved - "nobody thought the pit would close."

Already other communities had lost their pits, and the men were being bussed to this pit. For the present, however, the old ways were continued ; young men and sons followed older men and fathers into the pit; the expectation of getting a wage was secure, so the shop could lend without running too great a risk; the discipline of getting the young men to pay up relied on the fact that everyone knew everyone, so the refusal to pay one week became part of an elaborate game - hiding behind lamp-posts etc. - of which everyone knew the rules.

The dangers of the work - three fatal accidents in two years in one local pit - explains the importance of making up quarrels between men who might be relying on one another for life and death when working underground.

Williamson (1982) makes the point in describing work underground that "pitmen need to understand the precise roles of others, to know what to expect from other men, to learn that men can be trusted, and to acquire, as a matter

of almost instinctive response, an ability and willingness to help others below ground. Without that, no pit can function." (Williamson (1982) p.85).

Another passage from Williamson's book illuminates several aspects of Audrey's account, in particular her comments on the roughness of the miners and the fatalism expressed in her reflection on the accident on the last day of the pit's work : "You would think that that had had to happen." Describing the process of "pit hardening" he writes, "These attitudes include a strong attachment to the idea of being "tough"", of not worrying about danger; they are extremely fatalistic attitudes which allow men to believe that they themselves are not really at risk, yet if they are to have an accident there is little they can do about it anyway. Then there is the value, central to their masculine self-image, of hard graft and a belief that only "real men" are capable of it." (op. cit. p.29).

Expressed in Audrey's account are some of the constant themes which sustained and, to an extent, still sustain the life and culture of the north east. These themes arise out of memories and perceptions of a past which is contrasted with the present: on the one hand it is felt that the coherence and warmth people experienced in the old communities has been lost; on the other hand the old times are recognised as having been times of deprivation and hardship compared with the present.

Audrey remembered a community which both held together in support of the men whose work was tough and dangerous and was held together by the wages they earned through the work, and the way of life it imposed on the whole community. In such a community the roles of men and women were clearly distinct, and the role of children was important. Boys represented the pitmen of the future on whose labour the community would depend. Perhaps what lay behind the gifts of pitmen to children was the feeling that the years of childhood were to be enjoyed briefly before the "shades of the prison-house" began to close. There was also the hope that the next generation might achieve a better life, and that son would not have to follow father down the pit.

It is a measure of how catastrophic has been the collapse of work opportunities in the north east, that the coal strike of 1984-85 should have been on the issue of keeping pits open to preserve job opportunities in mining and to keep alive communities based on pits. The idea that a son might follow his father down the pit has become a hope rather than a fear; an opportunity rather than a life sentence.

The concept of "occupational communities" is one that has been given attention by sociologists, for example in Salaman (1974). What Audrey here describes seems really to have been an occupational community in transition. The styles of behaviour and the feelings expressed were formed in the pit village communities of the north east. In her account we see how these styles were carried over into the new situation when the miners were being bussed from their own communities to the pit she describes. Perhaps the colliery shop came to represent in a powerful, symbolic way a vestige of the old village/pit community that was being lost. This might account for the strong sense of nostalgia for the "way of life that went" which imbues her description and which feels as if it was for something much larger than her particular two year experience however important for her growth as a person the experience was.

The communities created by the coal industry in the north east had a particularly strong identity because they were small scale, based on the relationships between the pit and its village. But the other traditional industries also created occupational communities which were co-terminous with social communities, whether they were complete towns like Consett, which grew up round the "Iron Works" or important sections within large conurbations, like Wallsend. In the mid sixties 29% of men living in Wallsend worked in shipbuilding, ship repair or marine engineering and nearly 50% of jobs in Wallsend were in these industries (Brown & Brannen 1970). Brown and Brannen also found that

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over 80% of the workers they surveyed in shipbuilding and manufacturing in Wallsend in the late sixties, "had spent their whole lives (except possibly for military service) on Tyneside, by any standards a very high proportion" (op. cit. p73). They go on from this finding to make a point which relates to the sense of nostalgia for community expressed by Audrey. "One consequence of this absence of geographical mobility is that the majority of Wallsend's adult population have lived through and shared the deprivations of the pre-war years... Certainly our experience is that the Depression remains an influential memory to many who live in Wallsend, including some who did not experience it directly. If, as has been suggested, shared deprivations are a potent factor in the growth of a working class community with the values of mutual aid and neighbourliness, then one would expect this to be typical of Wallsend." (op. cit. p73).

Brown and Br~~e~~nnen's study was published in 1970 before there was any indication that recession was to return. One of the things that has depressed people in the north east about the 1980s recession is that they thought they had seen the end of large scale unemployment and the blight to lives that it brings. People had brought up their children in the expectation that they would have a better life than they did. The generation who started work after the war perhaps did. But those who had children leaving school from the end of the seventies were continually worried about their chances of finding a job. At the same

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time, particularly if they worked in production industries, they were worried that they themselves might be made redundant.

The women in this study who had grown up in the thirties certainly experienced the post-war improvements in living standards as making a sharp difference to them. But they spoke with mixed feelings :

"Oh, it became a better way of life from coming out the Land Army. I felt as if I went up - I didn't have to scrimp and scrape and save, 'cos the money was coming in and you know I had a car and colour tele and telephone and all these sort of things which I thought were luxuries but now it's everyday life. Even people on social security have got that. ... When I left Jameses - bearing in mind I was pleased to leave" (i.e. she took voluntary redundancy) " - but I felt so insecure in myself. It was all right for a couple of months. I was thoroughly enjoying - and suddenly this wave came over - and I felt so insecure I got rid of my colour tele, didn't I? ... 'Cos I was frightened I couldn't pay the licence. The car I got rid of. And I could've kept them all. But I felt so insecure."

Another, whose family life in the thirties had centred on the chapel, spoke about the social world after the war in the course of trying to explain her sense of separation from it and therefore her separation from those she worked with at Jameses :

"Their way of life was so different to mine, outside the factory. Their talk was where they had been the night before, what club they had been to, or going to this dinner. Their lives used to be so different from mine My life at that time was spent more or less going to work, and coming home, and looking after my father, and not going anywhere. But even if I didn't have that sort of responsibility of looking after my father I don't think I would've still felt right and I don't know why. I think my way of life, or the way of life I had been used to, was entirely different ... I mean a lot of them, like me, had known hard times but their outlook was, "I'm going to make sure that I'm all right Jack". This sort of attitude. And, "You're a long time dead. Enjoy yourself while you can". But their way of enjoying themselves was different to mine so that I never really felt part of them. I felt apart from them. It's so difficult to explain! They got to know me at the finish. Well, you know what Jameses was like - suggestive drawings and this sort of thing being handed round the benches. They knew not to let me see them.

It could have been that all that you earned went into the house and you were only given a small amount of pocket money so you just didn't have the money available to do the things that they did but I honestly think that had I have had plenty of money I wouldn't have done the things they did. I like to be out. I used to walk a lot, you know. I used to like to get down to the sea front or up

in the parks.... But the first time I got a car then was a whole new existence! ...I paid five pounds for it! That would be about 1958 or '59, something like that. It was a Standard Flying Twelve. Oh, dear me! I didn't have it many weeks and I sold it for £25 and used that as a deposit on a Ford Anglia. Oh, well, I was made then!" Both her parents were alive then and she used to take them out. "And I loved it. I felt, you know, driving along, seeing the lovely countryside, I felt close, and that was the sort of thing I liked. I used to like to go to the pictures but that was only a once a week thing."

Someone who observed north eastern life with an outsider's eye was Mary who moved there from the south east in 1964. "The pace is quicker up this way I find, the people, just going shopping, they always seem to be in a hurry, that sort of thing; where they didn't - they might now down south - but they didn't beforehand... I think people up this area were more into factories. The housewife was working more up here than they were down south. Down south they were more or less part-time work, daily helps and things like that, whereas up here it was heavier industry work and the pace was quicker and more tiring, of course. And they were having to fit the shopping in with their free time." "I think women down south was more independent to me in a way. Up here, the wife, her place was in the home until the last so many years they've had to work and it's just coming gradually now that they're getting more independence. I found that the women was kept

down more up here than they were down south. The women down south had more to say in the house, I found that, fifty/fifty, whereas it wasn't up here when I first came. They had to do what their husband told them and that was it. I used to hear little bits and pieces, you know, they used to be grumbling about their husbands and that, you know. I found a big difference. I didn't say anything but I found out, oh, you were treated differently up here. But it's coming now. It's changing for them, for the better." I suggested that the fact that in some cases the women had kept their jobs when the men lost theirs had been an influence. Mary said, "Yes, the tables are turned now and whether the men can accept it all the way I don't know. Some of them are having to do the housework while their wives are out now. Some of them are lost completely, I think. The women are definitely having more to say now which I think is a good thing".

These accounts give us a feel for how the changes that occurred in the post-war period in the north east were experienced by people who lived there in ways which were both extremely personal and connected with wider social developments.

The Seventies & Eighties

We need now to turn to the industrial history of the north east, where we left it, at the point at which regional policies were managing on the whole to keep up with and to offset the effects of the rundown of the traditional industries of the area.

From the early seventies the efforts that had been made to regenerate the region's economy began to seem less long-term in their effect than had been hoped. The oil crisis of 1973 contributed to a process which revealed that the industries which had been brought into the region were vulnerable. They did not have the natural reasons - mineral and geographical - for existing that originally supported the traditional industries. The "branch plant economy" that the region had acquired became clear : "in 1963 approximately 48% of manufacturing employment in the region was in locally owned industrial establishments. By 1973 this proportion had fallen to 22%" (Goddard (1983) p.4)). This had come about partly through the establishment of branch plants and partly because of takeovers of previously locally-owned companies. By 1973, Goddard reports, 31% of all manufacturing employment in the region was in previously indigenous firms acquired by non-regional companies.

The factories of the north, owned by companies with headquarters and senior staff in other areas of the country or overseas, were more likely to be closed when profits dropped than the parent plants. This phenomenon was a familiar part of the experience of people in the north east and among them the women in this study. The statistics to pinpoint it are, however, difficult to come by. The research of I.J. Smith is referred to by Goddard in the paper quoted above : "the rate of closures of acquired plants would appear to be four times the regional average for all closures with approxi-

ately 10,000 jobs lost in acquired plant closures between 1963 - 1973, largely as a result of post-merger rationalisation to eliminate excess capacity." (op. cit. p4).

Jane Lewis in her paper on Women, Work and Regional Development (1983), concluded : "There is evidence to suggest that the jobs which moved to the North East in search of relatively cheap labour are now being re-organised through a combination of processes which have involved plant closures, production transfer to more modern plants, product obsolescence, the development of new production technology and the phasing out of shift and part-time work. This reinforces suggestions ... that the creation of new employment of itself in the Development Areas has not provided a basis for the economic development of these areas. Jobs have been semi- and unskilled and may have disappeared through closure and contraction." (Lewis (1983) p.22).

How have women fared in the changes in employment that have taken place? The general shift towards service industries (73,000 jobs gained in this sector in the Northern Region 1966 - 71) favoured women since a higher proportion of them are employed in this sector. Between 1961 and 1971 women's jobs on Tyneside increased by nearly 30,000 (cf figures quoted by Hardill & Robinson (1986)). As a percentage of the workforce on Tyneside they moved from being 31.0% in 1961 to 37.3% in 1971. This trend continued : "Between 1971 and 1978 women's share of employment grew - from 37.3% to 40.7%-for two reasons; on the one hand, total

female employment increased while, on the other, male employment declined. But after 1978, both male and female employment fell (although female employment fell by slightly less than male - hence the female share of jobs slightly increased)". (Hardill & Robinson (1986) p.4).

The other important factor beginning to show here is the growth in part-time jobs done by women at the expense of full-time. In the Northern Region full-time jobs done by women began to decline in 1973. By 1985 the loss was 52,000. Over the same period part-time jobs increased by 35,000. (Employment Gazette Historical Supplement February 1987, Table 1.5 Northern Region). The women in this study, working in manufacturing industry, were in a sector badly affected by job loss - 169,000 jobs (men and women) in the Northern Region lost between 1973 and 1985 (op. cit.). In the service sector jobs continued to increase in the region until 1979. From then until 1983 40,000 service sector jobs were lost. The trend was then reversed and by 1985 34,000 had been regained. The increase of 10,000 part-time jobs done by women which occurred over this period were part of that 34,000 (29.4%) since the service sector was the only one to grow at all over the period. So the general trend for women in the region was from manufacturing to service and from full to part-time, that is when it was not from employment to unemployment. In this study Margaret and Mary personify the trend. Made redundant from manufacturing in 1980, they managed, after some months, to get worse paid jobs as hospital cleaners.

What happened in the clothing industry in the northern region from the early seventies will be discussed in later chapters. The general position of women in the industry of the region, at the end of the period with which this study is concerned, is summed up by Lewis (1983) :

"Women are concentrated in industries which have been, and will continue to be, greatly affected by developments in new technology - both in industries producing new technology related goods and in areas of work heavily affected by the introduction of new production technology. There is therefore now a need to examine in what way and to what extent developments in new technology and processes of company reorganisation are affecting the decentralised jobs for women in the Development Areas." (p.22).

As far as the general employment market for women in the north east is concerned, Hardill and Robinson come to the depressing conclusion that nothing has greatly changed since 1921! They list the ten largest occupational categories for women workers living on Tyneside according to the 1981 Census :

Table 6.2 Principal Occupations of Tyneside Women 1981

Clerks	18%
Salesmen (sic), sales, shop assistants, shelf fillers, forecourt attendants, etc.	11%
Caretakers, cleaners, etc.	8%
Secretaries, typists, receptionists	7%
Domestic staff and school helpers	6%
Nurses	5%
Teachers (primary and secondary)	4%
Counter hands, assistants, kitchen porters, etc	3%
Waiters and bar staff	3%
Tailors, dressmakers and other clothing workers	2%

(Hardill and Robinson (1986) p.18)

Altogether these occupational categories accounted for two-thirds of all women workers (op. cit. p.19). The figures given by Henry Mess for 1921 (quoted by Hardill and Robinson p.13) work out in percentage terms as :

Table 6.3 Principal Occupations of Tyneside Women 1921

Indoor Domestic servants	22%
Shop assistants	14%
Personal service (barmaids, laundry workers)	13%
Clerks/Typists	12%
Dressmakers, etc.	8%
Professional workers	6%

Though the percentages have changed and the numbers greatly increased, women are still doing the same kinds of jobs. "The main point is, however, that women are still heavily concentrated in a small number of occupations, most of which have low status, low pay, poor conditions and are often part-time" (op. cit. p.19).

Even when efforts have been made, for example in education in the Technical, Vocational, Education Initiative, to help girls to consider non-technical jobs, it is still very difficult to bring about change in this area. In February 1987 North Tyneside Careers Service sent out an analysis of the occupational areas which young people registered with them had gone into in the year ended 30th September 1986. Boys and girls were still separating into their traditional job roles with girls predominating in clerical, retail, and light manufacture. A covering letter expressed the distress of the Further Education Sub-committee at this situation and ended :

"It was generally felt that a move away from traditional sex roles in employment would increase the motivation of employees and help the efficiency of local employers."

No doubt this is true but in the present climate, "Young people who (are) seriously seeking work (cannot) afford to be selective." (Roberts, (1971) p.38). As an article in The Guardian on sex stereotyping in the Youth Training Scheme put it : "The difficulty is less that young women lack imagination than that they have plenty. They know, though jobs of any kind are scarce, the least hard to find are in dead-end women's work." (Cockburn,C. (1987)).

In the period with which this study is mainly concerned, 1945 - 1975, women did not have difficulty in finding full-time jobs in industry even if these were not highly paid and did not call out from those who did them many of their skills. For all the limitations, it begins to be clear that this was a good period for women on Tyneside as far as the availability of employment was concerned.

In the next part of this study we shall discover how the particular women with whom it is concerned experienced being workers in manufacturing industry on Tyneside during this period.

PART III

THE EXPERIENCE OF INDUSTRIAL LIFE

INTRODUCTION

In the first part of this study we followed the women I talked with through the process of leaving school and by various routes becoming part of the industrial labour force on Tyneside. In Part II we considered how women's employment developed in the north over the period covered by this study (1934 - 1985). In Part III we turn to the industries in which the women I talked with worked and see how the women experienced them as changing and developing over the period from 1945.

The industries in which they worked included : light engineering of various kinds; the manufacture of sweets and light bulbs; and the clothing industry. The two sectors where there was continuity of experience were engineering and clothing.

The main focus of my conversations was Jameses, the engineering company where the majority of the women were actually working when I talked with them. Therefore the greater part of this study is concerned with that particular workplace.

The next most important common experience was of the clothing industry and it is with the clothing industry that we will begin our exploration of how women experienced being workers in Tyneside industry. We will also end with a chapter on that industry as we hear of the experience of the women who set up Marie Sutherland, a Workers' Co-operative, which sought a place for itself in the clothing industry in the north east.

CHAPTER 7

THE CLOTHING INDUSTRY

Most of the women I talked with about their experience of the clothing industry were currently working at Marie Sutherland, the workers' co-operative. They had all worked in other clothing factories, some for many years. One of the women, Nancy, did not work at Marie Sutherland and was currently employed at a clothing factory north of the river where she had been for ten years.

Changes in how production is organised, in payment systems and in the efficiency of the machines were some of the principal themes in the women's descriptions of what it was like working in the clothing industry in the period since the war.

Production and Technology

June started at Pelaw Tailoring in 1944 (Northern Co-operative Wholesale Society) : "At that particular time it was no way like the rag trade is now. I mean it wasn't racing to do - it was quality not quantity. You know, it wasn't mass producing like they do now. It was just a slow pace. We didn't have numbers to do. You could do two jobs all day and it wouldn't make any difference."

This relaxed attitude extended to the despatch of finished goods. "When I worked first in Pelaw Tailoring there used

to be cloth and jackets and suits made and just piled up on the sides all round the factories... They used to get knocked over when people used to run home finishing when the bell went. And the bales of cloth or the bales of jackets or anything would be knocked over and we'd get the job the next day of putting them all tidy. And it used to be filthy dirty... and they've laid there that long, we used to find nests of mice... with no skin on - new born little baby mice amongst all these - honest we did! That's how 'Speedy Gonzalez' the rag trade was then! Jackets that had been made and just piled up and never been sent out of the factory. I think ten sheets a day got done. Well, I mean, you do that an hour now, on jackets."

It seems surprising that in conditions of post-war austerity there was not more urgency about the throughput of cloth and finished goods. It might have been accounted for by the relationship between the co-operative factory and shops or the fact that what June remembered was explained by wartime allocation of utility and quality cloth or that it occurred in 1951 when there was a slump in the clothing trade on account of the Korean war (for these last two suggestions see Wray (1957) chapter 2) ..

"There was no belts. There were just like we have our machines now.. just sat, like, in little rows. But it was

talking and just... in fact the powers of your machine weren't as fast as what they are now. They've speeded the powers of your machine up. There was piecework.. and then that faded out and then they started bringing these belts in, the conveyor belts, you know, that went round. And you used to have big flat trays. They would put a job on each tray and there was a girl used to feed the belt, the Feeder. She used to put the whole jacket in their pieces, you know - the back, the fronts. And each girl sat at either side of the conveyor belt, and as the trays came down you took your part of your job off. But what we used to do we used to get crafty. We used to shove a couple of empty trays in between... and split the work between three trays to make it look as if your tray had a job on. We got crafty! And what a massive belt! And Christmas time we used to have all the decorations done like, and when you were at the top of the belt looking down it was beautiful!... And we used to sing songs to the foreman, 'Charlie is m' darling' and all this. And he was a canny soul. He used to laugh and enjoy it, you know."

Although some clothing factories installed conveyor belts immediately before and during the second world war, this chiefly occurred, according to Wray (1957), in the new factories built after the war : "Conveyor-belt production can therefore be regarded as largely a post-war innovation in women's outerwear factories, and as the first method of

applying fully sectional methods to women's outerwear production in which time study was used to ensure a smooth flow of work."(p.94) Although conveyor belts appeared at first sight to ensure efficiency and tidiness, in fact they prevented the fastest workers working at the speed they wished and thus lost them money. The method also made rectification work difficult and according to Wray "alteration hands" (op. cit. p.95) had to be employed.

There were, however, vestiges of older methods of working still in operation after the war. June remembered that in the early days of her time at Pelaw, "these cross-legged tailors - 'tinker tailors' we used to call them - you know, used to sit cross-legged and they'd edge stitch round the... all by... in fact they'd made suits without any machining, all hand done.... They started to dwindle away, all them kind of people. They were oldish to start with. They'd been in the rag trade from them probably serving their time. They either left or there wasn't a job for them and they were finished because this was the starting of the new way of sewing trade and there was no room for that kind of thing."

June confirmed that the new belts were supervised by men, and when I asked how they knew the job sufficiently to do this, she explained that a Jewish man came from Leeds who knew the rag trade, ... "had mebbes been looking after a

factory before he came to ours and it was when he came in that all this change started to come about."

Angela Coyle looks in her article, "Sex and Skill in the Organisation of the Clothing Industry" (1982) at how it has come about that women in the clothing industry are still concentrated in unskilled and low paid work in spite of the fact that they make up a large majority of the work force. She shows how women's machining jobs have been "deskilled". Instead of making-up a whole garment ("making through") "most processes have now become mechanised, and each has been broken down into operations of the simplest form and the shortest time. The assembly of a garment is now based on a series of short simple operations for which operators can be trained very quickly. Despite these changes, however, the level of mechanisation still renders clothing dependent on labour. It is not an automated labour process - "what still counts in the fashion trade is the hand that guides the pieces of limp cloth through the classically simple sewing machine." (B. Campbell ; Lining their Pockets, Time Out, July 13-19, 1979)." (Coyle (1982) p.14)

It is ironical that Angela Coyle should so emphasise the de-skilling of women working in the clothing industry. The women in this study who worked in the clothing industry as machinists regarded themselves as skilled workers - though much of their skill they would feel

resides in their ability to work at high speed while retaining accuracy rather than in an ability to "make through" difficult garments. Julie, speaking of why she had enjoyed working as a trainer in the industry said, "It's like giving somebody else your skill, isn't it? You know, well, at least you're passing something on to somebody else." Again, she recalled somebody saying to her at an interview for a job, "I knew you were a good machinist as soon as you picked the material up." Julie went on, "You know, you can tell, mind. When anybody comes for a job, you don't even have to watch them sew. It's how they handle the material and that."

The trend to reducing operations to "a series of short simple operations" is only half the story. The other half ~~if~~ the pressure to introduce sophisticated machines to s/ keep the British clothing trade competitive with the industry overseas using cheap labour. Hardill (1985) emphasises the important influence that Marks & Spencer's has had on the clothing plants in the north which supply them. Marks & Spencer "has insisted that its suppliers embark upon a policy of investing in new technology to hold down costs." (p.36) Both Nancy and Julie gave accounts of working on sophisticated elasticators, as we shall hear.

I had asked Nancy if the speed of work had increased.

"Oh, definitely, the machines are fantastic. I mean I was on a machine that back-tacked for you and everything. I don't like it. I don't mind the machines what cut off. That's what I'm on now. One of these automatics had me dizzy. I says, "Oh, you'll have to take.. they were saying, he was having us on, saying 'If you can use this machine you'll be able to drive a car no bother!' But I mean the other week the girl who was on the elasticating machine, she wasn't in, so I went up because there was a merchandiser coming. (The boss) said, 'Sit on this machine and impress this guy with this machine'. Because it's got eight big balls of elastic and all these needles and all these rollers and things. It's murder when you have to thread them all up. You have to use a special thread and things. I'm sitting there as though I'm.. you know..this merchandiser come, to try and impress him with this machine you know. The machinery is fantastic."

I asked how companies adapted their machines to cope with the demands of different styles that might be in fashion. "They hire the machines. Their special machinery, it's fantastic. We're doing this picot work, and he just hires them in. The styles do change."

Nancy would no doubt have felt that B. Campbell was expressing a very patronising view in writing "what still counts in the fashion trade is the hand that guides the

pieces of limp cloth through the classically simple sewing machine."

Wages

The other issue raised by Angela Coyle is that of how men have managed to retain their status in the clothing industry as skilled workers and thus retain their wage differential. The proportions of women and men in the industry has remained stable over the years : "in 1951 men were 21.4% of the labour force... by 1976 this had changed to 18.9%" (Coyle (1982) p.14) but she points out that this had been achieved by "the concentration of women on to assembly processes, the concentration of men in the cutting room and the stock room, and the absolute mushrooming of managerial and supervisory jobs for men." (op. cit). This segregation has meant that women in the clothing industry, despite their skills, have been in a weak bargaining position. Their position is, in fact, a good example of the phenomena described in Craig, Garnsey & Rubery (1983) :

"The main conclusion that we drew from our research evidence is that jobs in which women are employed tend to be low paid and of low status whatever the content of the job or the skills and experience of the female employees. Women only tend to obtain relatively high pay when they are employed on jobs still dominated by men, or even then

only when employed in the same firm, or when in possession of a professional qualification. We have found that women are indeed excluded from many skilled job areas, often those requiring formal training, but that in addition, the skills and training for women's jobs are undervalued and underestimated. The main reason why the employment of women has an independent effect in lowering the pay and status of a job is that they can in practice be recruited at lower wage levels than prime age males. These differences in the male and female labour supply in our view are rooted in the social and family system but reinforced by opportunities in the labour market." (p146)

The points made here are borne out throughout this study - for example it is clear that the women who worked at Jameses, an engineering works where men were also employed, had far more power in negotiating with management because they were in unions with men. The issue of how work study and the bonus system affects clothing workers is discussed in the final section of this chapter - Relations with Management.

Angela Coyle, in discussing women's pay in clothing writes, "relative earnings in the industry have declined since the 1950s. The continuation of government controls on clothing production in the early post-war period meant that in 1950 the industry could attract labour by offering rates of pay that were above the manufacturing average,

but particularly since 1971 there has been a continual decline in earnings in clothing relative to manufacture as a whole." (Coyle (1982)p.18). The views of the women in this study did not entirely bear out this finding.

Throughout the period they left, or tried to leave, the clothing industry for better wages elsewhere : June in 1949 went to Reyrolles, Nancy in 1964 to the Plywood factory, Julie tried to go to "the Morganite" in 1967.

However, in 1984, Nancy described how she found a girl of 19 crying because her wage on bonus had dropped from £110 to £92. "Eee, my God, I says, my husband's not even on that £110 and he works in the bottom of a ship, and he had to study for six years - and all this muck and, like, oil and being a marine engineer. A marine engineer, and he isn't guaranteed that. This was before the last pay rise and he was on £106, I think. I thought, 'For forty hours sitting and listening to music! Daresay you were slogging, pet', but she's a nineteen year old bairn. And she wasn't doing, like, a collar job, or a specialised job. She was just sitting sewing, just straight, you know."

This reaction of Nancy's brings out how difficult it has been for women in the north east to regard their work as in any way exacting when compared with that of the men in its traditional industries. It is a good example of how consciousness of the physical strength and endurance,

combined with a high degree of skills of various kinds, which traditional industry demanded, has imbued north east culture with a respect for those who did such work. It has also given the people of the north east a dogged endurance of other kinds of privation and suffering.

The next section of this chapter is concerned with how the women in this study who worked in clothing combined their family responsibilities with their work. What follows in the rest of this chapter in many ways bears out the statement that "differences in the male and female labour supply ... are rooted in the social and family system but reinforced by opportunities in the labour market." (Craig, Garnsey & Rubery, (1983)p.146)

Combining Work & Family

June described very clearly the interaction between the desire of managers in the clothing industry to achieve high rates of production with the complexities of women's lives. When women are good performers at work that is only the threshold of their situation. June worked at Pelaw Tailoring until 1958 when her first child was born, and after that she went back several times between the births of her three daughters and two separations from her husband. When her youngest child was two she went back and the manager said, "We'll never get rid of you, June!"

"I used to put Susan in the day nursery and because I was making a bit bonus then, they were making us pay the full amount for her as a married couple do, you know... and it wasn't worth me working 'cos of having to pay that much for having the bairn looked after. At first I got it free and then as I started making bonus they were charging so much and then the more I was making the more they were charging. I was paying the maximum you could pay and even the sister at the children's place, she said, 'I can't see the point in you working'." June was at the time receiving £2.50p from her husband.

"I was going to put me notice in, ... I was on the button-hole machine then, on the end of the belt and the manager says 'Rather than see you leave, June' - he rang round a few day nurseries from 9.00 a.m. - 3.00 p.m. to see if he could influence us getting them in. But there was a waiting list. And it meant I could work part-time 9.00 a.m. - 3.00 p.m. if I could get the bairn in. ('Cos me mother was getting on.). So he couldn't get's in there. He says, 'I'd hate to lose you, June'. 'Cos I used to get me number off the end and they hadn't ever gotten that quantity off before. And you know how they wanted to get more and more? And he knew I was good at it like, and he didn't want us to leave. I says, 'Well, the only thing I could do if you would allow us, I could work mornings, because', I said, 'by the time the little'un gets up, my mother won't have her too much around her feet

till I'm home at 12.30. And the bairn won't be tied in. She'd have the afternoon where the bairn could play out'. (She was about two, then.) And I said I could see to the bairn if she was up to get her ready before I went out to work; but I could only work half a day."

"Well, I got that I was doing as much in half a day because you see, if your work's piled up for you, you can rattle through it. And I used to get it all off by half past twelve. I was making as much money, 'cos the bulk of the work was lying for us going in and I could just rattle through it all. There wasn't waiting for it like it is when it's drawn out over the whole day. And I did that for about six month. But the forewoman didn't like it and she started to be funny. So I just had an argument with her, and I just walked out. I didn't even hand me notice in... I just think she resented me working half a day. She wanted me in full time, 'cos she used to keep saying, 'Have you never heard anything more from these day nurseries?'. "

This is a classic account of a working mother's dilemma. June was anxious to retain the job; not let the manager down; not over-tax her mother; not restrict her child's life; and to end up with some money in her pocket. It is interesting that it was the male manager who was anxious to keep her as a worker who at least tried to help, while

the forewoman, who might have been expected to be sympathetic, was resentful - presumably at what she saw as June being given preferential treatment, and also because the arrangement was doubtless less convenient for her than having a full-time hand.

The intense competition to recruit machinists came out in Nancy's account of her experiences of trying to combine motherhood and work. "Three years after I was married, (i.e. in 1969), I had two babies and a new house. . And then when Christmas came I didn't know what I was going to do 'cos you know people's good getting carpets and everything. So Clay's were sending and asking. Mrs. Taylor asked us if I would go back and work on a night-time for her. And as soon as I got there Mrs. Hodge seen us so she started. So I was torn between the two. But I had promised Joan Taylor I would do her pyjama collars for her. 'Course Anne Hodge said, 'You're not going on them. You're coming on the Marks & Spencer's thing'. So I ended up working over there on the Marks & Spencer's team again, on the twilight shift. So I was there till after the Christmas for £4!" Her husband, Paul, came in from work and looked after the children. "When I think of it now. For £4 a week traipsing right down to the bottom of Norham Road. It was about 5.30 till 9.30. I was up and down, up and down that road."

"Levi's took over Clays. So we could have stayed for them I suppose. But anyway, we decided we'd leave because Mr. Hinton and all the management were leaving. So I left there when everybody else left... Then I got fed up again not having a bit money, and that, in me pocket. So I says to Paul, 'I'm going to go and look for another job'. And I says, 'I've heard that Hobart Rose's are starting people on the twilight shift'. It was in the papers. I says, 'You know Mrs. Hodge is at the shirt factory now, and she's wanting us to go down there to work. 'Cos she's keeping sending word'. He says, 'No', he says. 'Cos he liked the Friday night out, and I had to work on a Friday night then. (I think at Clay's I didn't have to work on a Friday night...)."

In the event, it turned out that Hobart Rose had finished recruiting. But Nancy and her children were out for a walk... "And I thought, I'll call in at this shirt factory and have a look in that factory shop. And this woman, Freda, was doing the interviewing and I said to her, 'I'm one of Mrs. Hodge's girls, Anne Hodge's girls, and I hear...' And she says, 'Can you start tonight?' And I said, 'Ee, I was just coming to enquire what the money was'. 'Oh', she says, 'Oh, start tonight. Anne will be thrilled 'cos you're going to work here'. And I come home and I was frightened to tell Paul. So I got off the bus and I went to me sister-in-law's to see if she would keep the two bairns on a Friday night, so Paul could get out,

'cos I was worried. And she says, 'Oh, I think you could make him stay in. It's nine o'clock finish.. it's not bad'. So when he come in and I told him, he wasn't too pleased but he said, 'Oh, get yourself away', 'cos he knows I can't sit. You know, I cannot settle. I don't like television very much, not unless it takes... and I cannot sit and read, not unless it really interests us."

This account brings out how close was the network that those who worked in the local clothing industry belonged to. It was almost as if those Nancy worked for and with were an extended family. This meant that she had feelings of responsibility and of not wanting to let people down operating in both her real family and her work family at the same time. The two sets of relationships could pull in different directions as they did over her being at work on Friday evening.

Nancy loved the shirt factory and only left when she was expecting another baby. Sadly she had a miscarriage at six months. "Our Anne was $4\frac{1}{2}$. And I was upset because I thought I'm going to get them off to school and then I'm going to have this baby. And then when I lost it, it was terrible. You know after I'd gotten used with it and that. It was still a shock, because I had had no trouble with the other two."

Anne started school. "By October I was demented. So I went down to Dukes & Markus's and got a job down there, and I could get the school holidays. But they said, 'Oh, you can have the school holidays, no bother'. And then when I got in and started doing the work, when the school holidays came up, 'Oh, bring your children and we'll put them in the nursery'. So odd times, I did. But I didn't like that because the older children were kept separate from the little children and it seemed to me hurled into a corner. It was strange. You went in for your cuppa tea, and your bait, and the kids were in the corner, like partitioned off, as though they were cattle - like sheep in a sheep pen, I should say. And they were shouting, 'Mam, Mam!' I seen my two bairns, you know, in that place and our Paul's little red nose and I thought, 'Ee, it's cold, where are they?' And of course this woman had them walking for miles and out and she was a canny enough woman, and that. One of the machinists volunteered to look after all our kids. I thought, 'Well, you don't need money that much - your poor bairns'. And I thought, 'Ee, you're being too soft'. 'Cos they're rather clingy children, especially our Paul. Then this day the manageress come and told us that our Paul had been through this play tunnel and lifted his head and he'd cracked his head wide open, split his head. So after that I thought, 'They're not going in the nursery no more'. ...He not half give hisself a knock. So I thought, 'Well, that's it'. And I stayed there for about twelve month."

Dukes & Markus was the only clothing factory locally to provide a creche. This was only available to the skilled machinists, according to the CDP Study of North Shields - Women's Work (p41). Nancy's account of her experience shows that the mere provision of child care facilities by a workplace does not deal with a mother's anxiety about her children. Nancy describes herself as being 'torn in different directions': reproaching herself for perhaps being greedy for money; anxious lest she should be being too protective of her children. Theories and opinions about child rearing reach women from many sources, including family tradition, and much attention in the media. There is also peer group opinion, and this was mentioned in passing by Nancy. She described how she had gone back to work after her miscarriage and how her workmates, who had not heard about it, "All wanted to know what I had had. 'You've never left a new baby? That's not like you'." This implies a good deal about the reputation Nancy felt she had for being a good mother. She would not have wished to lose this by being thought more concerned with earning a wage than with the welfare of her children.

At this period (1973) the clothing industry was clearly desperate for machinists. While Nancy was still working at Dukes & Markus, her old boss, Mr. Hinton, who was now working at another factory sent Pam, a friend of Nancy's, to see if she could be persuaded to move to his factory.

"They used to pay people then. If you could get a good machinist to come to a factory and stay for three months, you would get so much money off the firm. So Pam said if I would go she would split the money with us." It would have been about £10. Nancy replied, "Oh, Pam, that's not much good, if they've got to pay you for to help people to come and work. 'Course then there was a need for machinists. Machinists were short to have you know, which they aren't really now "- in 1984 .

Nancy's response to the offer of a bonus for changing her job is interesting, and reflects attitudes often expressed by the women in this study. She felt there was something slightly spurious about the system : "that's not much good if they've got to pay you for to help people to come and work." Instead of taking a short-term view of the benefit of some cash-in-hand, she takes a long-term view that the company that has to use such methods must be suspect. This reflects the attitudes of industrial workers in the north east who are proud of the skills inherent in the traditional industries of the region. Shipbuilding and heavy engineering are industries with long lead times and industries which demand the combined skills of many workers. This may lead to conflict over demarcation between work to be done by different skilled workers, but it does not lead to an attitude of mind where making a 'quick buck' is part of a worker's expectations.

These attitudes, ingrained into the male workers of the area have rubbed off on to the women too. We shall see more of these attitudes in the sections on the women's experience as supervisors and shop stewards.

Nancy solved her job problem by visiting the factory shop at J & J Fashions. There she met one of her old supervisors, who asked what she was doing. When she heard she was having the school holidays off from Dukes & Markus she suggested Nancy should come to J & Js. "All your friends are here." Nancy said, "Well, I would love it but what about the school holidays?" She said, 'Well, you cannot have them off. But I'd give you shorter hours, say, nine till one or half past nine till one o'clock'. "So of course me face had never liked Dukeses. It was huge and noisy. So when I was telling me Dad, he says, 'Go and work for your old boss, and I'll meet you outside the factory and take the bairns for walks, and bring them back over, and that'. Well he had just retired then. So I thought, ee well, me Mam wasn't in very good health. I thought, well, I could help them a little bit maybes. She wouldn't take any money, but pay her tele licence and things like that would help her. So I did that." Several people she knew either worked at J & Js already, or came there. "It was nice. I enjoyed it. It was very small and family-like and friendly." Nancy has stayed there since.

Nancy resolved her child-care problems by calling on her own parents for help in a way typical of the area. In her case it was her father instead of her mother, as is more usual. Like June, she weighed the burdens she was putting on her family and children in order that she should be able to have a job, and worked out a solution which would be acceptable, and indeed beneficial, to all parties.

For Julie, things were easier as far as child care was concerned; "I've got me sister and I've got Jim's mum. I'm not, sort of, pushed to get anybody. I don't have to get a stranger as I would say. I wouldn't do that. If I couldn't have family to mind him, I wouldn't have anybody to mind him. I wouldn't like to think I would have to knock him from one to the other because of my job, like. I would sooner give the job up as have it affect him."

Julie has not had to face the dilemma of the mother who needs to work and who has no-one to whom she can easily turn for help with child care, so she assumes that the child would come first and the job second. In practice, she might have found herself finding other solutions to the problem. It is, however, a measure of the settled nature of north east society where members of extended families still live within easy reach of one another that the thought of entrusting a child to "a stranger" should still seem unusual.

The importance of the family as a powerful institution was continually emerging in what the women said, and in the attitudes they held. If their mothers had had a very strong influence on their choice of job when they first left school, their children had a powerful influence later on, more powerful often than their husbands. Nancy's husband had to make the best of her determination to work, and Julie's husband's views came second to considerations of benefit to their son. When Julie was trying to decide whether to go back to the clothing co-operative which she had left (some months before) when it seemed to be going to close or to take an offered job in a well-established clothing firm, she decided on the co-operative. "I thought, 'Well, it's handy. It's on me way to school, coming back from school. I can pick the bairn up.' I had no worries. I hadn't to depend on anybody to look after James. Everything was on hand', I thought. And he (her husband) called us all the stupid things under the sun! He wasn't suited at all 'cos it(the Co-operative) was still... you know, it was dodgy."

Her decision to go to Marie Sutherland in 1982 was no doubt influenced by the experience she had had in the few months since she had left. At this point in her life she had been out of the industry for about seven years since James had been born. Her first spell at Marie Sutherland had been her first regular job since that time. She had left Marie Sutherland in response to a request from a man

she had worked with in the past. The experience this led to illustrates the dilemmas faced by someone like Julie upon returning to work after a time away caring for a family. She had worked in the industry prior to this time away for several years and she had held responsible positions as supervisor and training officer. When she went back she found she had lost her status in the industry and was treated more as a girl than a responsible married woman, let alone someone with industrial skills.

Relations with Management

"I gets this 'phone call from this lad I used to work with at Marshall's. He's now factory manager at South Shields but he was a Work Study Engineer when I worked with him at Marshall's. I starts this job. I hated it. I don't know, I used to get on with this lad so well. He'd changed so much, I just couldn't stand him. I don't know if it was the position he had. I don't think people should change because of the position of their job, you know. I hate snobbery and he, to me, talked down to me. Well, that annoyed me. I mean he only lived round the corner. He used to pick us up on a morning. We used to go to work (at Marshall's) together. He used to drop us off on the way back. In fact often he used to call in if we'd been to a bowls match or anything. He'd come in and have a cup of coffee with Jim and a bit chat. Ee, and he

really talked down to me as if to say, 'You're a worker...' like, ...'and I'm the boss'. Well, I mean I don't have to be on like that with anybody, 'cos if I've got a job I do me job and I pull me weight. He annoyed me, he really did. Well, I thought, I'll see you, like. I dug me heels in. I thought, I'll make him dance here!"

Julie had been asked to come to work on a multi-elasticator, a machine similar to the one Nancy was asked to impress the merchandiser with. "It had eight threads on it. It had four needles and four underneath threads. It was to elasticate the waists of the skirts. We were making these cheap skirts for Tesco's. And he didn't know anybody else who had worked one of these machines but me. Well, that annoyed me, you know, when he wanted me there for that job because he didn't know anybody else - all the girls he had in the factory - and he didn't know anybody else who had worked a one of these machines before. I thought, 'You used me'. So anyway, I gets into the way of this machine. It was no good, not a bit of good this machine. So they got another one. That wasn't much better. So I used to have the mechanic on it three, four, five, six times a day. I thought, 'Well, I'm not using it if it's not right.' Couldn't get the right sizes on the skirts. I mean... you can imagine... elastic - it's all right when it comes through the machine and as it's moving down the line.. but the skirts, it moves in - elastic. So you'd have to make them a bit big for them to

finish off at their right size. I mean, I knew all this, but the manageress, just a young girl she was, I says, 'By the time they get down there, pet, they'll have shrunk'. She says, 'Do you reckon?'. I says, 'Well, come back and we'll measure them.' She must have thought, 'We've got a right one here like'. I says, 'I'm not taking them back.' Because she wanted us to pick them all out. I says, 'You've got no chance. So the next day she came and she measured them and sure enough they'd shrunk. 'Ee', she says, 'You were right! 'Well', I says, 'I know. I've worked a one of these before, remember? That's what I was brought here for.' So anyway, I got to like it a bit, this job. So I was getting through, like. And I got that I was doing 700 a day. And it wasn't enough. They wanted us to do 1200 a day. It was a physical impossibility."

I asked how he had arrived at this figure. "I couldn't tell you. But I used to go in at 8 o'clock on a morning, put my head down. And I thought, 'I'll show you. It cannot be done. It's an impossibility'! And I really worked this day. I mean, I worked every day but this day I thought, 'I'm really going to put meself out.' And I worked hard, really hard, and I think I done 40 more than I would normally have done... I was shattered. We didn't finish till quarter to five. I never stopped the whole day."

The manageress brought the Work Study Engineer from one of their other factories. "He came and he stood over us all day and I still didn't do any more. It took us ten minutes to change me threads 'cos I had eight threads on that machine. And I says, 'I hope you've taken all this into account, like'. 'Oh', he says, 'I'm reckoning the time up.' I still couldn't do any more but they wanted me to do 1200, between 1200 and 1400 a day, and it was just a physical impossibility. I asked what the work study man had said, since it must have been obvious. 'He says he's sure somebody else could do it quicker'. So I says, 'Well, find somebody else that can do it quicker'. I mean, probably over weeks and months... This day me machine went off. I says, 'I'm going home. I'm sick of it. I don't like this job.' Then I thought, why should I? I'll just stick it out the day. So I stuck it out that day - didn't go in the next."

Nevertheless Julie found herself going in to see the manager. "I called in on the factory. He says, 'What you off for?' 'Cos I felt like it', I says. He says, 'I don't like your attitude. Now we're in this office just the two of w', I don't like your attitude at all'. I says, 'You've brought me here to make a mockery of me and you're not going to'. I says, 'I've slogged my guts out on that job', I says. 'And it's a physical impossibility. You know as well as me there's not many people could do more than what I've done on that machine.' He says, 'I'm

quite aware of that, Julie.' He knew. He was just trying me patience. 'Are you going to take your coat off and start work?' I thought, 'Well, I may as well now I'm here'. It was half past eleven. It was nearly dinner time. I thought, 'Well, I'll get me dinner'. So I went back in, and they all said, 'Ee, where you been, where you been?' I says, 'I've been in the house.' 'Did you get wrong for being late?' I says, 'No, I didn't.' So I went and had me dinner. By three o'clock I was fed up. I just come home. That was it. I wouldn't go back."

Julie's action of leaving after having a row with a manager was something which happened with the women in this study on more than one occasion. In this instance, as in others, Julie felt powerless to make her point in any other way. The only power she had in the situation was that the manager needed a hand who could work the elasticator. While she could deprive him of that hand she had, it seemed, no power to influence for the better the conditions under which she worked the machine. The management still wanted her to produce 1200, even when the work study must have shown this to be impossible. Had she worked at Jameses, she would have been able to put in an appeal against this timing through her union. The union work study representative would have come and checked the engineer's conclusions and the case would have been discussed by the appeal panel made up of representatives

from both management and union. No such machinery existed in Julie's clothing factory where the union's power was much less.

The manager, for his part, had never been a machinist and therefore had no first hand experience of operating the machinery although he had had experience as a work study engineer and would therefore have known the strengths and weaknesses of the system. No doubt his chief aim was to achieve the production targets set by his bosses with all the pressures existing in an industry where competition is intense, profit margins slim, and fashion likely to change.

Although these factors make clothing an unsatisfactory industry to work in, factory closures and lay-offs are frequent occurrences, the Clothing Industry has been, throughout the period since the Second World War, the period described here, a surviving industry in the north east. The women who worked in the industry were, as we have seen, always in demand. As Julie's husband said when she kept being offered different jobs, "It must be nice to pick and choose, like, in this day and age."

Clothing as a Wages Council industry, had its basic minimum rates nationally set. But each company has its own bonus system on top of their basic rate. In the view of the North Tyneside C.D.P. Study, by keeping basic wages low and therefore the proportion of the wage determined by the machinist's efforts high, management has a highly effective means of control. "It's the bonus system that divides the workforce, whilst ensuring a high level of production. Bonus is worked out in relation to the level of skill of the operation and the maximum speed (for maximum productivity) at which it can be carried out."

(North Tyneside CDP (1978) Vol 5 P41). The CDP Study goes on to quote an operator who described this strategy of control in operation :

"You were paid on your individual work - it was solely up to you. They dropped the basic wage very, very low and it was up to you to make a good bonus and I found that the girls, they didn't have time to talk to you, you know, and it was a case of putting your head down and working hard till dinner time. I found the atmosphere strained and as I said, I didn't like it very much. It was every girl for herself." (June at Charlie Clay's) (op.cit. p41)

This may suggest that the management's control of production is more effective than in practice it is. Julie described what happened to her when her productivity was inadvertently too high. Before she had been put on the elasticating machine, she had been put on another job

(not having worked in the industry for several years). "I started on the Monday. By the Wednesday I was on piecework and the girl whose job it was was the shop steward, wasn't she? And she was off on the sick. Well, I didn't know this but she couldn't make her money on it, this shop steward, could she? Well, can you imagine when she come back! There was all hell let loose! She says to me, 'How many were you doing an hour?' I says, 'Forty two'. She says, 'Well, I've been doing it for six weeks,' she says, 'and I can only do twenty.' Well there was nearly a strike! But nobody warned me. I mean if that had been me and I had seen a strange person put on the job and I knew the situation, I would have said to that person, 'Watch it. Mind, she can only do such and such. You'll have to do the same as her'. Or mebbes they just didn't expect anybody to do the work you see. I mean it was a simple job. I was just rattling them off. 'Course when she come back and they took me off, the work study engineer was saying, 'If she could do that many, you could do it.' This incident and Julie's comments clearly illustrate the way that the workforce ~~d~~velops strategies e/ for dealing with the strategies of management. Another example was given by June when she recalled how they "got crafty" and added empty trays to the conveyor belt to give themselves more time, in the early days of piecework systems in the clothing industry.

The authors of the North Tyneside Study blame the bonus system for the weakness of unions in the clothing industry. "The union, despite high membership, is weak and on the whole makes little difference to these women's working lives. One reason lies in the mode of production - the bonus system promotes individual competitiveness, while the perks laid on by management serve to endear the firm to the workers. Thus in most factories the workforce is not inclined to be militant."(op. cit. p42). It does not seem that, in itself, a bonus or piecework system necessarily weakens union power. In Jameses, where a piecework system operates, it could be said to give the unions power, for it gives rise to an enormous amount of negotiation in which shop stewards have to represent their members. The difference is that there, the unions are representing both men and women and they are supported by the traditional power of the engineering unions.

What is said here about perks is important since they seem to be a distinctive part of the culture of the clothing industry locally. The implication of what is said in the C.D.P. study is that they are essentially manipulative and disguise shortcomings in working conditions. Those who receive them do not experience them like that because a company could always choose not to give them. I have often been told in an appreciative way about the Christmas hampers given out by one local clothing firm and I have noticed now pleased the workers at Marie Sutherland are to

receive turkeys at Christmas from their main customers who also give them to their own workforce. Women perhaps tend to respond to such things because they see them as personal touches. The question of incentive schemes in the clothing industry and the use of perks will be taken up again in Chapter 9 in the context of a discussion of the objectivity and value of payment by results schemes (see pp). The culture of the clothing industry is also affected by the fact that the main workforce is women and that the managers are men. It has a different flavour from that in engineering. The picture that has emerged in the accounts I have quoted is of an industry with men at the top and, in the better organised companies, quite powerful women acting as first line supervisors. Mrs. Hodge and her Marks & Spencer's team, described by Nancy, was clearly a force to be reckoned with and very different from the manageress who was "just a young girl" that Julie encountered. The men bosses were people who had risen from jobs working alongside the women. The manager with whom Julie clashed "lived round the corner" and the manager at Pelaw Tailoring June had known since he was a lad. The relationship between the women and these men seemed to be felt to go best when it contained a certain amount of humour and banter. They sang "Charlie is m'darling" to the foreman at Pelaw and when June went back there and was interviewed by another foreman he said, "We'll never get rid of you, June". This strategy for

dealing with relationships between men and women is of course common in industry. It helps to get over the ambiguities of sexual attraction and the difficulties which are peculiar to the exercise of authority by men over women in the close proximity of the shop floor. It is clear that in Julie's opinion her manager had not learned how to exercise authority gracefully. Her tone of voice suggested that he was inclined to be hectoring and she described him as giving himself airs, as a boss. She "didn't like his attitude at all".

We will come back to a consideration of management styles and of trade union power in industry in later sections of this work.

Conclusion

Our exploration of the experience of the clothing industry that the women in this study had in the period between the Second World War and 1984, reveals that while there have been changes, these have not been very radical. Machinery has been developed to work more quickly and to do a wider range of operations. Improvements to machines and the quality of sewing thread "increased average speeds from 4,500 stitches per minute in 1950 to over 8,000 stitches per minute in 1970" (Hardill (1985) p.38). It is still a case of one operator to one machine - "abandonment of individual machine technology is not practical in the near future." (op. cit. p37). Wages have improved, but in the

north east the improvement has been felt to have occurred partly because of the relative decline of wages in traditional industries such as shipbuilding. The traditional structure of the industry with men acting as managers of a female, rather powerless, workforce has not changed. The chief source of power that the women hold is that their labour is needed in this industry in ways that it is not in other manufacturing industries. But this power is very difficult to capitalise upon because of the problems over child care which still beset women with young children who want to have a job. We have also seen in these accounts how the provision by industry of childcare facilities does not necessarily solve the problem for women who feel vulnerable to accusations that their children are coming second to their job. On the other hand there was no doubt in these accounts that the experience of having a job was vital to the women, not only for financial reasons, but also because of the social contact and purposeful activity that it brought with it.

In this chapter we have not discussed how the clothing industry in the north east has expanded and contracted in recent years. This will emerge in chapter twelve when we will hear how Marie Sutherland was set up as a workers' co-operative in part as a consequence of the frustration of women machinists faced with the experience of a series of short-lived jobs. The issue of clothing companies

being attracted to the region with development grants and the catastrophic decline of the industry during the seventies, in response to developments in the industry overseas, will be discussed in that chapter. The future for the industry in the north east is likely to depend as much on international considerations as on the domestic issues discussed in the present chapter. Hardill, in her article, "Is there a Future for the Rag Trade in the North East?" (1985), answers the question by concluding, "employment in this industry is still characterised by uncertainty" (p41), but that "the economic future of clothing plants in the North largely depends on a positive reaction to consumer demand, the adoption of new technology and the extent to which United Kingdom producers can counter the threat of internationalism." (Hardill (1985) p.37)

CHAPTER 8

THE FACTORY WORLD : JAMESSES

Men's Jobs and Women's Jobs

Jameses, the factory where most of the women in the study worked at the time of my conversation with them, is an engineering company to the east of Newcastle. It is now part of a multi-national, but until the late sixties was a Tyneside firm dating back to the eighteenth century. Many of the older workers remember the days when Commander James was the Chairman of the company and used to take a paternal interest in the place. When work in the factory got short, he used to transport the workers to his farms in Northumberland where they hoed turnips and did other jobs, returning home with gifts of vegetables. The manager who ran the factory for Commander James, Harry Joy, had started as an apprentice and rose to the management job. He therefore knew the problems of doing jobs at first hand, and although the stories about him make him sound a rough and ready, and somewhat autocratic man, he was a popular figure, perhaps especially in retrospect. Margaret described him in terms I have heard often repeated : "He used to come down and talk to you as if you had lived next door to him for years... If you were outside having a social event, he didn't segregate himself. He walked around. He was a good manager, Harry Joy. I'm saying he was a good manager - he might not have

been a good manager as to production, but he was more for the workers. I mean, he started when he was 14, served his time. He grew up practically with the men. He just used to talk to them as if they were mates."

Product & Manufacturing Process

The work of the factory involves a complete process of manufacture. This begins, on the one hand, with the making of synthetic rubber, from "mixes" of different ingredients, in mills and, on the other, the stamping out of metal components from strips of metal bought in by the factory. After this the parts, some made only of rubber and some of metal and rubber, are moulded in presses. Next come the "finishing processes" in which "flash" (the spare rubber squeezed out by the press) is removed by several different mechanical and manual methods. In addition various tasks, such as the fitting of springs, and polishing, are included in "finishing". The parts are individually inspected for faults before being packed and despatched.

This manufacturing procedure sounds relatively simple. But the finished products come in a multiplicity of sizes and specifications for a huge variety of specialist applications in engines, machines and appliances of many kinds. The design and manufacture of the products therefore require technical knowledge, precision skills of various kinds and also physical strength and stamina.

The products of the company have wide application but are particularly used in the motor industry. Not surprisingly, therefore, the company expanded after the war and a new factory was opened in the mid-fifties where those I spoke to worked. The company's products enjoyed a good reputation, the pay was good, and jobs there were sought after. This might seem surprising, for the jobs, even in the present and certainly in the past, require physical strength and endurance, are sometimes unpleasant, and often boring.

Jobs Done by Men

The men in the factory are employed as operators of machines, including the presses, some of which are now automated. Traditionally, the male machine operators have worked on a "week and week about" pattern of working alternate day and night shifts, though there have been some who worked "constant" day or night shifts. With the advent of more sophisticated and costly machinery in some departments, a three-shift pattern of twenty-four hour working has been introduced for their operators, who work on a three week cycle of shifts. This enables the high capital investment in the new machinery to be used to maximum benefit. Much of the work on this new equipment is not particularly heavy but, because of the shift work requirements, the jobs have been filled by men. We will return to the issue of women working night shift later.

In addition to working as machine operators, the men at Jameses work as turners and fitters in the Tool Room, where the precision moulds ("dies") are made for the presses amongst other things. Other jobs which also have to be carried out by "skilled" men, i.e. those who have served their time as apprentices, include machine-setting in various departments and the work of electricians. The job of a machine-setter is to set up a machine for an operator so that the operator can produce a batch of similar components. At the end of a batch, if the machine has to be reset for a different size or type of component, and the use of a spanner is involved, a skilled man has to be called in to do the job. The skilled men are represented by the AUEW¹ in Jameses and are very much a separate grouping from the "unskilled" men and women represented by the GMBATU.² Unskilled men include some of the machine operators and labourers doing a variety of jobs. The fact that these jobs are classified as "unskilled" does not mean that they do not entail the exercise of skills. For example those who mix and make the rubber, a job in which your skin is impregnated by carbon black and you look like a sweep, have to be highly skilled to get satisfactory and consistent results.

1. Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers

2. General, Municipal & Boilermakers Allied Trade Union

The supervision in the factory - foremen and chargehands - is now exclusively male. There is a whole structure of research and development and engineering departments almost entirely staffed by men. There are also office and sales departments where no women have any significant management responsibility.

Jobs Done by Women

Apart from traditionally female jobs in the offices, the jobs done by women at Jameses include : preparing parts for moulding by aligning metal and rubber materials; operating the punching, polishing and cutting machines used in finishing and assembling the products and the machines which make and fit the springs. Among the manual jobs done by women in the finishing processes are some which employ very rudimentary technology. For example, flash is removed by rubbing the parts against a spinning emery wheel on which talc has been liberally sprinkled. The talc goes up your nose and into your hair in spite of the extractor fitted to the machine. Another method is removing flash with the aid of alcohol. Sometimes the parts are left to soak in the alcohol in order to loosen the flash. In this job the fumes are breathed in by the operators and although these are harmless they can make people sleepy. Another job is scraping the excess rubber from metal parts with a sharp blade as the parts are spun on a spindle. Here you have to be careful since the parts have sharp rims which can cut your finger if you handle

them carelessly. Rubber and plastic flash is also pulled off by hand. The flash is meant to come away easily but often does not, and the women on this job have in some cases developed muscle strains of greater and lesser seriousness. As a last resort, scissors are sometimes used to trim recalcitrant flash. Fitting of springs, another job done manually by women, requires tough skin on the fingers.

A large section employing women has traditionally been the inspection department, where parts are checked before despatch. This job pays well and accordingly some men as well as women are now employed on it. Although the job is not unpleasant it is monotonous and requires sustained concentration as tiny faults have to be spotted on a bewildering range of products.

Most of these jobs entail a great deal of lifting of metal boxes with the parts in them. Workers at Jameses are covered by the rules of the Factories Act 1961 that "no employees should carry, lift or move a load likely to cause injury to them". (Gill & Whitty (1983) p.263).

In practice they often do lift boxes of parts which are heavier than is sensible because operators tend to fill the boxes with the heavier metal parts. The next operator, not wishing to waste piecework time, will lift the box rather than spend time fetching a supervisor and

getting parts emptied out of the over-heavy box. The causes of back problems are notoriously difficult to pinpoint, but it is noticeable that long-serving workers at Jameses, including Audrey and Brenda in this study, have serious problems with their backs. Audrey is now on invalidity benefit as a result.

Women & the Night Shift

One of the ways in which men's and women's jobs have traditionally been stratified within Jameses has been through the fact that the factory has only been allowed to employ women on night shift since 1982. Until the Sex Discrimination Act 1986 did away with the protective legislation governing the hours women could work in factories, laid down in the Hours of Employment (Conventions) Act 1936 and the Factories Act 1961, in order to employ women on night shift an employer had to apply to the Health & Safety Executive for a Special Exemption Order. Following a visit from the Factory Inspector to see the facilities available etc. this was granted on an annually renewable basis if it was "desirable in the public interest to do so for the purpose of maintaining or increasing the efficiency of industry or transport" (Factories Act 1961. Part 6. Para. 117). This section of the 1961 Act is still in force (Employment Gazette May 1987 p.268) despite the fact that the Sex Discrimination Act 1986 did away with some of the other

clauses of the 1961 Act which restricted the numbers of hours women were allowed to work, both regularly and on overtime, and prevented women from working in factories on Sundays.

Jameses had to be persuaded to apply for a Special Exemption Order. Pressure for this came mainly from Brenda but with encouragement from Sally and one or two other women who wanted to go on to the night shift, partly because it was better paid and partly because it fitted in with their domestic arrangements. The idea that women might work night shift at Jameses was originally sparked off at a meeting, arranged by the Northumbrian Industrial Mission, between women Shop Stewards from Jameses and W.D. & H.O. Wills in 1980. Wills had introduced a night shift and the women working on it were enthusiastic. This caused the women from Jameses to consider the idea seriously. Another impetus towards women working night shift came from the threat posed to women's jobs at Jameses by the introduction of the expensive new machines worked on the three-shift system. Not only did the shift requirement preclude women from applying for these jobs before the factory had a Special Exemption, but also the new machines did away with the need for the separate job of flash removal. The new machines were designed to make flash removal very easy. Since the operator of the new machines no longer has to use his time and energy on

the heaving around required on the traditional presses, he can remove the flash while waiting for the new machines to complete their cycle time. Two jobs have become one, and the physical strain involved in being a press operator has been cut out.

Brenda, a senior Shop Steward, was concerned about the actual and potential threat to women's jobs that this represented. When I talked with her about this issue she agreed that she had had a long battle on the subject with her male colleagues, the union district official and the management. She said, "I never got backing off anybody. I was amazed. The only person I did was Jeanette. But, you see, I know a lot of people who don't agree with shift working and a lot of them say, "I wouldn't let my wife come out and work shift work, and that. But there's a lot of men won't work shift work either... You see, this is where I find sometimes... you don't know ... You can't really take your union as an example 'cos they get on about saying that people shouldn't work shifts; it's bad for their health; it's bad for their digestive system - the sleeping habits and that change, and you can't get used to it and everybody should do what they can to try to do away with shifts and that. And yet, on the other hand, you've got new machinery coming in, new technology which must be worked round the clock and they tell you you must go along with "technical innovation" as they call it. Well, if you've got to go along with it unless people's

attitudes change about women and they're going to be given the chance of this, you're just going to have no women working in industry at all. Well, that's the way I can see it happening in a few years' time."

Caroline : "And is that really the basis upon which you fought this battle?"

Brenda : "Yes. That's what I believe in."

Caroline : "And you also said that part of the opposition you got off men is because they think there aren't going to be many jobs around and if there are any they should be for men, really?"

Brenda : "Yes."

Caroline : "I mean in other words they have very traditional attitudes about that?"

Brenda : "That's what I honestly believe in. I mean, the likes of females now, places have got to be changing. I mean new factories that are coming up now, they're working, like, three-shift systems and that for women, where they're working night shift and that. Just up the road from us there's a factory who've got shift patterns right round the clock for twenty-four hours. But you've got hospitals and you can name loads of industries where it's not unusual for women to work shift patterns. I don't know why they should try to stop it in engineering."

Caroline : "And do you think there will be women who volunteer for it?"

Brenda : "Yes. We've started two more women on constant

night shift that have applied for it since we got it in, which cannot be a bad thing. And people who have left to go to the factory up the road from Jameses, now that they've learnt that we've got shift working on would like to come back.... I think if they gave women just a trial period on it to find out if they liked it or not, then people might be more willing to do it. I think people's just frightened to take the step. It's like everything else that's new - they're frightened of changing. They're frightened to say on a permanent basis, "I'll do week and week about" or "I'll do night shift." I mean, I hear stacks of women say, 'Ee, it's only four nights on night shift. That would be smashing and we'd be finished on a Friday morning.' And then they say, 'Ee, I know, but what if we done it and we didn't like it?' On the other hand you'll probably find that some people who need a job and really need a job would do night shift for it."

Brenda gave an example of a woman with two unemployed sons who went on to night shift when she was threatened with redundancy on her day shift job.

Sally was one of the first women to go on to the constant night shift. I asked her how this had come about.

Sally : "It was from the Wills' women - you brought the women from Willses to talk about it.... I'd wanted it, you know. What used to happen, what used to get w' goat was when we used to be asking for things, for women and what have you, and all the other shop stewards used to say

'Well, why don't women come in on night shift?' I says, 'Well, just give us the chance and we'll be in on night shift', you know. Plus Richard (her husband) worked night shift all the time down at Swan Hunter's you see, and for about three years he was constant night shift and so for that three years I kept asking for it because it was like "never the twain shall meet"... So 'course when the Willses ladies come, that made us more determined you know, and every time I used to ask, you know, for night shift if there was jobs going on night shift - 'Can we go?' I mean, to this day Ellen Dunn would've had a job if they'd just let her stick it out for another couple of month. Because she would have went on night shift just like that! She always wanted night shift. There was four of us.... Millie didn't really want night shift (the older one we've got on night shift). She just didn't want to lose her job with her being a widow. She had put "day or night shift" in, so they hoyed her in between me and Mary as a chaperone. I would say that's the main reason why Millie got... an older one to keep the other two subdued I think. But I've always wanted it and eventually it was women's jobs they were taking away, see. There were so many women's jobs going to be lost...."

"I cannot remember... I think it must have been Brenda and Geordie (the convenor) that pushed for it, you know. And he came down one day, laughing. He says, 'What do you

think about going on night shift?' I said, 'I would love to.' He says, 'Well, all you've got to do is put in for the job.' But they not half kept w' hanging on, you know. Mind you, when they took w' for a trial on them to see if we could work the machines, I thought I would never do... I swore blind, when I went back to Mary, 'There's no way I could do that job.'"

It turned out that Sally had been wrongly instructed by the woman on the job on day shift who told her to fit these particular springs with her fingers when they were supposed to be done with a tool. The woman's fingers were so hard she could do them happily, but Sally wore the skin off her fingers and couldn't do her own job for a week. She thought to herself, "I would love to go on night shift, but not on this job." And then, all of a sudden I thought, 'Oh, to hell, it cannot be that bad' so... And I've never had a sore finger. I've never had one more blister since. It was just, I was doing them with my fingers and I shouldn't have been."

Caroline : "What sort of reaction did you get off the lads?"

Sally : "Terrible, absolutely terrible. They looked at you sheepishly... I don't know whether it was because they were watching their "p's & q's". Nobody spoke to you... The atmosphere - you could cut it with a knife. And it's an awful thing to say but one day there was a group of them standing talking and I jammed my finger or something

and I let out such a swear word! And after that they were just great. And we've never looked back. We're just 'one of the lads' now. I mean, they don't swear in front of w' if you know what I mean, but we're just one of the lads. You know, they can talk about anything. I mean we're invited to all the bachelor parties and that, if there's a wedding going on. It was just that one swear word broke the ice. It was ridiculous..."

Caroline : "So they very much felt that it was a male area where women didn't go, on the night shift?"

Sally : "Oh, yes. It was very male dominated. But they're great. We get on marvellous with everybody.... do anything for w', any mortal thing...but we still have w' tiffs."

I asked if any women had been recruited from outside the factory. Sally said, "I honestly don't think Jameses is asking for women, plus the dole probably think, 'Oh, night shift - we'll send a man up', type of thing you know, which is wrong because it's surprising how many women would work night shift just for the job. They wouldn't have us if they could help it. But they've got to have w' and there's no chance of us leaving."

In spite of having said this, Sally described what happened when two young women were recruited on to the

night shift from within the factory, when they were threatened with redundancy. "Now Carol would have stuck it, but little Jane... she was about to get married so she was badgering Carol, 'Oh, I hate this.' And when you're sitting - we were quite happy just plodding along with w' jobs - you're sitting round your break table and somebody says, 'I'm sick of this. I hate this' - it rubs off on you. And at the finish we ended all asking for our redundancy, the whole lot of w'. Well, that's sick. Well, Carol and Jane got their's but Carol's regretted it ever since, because she's never gotten another job and that's, what, nearly two years ago."

In these accounts of the process which led up to women being allowed to work night shift and their experience when working it, we see reflected, as it were in a prism, many of the issues about equal opportunities in relation to women and work. Underlying the whole issue is the rivalry between men and women and the fact that in our society men hold the power. The fear felt by the men in the situation described is that if women are allowed in it will deprive men of their jobs, possibly lead to a fall in wages and will mean that what had become an exclusively male area will become a mixed sex one. Hostility would also be felt on this last score if men were to be coming in to what had previously been an all female area or organisation. In both cases there is the feeling that one will have to be "on parade" for the opposite sex and

although this is stimulating in some ways, it also means making an effort. When women come into male areas there is hostility about having to moderate male conversation and language and that women will want to tidy up and introduce "feminine touches". When men come into female areas there is the fear that women's conversation will also have to be circumspect and that the men will take over because of what is felt to be their inherently greater power.

If hostility and rivalry between the sexes is one aspect of the dynamics involved in the night shift question just described, another is what are felt to be the dangers of sexual attraction. The opportunity for sexual activity in a largely deserted factory at night was clearly felt to be greater than in the day time. Though this was not directly stated in these recorded conversations, it has been acknowledged to be a factor in other conversations I have had, and it was implied in some of what is here quoted. The male stewards were reported as saying, "I wouldn't let my wife come out and work night shift and that". Sally felt that Millie had been sent as a "chaperone", "an older one to keep the other two subdued".

The issue of men not swearing in front of women is a standard reference point in any discussion of relations between the sexes in industry, and one which is puzzling,

since women swear too. The issue is, I believe, one of symbolic power. Because it is accepted that men should not swear in front of women, when they do so, it expresses contempt of the women who are present. The message is : "No decent woman would be here to hear this". This issue is touched on in Nichols & Armstrong (1976) in their discussion of the case of six women working with men in Chemco's Cement Works.

"At one level the antipathy between men and women is cultural in origin :

"Do you go to plant meetings?"

"Not now. We used to go but there's such a load of filthy bad language - even the Works Manager. And we said we wouldn't go any more - well, it's not right, is it? They ought not to if there's women there.

They wouldn't like their own wives to hear it."

"Men swear at work whilst women (at least in the presence of men) do not. In a society in which half of all women are working, the two sexes are still not brought up so that they can work happily side by side. "They only come in for the pin money" is not an attitude confined to a few misogynists in Chemco's Cement Works." (p.88).

In Sally's story of her swear word which broke the ice, we see that the conflict over women's invasion of a male area was resolved by treating the women as honorary men.

"We're just one of the lads." This solution to the issue

of sexuality in a group with one member of the opposite sex seems to be a common one. A girl apprentice in a heavy engineering works said the same of herself that she was "just one of the lads". I have experienced the same feeling as a woman chaplain in a group of clergymen and a male social worker who worked with a group of women told me that he is treated as if one of the women as far as their conversations go, though there was a tendency for the women to "look after" him when it came to drinks and food. In a sense the "one of the lads" solution as a way of dealing with the feelings of sexual conflict engendered in a group is actually a way of ducking the issue altogether - "In a society in which half of all women are working, the two sexes are still not brought up so that they can work happily side by side" - as a partnership of men and women.

Personal dynamics between men and women were part of the night shift issue but there were also wider social issues at stake which Brenda pinpointed when she described the conflict within Trade Unionism about wanting to go along with new technology to preserve jobs on the one hand and wanting to do away with unpleasant work patterns on the other. The whole issue of women working night shifts has split the feminist lobby in two. On the one hand the Equal Opportunities Commission published Health & Safety Legislation : "Should we Distinguish between Men and Women?" This concluded that : "There is no longer

justification for maintaining legal provision on hours of work which require men and women to be treated differently. Our overall recommendation must therefore be that legislation should be removed or, where health, safety and welfare demand it, replaced, so that it applies equally to men and women." (E.O.C. (1979) Chapter 10. Para.394)

On the other hand the National Council for Civil Liberties, Rights for Women Unit, published a booklet called The Shift Work Swindle (Coussins 1979) which opposes the recommendations of the E.O.C. document because they "are made in the context of a false concept of equal opportunity between the sexes"(italics). "Equality is blindly pursued by the E.O.C., for its own sake, without regard to the relative impact on men and women of equal provisions under the law. It should be the E.O.C.'s aim to achieve equality for women without deterioration of their working conditions, instead of equalising "down"... "If the E.O.C's recommendations were implemented, women would simply be equally vulnerable with men to the pressures of working long and unsocial hours to gain a decent wage. It is an insult to women for the E.O.C. to campaign on their behalf for such a spurious kind of equality"(p9).

The booklet goes on to attack the evidence adduced by the E.O.C. as "at best... inconclusive and at worst...

positively contradictory to the conclusions which are drawn from it" (*italics*) (p9). In the view of the booklet this was because the women who said they were willing to work shifts were only doing so under duress because of the lack of alternatives, the imperatives of childcare etc.

Certainly in the discussion of the night shift issue at Jameses we cannot help but be aware of the context of high unemployment outside the factory and of continuing redundancy within it in which the debate was taking place. These factors were a strong influence on several of the women mentioned by Brenda and Sally as wishing to work night shift. In an area of high unemployment where these women might be the only earner in a family of adults, working night shift, with the premium attached to it, would be an attractive proposition on financial grounds. Given this background the E.O.C's recommendations become an example of "equalising up" and not of "equalising down" which is not to affirm the general conditions of employment in the north east as ideal for either men or women or, indeed, for the companies for whom they work which seek to survive in a difficult competitive climate.

Women working on the shop floor at Jameses are in many ways an elite group of factory workers. The company is a member of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Employers and hence bound by national

agreements with the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions. So, through the Confederation, the women workers are represented by a powerful union structure which also represents skilled men. In this way they are in a far more powerful position than the majority of women factory workers in the north east who work in industries such as clothing and food, employing predominantly female labour. In such industries unions tend to be weak and to lack the traditional negotiating muscle of unions representing skilled men such as the AUEW, EEPTU¹ and the former Boilermakers' Society now merged with the General & Municipal Workers' Union. In day-to-day negotiations, the women workers at Jameses are represented by their shop stewards of the new G.M.B.A.T.U. Since this union also represents the "unskilled" men who work at Jameses, the women are in a stronger position than they would be if they were in a women-only negotiating position.

Jameses : Its Background & Setting

This chapter began with a brief reference to the history of Jameses and the importance, in the memories of the older workers, of the era when Harry Joy was Works Manager (the 1950s & 60s). People at Jameses look back to the days of Commander James and Harry Joy with much nostalgia. People in those days used, I am told, to sing while they worked. There was a great deal of joking, mutual help and

1. Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunication & Plumbing Union

often a department would organise a coach trip to a club at weekends. When I have asked people what has made the change between those days and the present, they will nearly always say, "This place hasn't been the same since Latec's (the multi-national) took over." (at the end of the 1960s). If I press them further they will say that much of the change came with "the new wages structure". It was striking that so many of those I spoke to for this study pointed to this as the instrument which had taken away the sense of community in the place and caused people to be out only for themselves. This issue will be explored in depth in the chapter on The Influence of Piecework on the Factory World.

Something suggested here is the great importance in a factory of its history and of the culture and traditions that have been built up over the years. Jameses is a factory in which the workforce is stable. Dating from the days when to get a job at Jameses was a guarantee of a good wage with a company of good reputation, workers have come and have stayed. Some of the older workers started in the riverside factory which Jameses moved from in 1956 into "the new factory". Many of the older workers therefore live in the riverside, inner city area of Newcastle, while those who joined the firm after it moved to the new factory, live in the communities east and north of Newcastle, both in areas of older housing and in new estates and the new town of Killingworth. Some travel

from the west end of Newcastle and some from south of the Tyne. Like all large engineering companies on Tyneside, it has therefore been both a very local institution and a more area-based one. The managers tend to live in the more middle class areas at the Coast and north of Newcastle, though some travel in from rural Northumberland. The factory's present site has remained a "green field" one, partly because the company bought a considerable area of ground round the new site to allow for expansion. This occurred insofar as an extension to the factory was built in 1970 and vacated in 1983 as the business contracted. The other land has never been developed and remains as grazing ground for ponies unofficially tethered there. Larks nest on the rough ground beyond the car park and many different varieties of wild flower grow there. Housing development has crept up to the borders of this land but the factory itself remains isolated. There are no nearby shops or eating places to which workers can pop in their dinner hour and in this way the factory has far less of a link with the local community than in the days when it was literally next door to many people in the dense housing of the riverside area.

One of the features of the reign of Harry Joy was that pigs were kept at the back of the new factory, fed on scraps from the canteen, and vegetables were also grown. A story was told me of how an apprentice was set to build

a pig sty. He had just laid a thick layer of mortar along a run of bricks when one of the pigs came and licked it up. The lad was terrified because he thought the pig would die and he would lose his job, the pigs being a major interest of Harry Joy's. Fortunately the pig's digestion proved equal to the mortar!

It is hard to imagine anything quite so colourful going on nowadays in the drabber world of recession, computer control and multi-national budgeting. Indeed, a very strong part of the culture of Jameses over the last few years has been the sense of having come down in the world as the effects of recession and international competition have bitten. As part of the contraction, the factory has moved back into the older part of its premises, vacating the extension opened in 1970, and the factory canteen has been closed. The fact that people no longer gather to eat together has detracted from the sense of corporate identity. Instead, people eat their lunches where they can - on the benches where they work or in their offices - and the only communal facility is a kiosk selling sandwiches and drinks.

The feeling of decline has been hammered home through successive redundancies which took the workforce from 1700 in 1977, 1400 in 1979 and to 650 in 1982. Many people have said to me variations on the theme of "I used to take a pride in my work and I really used to worry about it but

now I just do the minimum." This comes from managers as well as operators. When things were at their worst in 1982, the atmosphere was such that people were feeling, as redundancies occurred practically monthly, "the sooner this place closes and we can all go home, the better." This in spite of the fact that they knew they were very unlikely to get another job.

An important feature of the workforce at Jameses is that of age. While among the 399 male operatives (i.e. the "unskilled"), employed in 1984, the age spread was fairly evenly distributed with 63% over 35 and 53% over 40; among the 134 women operatives, 77% were over 35 and 65% over 40. Only 14% of the women were under 25 compared with nearly 19% of the men. This shows that the top-heavy age weighting among the women was not solely accounted for by the numbers leaving to have children. It shows a shift away from the employment of women by non-recruitment and redundancy in part explained by the dwindling number of the unskilled jobs done by women as new technology and the three shift systems associated with it are brought in. This was the concern of Brenda explored earlier in this chapter. She was also concerned about the drift away from a policy of employing women as concern about unemployment among young males became an issue of local concern. At her instigation the trade union had some success in persuading the management to agree to keep the proportion

of women to men in the factory on a one third to two thirds basis.

What has changed from the earlier, more successful days is that both the individual worker and the factory unit as a whole senses that it has become "just a number". The feeling of being a literal family concern, of the Jameses, has gone, and so to a great extent has the sense of being an individual company with a good reputation for a good product. In this feeling the individual worker shares in something which has taken place not only in Jameses but also to Tyneside as a whole. Shipbuilding, heavy engineering, steel and coal are not the backbone of the nation's industry and of its wealth creation in the way that they were. Tyneside has lost its position in the nation to the areas of new industrial growth in electronics and light engineering and to newer kinds of wealth creation in business and service which areas like Tyneside find it difficult to see as industry at all. Moving on to a national perspective we find, of course, the same pattern repeated as Britain has declined from her position of industrial preeminence on the world scene.

Major Factors Moulding the World of Jameses

This Chapter has highlighted some of the major factors which moulded the world of Jameses in the past and which underlay the experience of the women in this study who worked there when I talked with them in the period from

the autumn of 1983 to the summer of 1984, a relatively stable period in the factory's life.

These major factors are :

a) Product & Production Process

The combination of dealing with a product which comes in a vast number of subtly varied sizes and shapes, with a complicated production process made up of several small operations, results in opportunities for frustration of many kinds and leads to there being a large number of categories of job in the factory.

This situation in turn means that industrial relations are complex - there are many issues in terms of job content to be evaluated and negotiated and since the factory is run on a piecework system there are many issues and opportunities for dispute and negotiation over questions of payment. Since the product is almost infinitely varied, so are the questions in relation to payment.

b) Personnel Issues

Other issues that arise out of the description I have given are those concerned with health and safety matters; shiftworking and the segregation of men and women in particular job categories.

c) Management Style

Behind all these very immediate day to day questions there is the major issue of the change from local to multi-national management and the shift from a paternalist to a "scientific" style of management, and the changes in atmosphere that these are felt to have brought about. There are also indications of the way that trade union power is subtly altered by circumstances.

Before moving on, in the chapters on piecework, supervision and industrial relations, to explore in greater depth what the women in this study said about these issues and in particular what they said about them in relation to their experience at Jameses, we hear from Brenda what her views were of the factory world of Jameses and how it had changed over the years she had known it :

Brenda's Description of Jameses

Brenda started at Jameses in 1959 when she was 17. Her account of the factory and its life and of her reactions to it encapsulates the experience of many other people who work, or used to work, at Jameses.

"When I first went there, for the first few weeks, I didn't think I would stick it - not because of the job - it used to be the smell of the factory and the smell of the rubber. Now it doesn't bother us one bit. But I

always remember the first few weeks. I thought, 'I'll never get used to the smell in here'". It made her feel sick. It wasn't the job, the job was quite interesting. ".... 'fact I found it very interesting, but it was the smell at first, and the heat. I couldn't get used to the heat."

I asked what had interested her : "Just all the types of products that were done on the job. I mean you worked in the Press Shop but in that week you could have probably about 80 or 90 different types of dies in, and every one was different moulded. Some had two pieces, some had three, some was like a jigsaw puzzle fitted together. Some you had... we used to make carbons... and it was, like, the black powder and a little paper doiley thing where you used to put a load of soap in and make carbons like that. But obviously as the place expanded you couldn't cope with that type of handling. Now they've got the proper carbon presses. But it used to be very interesting because there was always something different. You had the same machine but all the dies an' that you got, were all different."

At the time, women worked this section of presses on the day shift and men worked there at night. There were nine women whom Brenda found "Very, very helpful. With nine people they were all friendly; there was no arguments and everybody used to come up and if you couldn't find

somebody you just shouted across to your mate and she'd come round and help you and say, 'Well, that's wrong', or 'This is the way you should do it'. You got more help than you ever realised. I mean they were on piecework then but they were still content to stop their own job and come up and show you. I mean, it took a while, 'cos when you first started off, every time you got a new die and that in, it was different to something you'd had in the day before and there was times you had to get up and go along to your mate and say, 'I've never worked this before. How do you do it?'".

The claim sheets for piecework payments were also highly complicated... "nothing like what they've got now... Then you used to have a sheet full of claims for sticky blanks, blank separates, cutting cords, trimming cords. There's none of that now it's all in with the price of the job's cut to the exact size. But then it was an experience just writing out your work sheet."

"They were a close-knit group. I mean we used to have trips and everything in the Press Shop then. I mean I used to organise a trip nearly every weekend after a while when I'd started there. We used to go to different clubs. We used to write away and ask if it was all right to bring a busload. And actually there's quite a few people at Jameses who are married now but they were single at the

time and they just met through having trips. We never had any bother. Wherever we went to, we were always welcome back again. We had no trouble, no arguments, everybody behaved theirself. It was really smashing. Everybody had a great time. We used to have a collection a few weeks ahead. It used to work out about sixty pence each for the bus... the clubs used to put on cheese, biscuits, sandwiches, and there used to be a dance band and that."

"Really, there's none of that now. The whole thing's changed and I think, when I think back to them days like then in Jameses, it was fantastic - the trips and the dances and that we used to have... The factory was smaller then of course. We had no new extension then. It was just one factory and you found that everybody just knew everybody. We used to have really good times. The trips used to be good. The outings to the clubs and that used to be good and now that's all just..." The trips ended, Brenda explained, when she was moved into another smaller department and could not continue to organise the trips for the Press Shop. I found it puzzling that no one had been willing to take the organising over from Brenda when these events had clearly been very popular. I suggested that perhaps the trips had filled a need at the time if the factory had not been open long on its new site and a group of new, young workers had been taken on who were pleased to find an opportunity for meeting and courting through these trips. But Brenda did not think this

explanation fitted. "I wouldn't say they were young people. I would say that out of the whole bus I was probably the youngest one. All the rest of them, in fact I would say 99% of them would all have been in the thirtyish to fortyish age group. There were very few young ones."

The success of the trips clearly owed a great deal to Brenda's powers of organisation which now she uses in her role as one of the leading shop stewards in the factory. Perhaps, too, times were moving on. It would have been 1963 or so when the trips ceased. At this period factory workers were becoming more affluent; more would have owned cars than five years before, and so the move began towards private outings rather than communal ones.

Brenda went from the large Press Shop into the small New Projects Department, just then being set up. "Although it was a small department it was a very close-knit department. There wasn't a lot of people in it, but you could do any job in that department. there was no grading like what you've got now, you know. And I often wonder if that was probably the best way, rather than the system we've got now at Jameses. I think when everybody was more or less getting the same pay and just went from job to job you haven't got half the problems you've got now. That's only my personal opinion, like". During her time in this

department, Brenda did five different operating jobs and also had spells as a clerk and as a planner. "You found that the press operators would even go and help one another then, you know, while now they haven't got time. They're just thinking about - you know - theirselves, and their own money they're making. But I often wonder, we've got a wage structure now which to me I've never really agreed with it. I think there's too many big differences and too many big gaps between jobs and grades and B.S.I's¹ across the board. I often think back to them days when we used to get the same rate more or less, you know. I mean it was different from the women to the men like. But I think it was better then because everybody would 'muck in' and get a job done."

These memories of Brenda's are illuminating in a number of ways. Perhaps we may be inclined to feel that distance must have lent enchantment to what she remembered of her early days at Jameses: people helping one another out; wanting to go out on social occasions together; and having pleasant evenings without any conflicts developing. What she remembers, however, chimes in with what others have told me. She is not the only person, as we shall hear, who identified the change in the payment system as having been responsible for breaking down the co-operation

1. British Standards Incentive - the type of payment-by results scheme used at Jameses

between workers, though, clearly as a shop steward, Brenda was hesitant to conclude that the present system, which has brought better pay levels to workers, should also have brought negative results.

On a more personal note it is perhaps not surprising that she should look back with pleasure to her role as organiser of the popular bus trips. Her more recent experience has been of much more negative kinds of organising which her position as shop steward has involved her in : negotiation over successive redundancies and negotiation over the vacating of the "new extension" which she mentioned as not having been built in 1960. This was opened in 1970 and vacated in 1983/84, having been built at what turned out to be the peak of the company's size. It is this kind of contrasting experience which gives those who work at Jameses a sense of having seen better days. The past appears as a time of much greater security and optimism than the present or future.

Another reflection which Brenda's reminiscences can give rise to in the reader is that here was clearly a young woman with considerable organising ability and someone who had a very positive attitude to her work - she found the varieties of product and the details of how they were made "very interesting", yet it was only by becoming a shop steward that Brenda's management ability could be used in

the company. As a woman she could not serve her time and follow the path into management which was open to time-served men starting on the shop floor. The company still has no mechanism for recruiting able shop-floor workers who are not time-served into management training courses while the increase in the number of managers with degrees and other higher educational qualifications militates against such developments. Whether the introduction of the extended Youth Training Scheme which is largely replacing the traditional apprenticeship system will in the future help to break down the barriers to movement from shop floor to management roles in this and other companies, remains to be seen.

In this connection it is interesting to note that in Brenda's memories of her early days at Jameses, managers do not appear. In a passage I did not quote, she mentioned that her training was given by two of the older women operators. In the passage quoted she described going to other operators, rather than supervisors, for help and advice over how to make unfamiliar parts. Her description of the bus trips was of events that were entirely the concern of the shop-floor workers. This illustrates the stratified nature of industrial life which, in spite of the run-down of the workforce, has changed very little since the time Brenda described.

CHAPTER 9

THE INFLUENCE OF PIECEWORK ON THE FACTORY WORLD

The New Wage Structure & Its Influence on the Factory as Community

In the last section we heard Brenda lamenting the decline of the factory as a social organism in which human relationships could flourish. Like many other workers at Jameses she attributes this decline principally to the introduction of the new wage structure in 1974. I asked her, "When you look back at the time you've been there, which is a long time really, what strikes you about how it's changed? I mean, are there important ways in which it has changed do you think as a - well, not so much from a technological point of view - more from a sort of human point of view?"

Brenda : "The changes from the human point of view? Well, I think since the Equal Pay Act and that come in, and the new wage structure was partly made up because of the Equal Pay Act where they had to get the same payment for the same, equal rights of work, you know. And I mean if a man was doing the same job as a woman they had to get the same pay, you know. And when they brought the Equal Pay Act in which came in round about the same time as the Equal Opportunities and Employment Protection Act, I think

that seemed to change people's attitudes in the factory. It changed it in the fact that the new pay structure... - before that people used to sing and be happy and they were quite content to earn their time and a half on the old system. They were more friendly and they had time to do things for you. Honestly since they've made this new wage structure of ours, people's gone more miserable, more depressed. They always argue about the big.. every time there's a pay rise comes round we get into the arguments about the differential between the people in B grade and the people in G grade, you know. The argument's always the same, that why should they get more?"My loaf of bread's the same", which is fair enough, but I think since we got the wage structure in, that's where I can see the change in the human side in our factory. People just haven't got time to lift their heads and speak to you or help you or anything now. Because they know when they're spending ten minutes or quarter of an hour with you they're losing money for it. It's that close in some cases. I think the human side definitely changed when that new wage structure come in. As I say, you could go through the Press Shop and they'd be singing, and you know it used to be really good. Now they just haven't got time. Even the Christmas time and that, people had time to put up a few decorations and have their paper hats and make a little tree or something like that. They haven't got time. You saw them for the first year and now you

just find that they're gradually disappearing. But I honestly think that - that's my belief and that's when the human side changed in our place." Although there had always been an incentive scheme at Jameses, the new scheme was a much more comprehensive one that was supposed to iron out disparities between departments and to be more "scientific" in its approach.

The Introduction of the New Wage Structure

At the time when the new structure was being planned, the company produced a booklet of 20 questions and answers about the scheme.

Question 2 was : "Why is a new wage structure necessary at all?"

Answer : "A number of reasons can be given :

- a) Current earnings are not at present in all cases directly related to effort, responsibility, etc., and this is basically unsatisfactory to Management and Trade Union alike.
- b) Piecework earnings sometimes vary from job to job and from area to area, again, an unsatisfactory situation.
- c) The existing scheme has been in operation for many years and is now outdated by modern approaches in many respects.

- d) It is generally agreed that too high a proportion of an individual's wage is dependent upon his piecework earnings.
- e) The present structure has reached the stage where administrative problems exist and are growing constantly."

The "modern approaches" introduced in the new scheme included a system of Job Evaluation which graded shop-floor workers' jobs on a scale from A to G (G being the highest grade). Points were, and are, given for the physical and mental demands of the job and the degree of responsibility carried. (Some of the parts produced at Jameses are, for example, used in aircraft and therefore there are safety implications for those who inspect them for faults). In addition to the grading system there was also to be a piecework system based on the timing of "jobs" by the MTM 2 system. Question 19 of the 20 questions was : "I have heard a lot about MTM 2 - what is it?"

Answer : "Simply, it is a way of measuring work without a stop watch, timing by analysing the motions the person makes and applying times to these motions which are well established and recognised internationally. Where a machine or process time are involved, a stop watch will be used as well. The observer notes your motion pattern and writes it down in a form of 'shorthand' - the observer

will explain it briefly to you on request."

One cannot help thinking that such an arcane-sounding system might need rather more than a brief explanation! Many of the questions in the series are very much more direct than the answers, which in many cases were variations on "This has not yet been decided." For example, Question 14 : "What form of wage payment system will be used?"

Answer : "This has not yet been decided and the Management and Trade Union must mutually agree the method."

Question 15 : "Our piecework earnings are calculated one week and paid the following week - will this continue?"

Answer : "This is another area where detail (sic) decisions of this type have yet to be finalised but Management and Trade Union will jointly be examining the advantages/disadvantages of various systems."

In other cases the answers are clouded by the use of technical or bland language :

Question 16 : What have Time Values to do with money?"

Answer : The answer is "nothing" directly. The Union will negotiate the rate of pay for meeting standard performance (see Question 17).

Time values will be issued that allow standard performance to be attained.

Rates of pay and time values are not directly related."

Question 17 : "I have heard the phrase 100 B.S.I. as Standard Performance mentioned - what does this mean?"

Answer : "This phrase is an expression of a rate of output which experienced operatives will achieve without over exertion as an average over the working day whilst being paid on an incentive or piecework basis. Time values will be set to allow this rate of output to be achieved, given the above conditions. "

In fact the system that was introduced determines wage levels for each worker by taking an average of B.S.I. (British Standard Incentive) performance over a three week period. Shortages of work, machine failures and other interruptions are compensated for by the payment of workers on Average Pay & Performance. Such solutions to the anomalies and exceptions that any comprehensive system is bound to throw up were catered for by the negotiation, alongside the new wage structure, of a substantive

agreement between the management and the union representing the shop floor workers. This is a kind of bible covering all aspects of matters at issue between the management and union. Copies of it are kept by the leading shop stewards and it has provided the basis for management/union negotiation since 1974.

In an article entitled "The Introduction of a Wage Grading & Productivity Plan in a Large Engineering Factory", D.A. Gotting describes a similar-sounding process to that which took place in Jameses. In this case the management were seeking to introduce a package of changes at the same time : 1) measured daywork; 2) a new wage structure; 3) new machinery for consultation and negotiation between union and management. "In addition there were several conditions within the plan that required the acceptance and adherence of the manual workers. On the whole these were spelled out in vague and general terms. There were 15 conditions and they were expressed in little more than 600 words." (Gotting 1971(p.314)). In spite of the vagueness of some of the answers to the 20 questions in the Jameses' booklet it does run to over 1,000 words in dealing just with the new wage structure.

In describing the proposed changes in the engineering factory D.A. Gotting writes : "First, as a push for greater efficiency and productivity in the utilization of manpower, the plan seemed to be designed to eradicate many

of the issues that have traditionally been settled through the process of bargaining by subjecting them instead to a process of rational planning and determination based on the use of such techniques as work study and job evaluation... Secondly, the plan contained a variety of new rules covering worker behaviour, new principles expressing managerial expectations of worker behaviour and new conditions cutting across established patterns of social organisation among the manual workers. Thus the plan required of the manual workers more than mere acceptance; it required of them to change their behaviour and conform to a variety of new rules and principles. Yet ... management underestimated the importance and the problems of changing behaviour, strove for a formal acceptance of the plan and assumed that its acceptance would necessarily imply conformity to its provisions."

(op. cit.p.316)

Practical Results of the New Wage Structure

It is not clear whether the management at Jameses thought that the new wage structure and substantive agreement would do away with the need for constant management/union negotiation by substituting "a process of rational planning and determination based on the use of such techniques as work study and job evaluation" but if so they will have been disappointed since the whole nexus of grading, crossed with timed work, is a fruitful source of

anomaly and exception which demand sorting out. In addition, the introduction of new products, new machinery and new working practices have to be negotiated. On the positive side the substantive agreement does provide a mutually agreed structure and context within which negotiation can take place.

Like the workers in the factory described by Gotting, the workers at Jameses expressed resentment about the way that the new incentive scheme cut across their "established patterns of social organisation". Brenda said, "People just haven't got time to lift their heads and speak to you or help you or anything now.. I think the human side definitely changed when that new wage structure come in". She went on to say that in her opinion this had also influenced the way people in the factory responded to Christmas time and how they no longer put up Christmas decorations. Monica also commented on the effects of the new incentive scheme in describing a situation in which a woman who had worked in Monica's department twelve years before had applied for a job back there, transferring from another department. The woman found she hated it and Monica commented, "I think she thought it was like it was twelve years ago and it's not."

Caroline : "Is it harder work?"

Monica : "Much harder. It's the piecework. It's faster now with all the times being changed. You know, you got them in hours before and now everything's in minutes.

You're just racing to beat the clock. That's probably how we're all tired as well. This structure that we are on now, this new wage structure, has changed every person in there. It's all money, you see. They're all watching what you're doing and you're watching what they're doing and one's frightened case somebody gets better than her. That is piecework I think. It was spoilt when they put the piecework on."

Monica points here to the way that the new wage structure has set worker against worker and destroyed the sense of co-operation and solidarity that she implies existed under the old scheme. In her department, Inspection, workers were restricted under the old system and also at first under the new system to the amount of bonus or incentive they could achieve. Under the old Performance Incentive Scheme the inspection workers were only allowed to be paid for achieving a 90 (later 95), incentive rate. This was to encourage careful inspection. The result was that on a Friday afternoon those who had "made their time" would help those in the department who had not yet achieved their limit. The system of putting a ceiling on their earnings in fact continued after the new B.S.I. system was introduced. The shop steward remembered going to an Appeal Tribunal on the matter set up by the Confederation of Shipbuilding & Engineering Unions. The new limit was fixed at 105 BSI. She was asked by the Tribunal if she

got paid extra for making 110 BSI. "No". Did she get paid less for making 100 BSI? "Yes". The comment made was : "How do you always lose?" After this the system of limiting the performance levels of inspection workers was discontinued and checks on shoddy work were left to be made by supervisors who could ask for it to be re-done without pay.

We may observe here that some of the blame for destroying the co-operative relationships between workers that Monica put on the new wage structure should, more precisely, be laid on this abandonment of the system of limiting performance. But this cannot be the whole story for workers from other departments, such as Brenda, and as we shall hear later, Margaret made similar points about the effect of the new wage structure.

Before leaving the points made by D.A. Gotting in his article, however, it is worth noting his criticism of the way that the management in the factory he describes went about introducing their new plan. He makes this general observation : "The way in which managers attempt to introduce a productivity plan, and the way in which manual workers react to their initiative, dramatically highlights the concrete features of worker-management relations. Second, the way in which managers and manual workers act towards each other over a proposed productivity plan is evidence of the way in which they are likely to conduct

their relations in the future (after the plan has been put into effect)" (op.cit.p.314) He goes on : "In the case that I discuss, management sought to gain acceptance of their plan without subjecting it to an arduous process of bargaining with the manual workers. When opposition to the plan among the manual workers became apparent, management resorted to a strategy aimed at undermining their opposition" (op. cit. p.314).

The management at Jameses were not accused by the workforce of a failure to consult. The process of carrying out work study, department by department was, according to the 20 Questions booklet, to start in May 1972 and end in October 1973; though, no doubt realistically, it adds, "It is stressed that the timetable shown below is only provisional and may be subject to constant amendments. In any event you will be notified through local meetings when your particular section will be involved." If Gotting is correct in thinking that the manner in which a productivity plan is introduced will determine the tone of worker/management relations when it is in operation - and this seems a reasonable assumption - then Jameses scheme might be said to have increased the level of day-to-day negotiation and to have increased the importance of shop stewards.

Increasing the Importance of Shop Stewards

Phyllis was involved in the negotiation at the time when the new wage structure was being introduced. She became a shop steward in the midst of the process. Prior to this she had not been actively involved in union affairs. "Unions didn't interest me", she said. But she had had considerable experience as a supervisor in a sweet factory and when she saw what she considered wrong policies being adopted she pointed this out. I asked her how she had become shop steward. "Opening my big mouth! They were reorganising. They were negotiating a new method of pay. It was prior to the spell before it was supposed to be equal pay for women and men doing the same or similar work and they were negotiating a whole new wage structure. It was the grading system that they were on about - Grade A, Grade, C, D or whatever.. And this was prior to the thing being accepted." Phyllis had been off work for seven weeks looking after her father and when she came back she found decisions had been made. "While I was away it had been negotiated and decided that the Cutting room should be put into sections, you see. Well, prior to that, all right, there was the scarfing, there was the air guillotines, the tube slicing, the benches, but there was no question of, 'Ee, love, will you help them out on there?' And people did it, you know. But they had decided to make it sections. You see, this was for the grading system. And when I came back to work they said it

was sections, you know. So I said, 'Well, that's ridiculous!' 'Well, that's what they've negotiated. It now will come in sections.' I said, 'Well, that's stupid!' I said, 'It really is. Why didn't you keep it all one department, then you would all get the same grade and be interchangeable, the same way as you've always been? 'It's sections!' (but of course, much more dramatically expressed!). 'Well', I says, 'you're so silly'. So Eva says, 'What do you mean?' So I says, 'Well, take you for instance, Eva. You've been here a lot of years and you've worked on the tube slicing but you're the last one to come on to these benches from the tube slicing.' She says 'Yes'. I said, 'Well, supposing there's a pay-off - last in, first out'. I says, 'You're last in; the first one out'. 'Like Hell!' (I mean Eva could swear!). I says, 'It's sections ; not in our department; it's sections. That's how it would work.' 'Well, dear me, we must tell them! It wouldn't work'".

Phyllis continued with her explanation. "Anybody who came off the tubes on to here whatever grade they get they would get their grade until such time as they were permanently transferred on here. "I says, 'If you had a lower grade and they had a higher grade, she'd be automatically working for more money than you.' Na, na, that's not on.' I says, 'Well, that's the way it is if you've accepted sections, bound to be.'"

As a result of this the shop steward was besieged with complaints and decided to give up the role. Phyllis was asked if she would take it on and she said, "Well, I don't want to but I've been shouting my mouth off... so I may as well put myself in the position to be shouted at." It was not a role she enjoyed. "I was never on a negotiating panel - I didn't fit in to that extent. In fact I didn't fit in at all." Phyllis did not take to seeing industrial relations from an adversarial point of view. "A fair way of thinking always got knocked back I found. One thing used to get my back straight up - when they were negotiating for an increase they always quoted the lowest paid, you know, and used that as a negotiating step. But as soon as there was money talked, on the table, and there was a chance that, say a labourer could take a 30/- rise and a press operator just get £1 to, sort of, even the balance, no way would they have it. They wanted their differentials and they wanted them pro rata. I used to think, 'Dear me, that's wrong'. It was the same when they were negotiating rises after this new wage structure had been supplemented, you know. To me it was wrong, because they weren't doing anything more for the money they were getting.. It was purely cost of living that was demanding sort of, more money. Well, it didn't matter whether you were a labourer or a director, the cost of living affected you just the same. It cost the labourer the same amount of electricity to boil his kettle as it did the managing

director, and I used to say, 'Well no, it should be across the board, a rise across the board. You've got your differential in your grading!'

This account of Phyllis's makes clear how the changes brought in with the new wage structure divided groups of workers and individuals against one another and how the importance of shop stewards was increased because they were the negotiators.

These points were also made by Margaret. In discussing how the union grew in importance she said, "It grew important because you worked hour for hour. Well then they brought the piecework in and they were trying to push two hours work into an hour's work, the management were. And the union stepped in, you see, and said, 'Oh no, we don't mind an hour and ten minutes but we're not going to have two hours.'

Working on Incentive

I asked Margaret what effect the new incentive scheme had had.

Margaret : "Crippled people! Crippled their minds, greed. It crippled people's mind because of the money; the greed. They were doing somebody else's job.. more...they were going to get - which it did do away with a lot of people's work. But they were capable of doing it and not being satisfied

with, shall we say, £80 a week. They'd know they could make 100. So they would go for that £100 a week, knowing it's going to put somebody who cannot make the £100 to be the first to be out. The management love that.

Management now would - which is only right that - would employ two people doing five people's work 'cos they're only paying two people's employment stamp. And some people are willing to do five people's work 'cos they're going to get £200 but they should think if there was five people working there, there would be £500 instead of costing the management £400. So the management are saving £100. That's how I look at it."

Caroline : "So you mean it set individuals against each other?"

Margaret : "Of course."

Caroline : "Instead of the sense that the whole of the workforce was sort of together.."

Margaret : "Working together! they didn't. They just broke apart. I mean they were doing - they were killing themselves. They were going out full blast from 7.30 a.m. till 4 p.m., not everybody but some of them, killing themselves, just to get, shall we say, another £15 or £20 a week extra. Management loved that. Somebody working from the buzzer till the next buzzer, not even stopping if they didn't want to go to the toilet or anything. They loved that 'cos they were getting the production at a low cost. That's my impression. I used to always say it

should be sixty/forty of 100%. Sixty percent to the management and forty percent to the worker. But the way them people worked, some people that I knew, they wanted more than the forty percent. They wanted the sixty and the management the forty. So that's where all the overheads became so..." Margaret said the machines hadn't changed but people speeded up. I asked her if people got more tired and if it affected their health.

Margaret : "Oh yes. Definitely. They worked much faster, much harder. They really worked hard. When they brought this B.S.I. in, the British Standard Incentive has really shown that we in the past thought we were hard worked, but we've been lazy. Not lazy in the respect that we knew we were lazy. We thought we were doing the right output. This B.S.I. has brought the pace out in everybody. I mean, they were like machines, themselves. Some men, the machine couldn't work quick enough for them."

Caroline : "And do you think that does have its costs?"

Margaret : "Oh, yes. Well it ruins them. They're just robots. They haven't got that... I mean at one time you could have a bit conversation and all that. But the latter end of them days up there, nobody had time to talk. And even if people went over to say such and such, or what not, they never stopped work. They worked all the time. They didn't stop because they had a goal to reach you see. They had a goal to get this British Standard Incentive out, and they knew if they lost it, if they slowed up,

they knew they weren't going to lose just £2 a week or so. It dropped your B.S.I. way down so they wouldn't do it, you see. They wouldn't stop and talk. They wouldn't - not that that's wrong - management love that - you don't want them to stop and talk. But they just didn't have time for anybody's troubles or something like that, you know."

Caroline : "And I mean, I suppose it's difficult to know this, but do you suppose that it did have effects when they were at home in terms of family life?

Margaret : "Of course it would have. It would have an effect on them, Caroline. It would have an effect on them physically, monetary as well. Because if you're a man working and have a family, and shall we say that your wage, just for a figure of speech, is £100 a week and suddenly your B.S.I. goes down and your income drops to £80. What are you going to do? And what's the wife - it causes a lot of arguments."

Mary : "'Cos you have that wage for a month and then it could pick up or drop again."

Caroline : "So that's two fours are eight. So that's £80 lost over the month.

Margaret : So the wife would say, 'Well, you mustn't be working', being oblivious to what goes on in our (factory)". (Here our conversation was interrupted).

Incentive Versus Co-operation

The question of the co-operation between women factory workers and the effect of piecework on this is a subject discussed by T. Lupton (1963) in "On the Shop Floor" in the sections concerning the Wye Garment Company : "The productive system - in which I include the system of wage payment - encouraged individualism. The layout, and the attitudes and expectations of the workers, discouraged spontaneous co-operation either to help or hinder management's plan. When, due to the breakdown of the planned system of co-operation - either because of defects in the system itself or because of the intrusion of haphazard factors such as absenteeism - the workers' expectations of a "fair day's pay for a fair day's work" or "a steady supply of work on the table" were frustrated, they reacted as individuals. Their common grouse did not result in a common protest or a common effort to control the system in their own common interests."(p68). In Jameses, with its much stronger union organisation than is traditional in the clothing industry, workers react as individuals but they react by going to the shop steward and expecting the steward to take up the cudgels on their behalf.

In pursuing this question about co-operation, Lupton disusses an instance where fellow workers had given over their tea break to unpicking work in which one woman had inadvertently used the wrong coloured thread. Lupton

comments, "It would be unwise to over-emphasise the solidarity of No. 3 Unit, since this solidarity did not extend so far as to touch significantly the value placed on individual striving to maximize earnings. People were prepared in this case to sacrifice their free time, but they were seldom prepared to help others out in working time - although this was not unknown - since this would have severely affected their own capacity to earn. On another occasion, when, owing to a change in style of garment, a large number of collars were wrongly assembled, the worker who was responsible was sympathised with, but was left to fend for herself. Spontaneous co-operation was rare. The workers accepted the situation which management had created, in which co-operation was expected to follow from the pursuit of her own interests by each individual. Resentment was expressed by individuals when this "built-in" co-operation broke down for any reason and adversely affected their capacity to earn; "They told us that time and motion meant that I would always have work on my table, and it is up to them to see that it is there" was one common expression of this attitude to management and supervision". (op. cit pp 66-67)

This "built-in" co-operation is more obviously part of the structure of a clothing factory where a line of workers will all be working on different stages of the assembly of a single garment than it will be in an engineering factory

like Jameses. In Jameses the process concerns a multiplicity of parts which are passed from one department to another for the successive stages of production, for example, moulding, knifing, painting. The result of this is that frustration is expressed vis à vis departments for sending "rubbish" down the line thus wasting other workers' time on "scrap". Frustration is also expressed with management for allowing bottle necks to develop with work piled up waiting to be done in one department while another is saying "we've got no work". Nevertheless management here is also relying on the in-built pressure to co-operate which a piecework system helps to stimulate.

Lupton's judgement was : "It seemed to me that such solidarity as there was, was the expression of the sharing of a common situation vis à vis management and other groupings, a negative thing, rather than something with positive content or purpose. This would explain why No. 3 Unit seemed to be the most cohesive of the three. No. 3 Unit had a grievance as a unit, in addition to the grievance of its members as individuals about work shortages, tight rates and the like. The grievance was that No. 3 Unit was treated badly in the matter of work allocation. It was said that they were given the awkward, badly paying work, and that the other units received more favoured treatment." (op.cit.p67) In Jameses the issue of "rubbish jobs" arises more in relation to the allocation

of work by the supervisor to individual workers than it does to groupings.

The Role of the Supervisor in Relation to Piecework

The responsibility of the supervisor for allocating work was something which Margaret, as a supervisor, took very seriously and which caused her to worry when she went home at night. "I found when this piecework came in people were eating it, drinking it and sleeping it, and I found it was getting to me. Because I was saying to myself, 'Now that person got treble time yesterday; that person didn't. I'll have to work it so it balances itself out.' And I used to be sitting alone on my own thinking, 'I'll do that.' They say that once you come out of work you should sever yourself, forget about it. But it's hard to put it out of your mind, you know, if you find you've slipped up and someone's been on a cushy job all day and you've forgotten about that and you've got somebody on that hard job all day which you usually split - turns you know - half days. Ye heavens! 'Cos you know for a fact even if they're a good person to work with or to work for you, it's still in their minds. 'She's been on that all day, looka'. And it got to me and I used to think, 'Well, I wouldn't like it myself, being mucked here and mucked there'."

Her use of the work/ "sever" here graphically communicates her sense of the living continuity between herself at work

d/

and herself at home. What Margaret says here shows how much the first line supervisor has to bear the brunt of implementing management policies over productivity and wages and how ambivalent the supervisor can feel about being a member of the management or of the shop floor. We will return to these issues in the section on the women's experience of being supervisors. Margaret described her efforts to maintain a just distribution of "good jobs" and "bad jobs". Audrey described a situation in which the foreman, who was in his department responsible for the distribution of work, opted out of the responsibility and allowed two women to dominate his department and to choose their own jobs.

Audrey returned to work at Jameses after a spell working elsewhere. "And I came back to Jameses and I always remember coming in with one of the girls from the Inspection and she'd said, 'Oh where are you going to work?' I said, 'Oh, D department'. 'Oh dear, you'll not like it there!' I said, 'Well I worked there before'. She says, 'Oh yes, but there's two kingpins in there now', she says. 'You'll not get any good jobs. There's two girls in there... and they rule the department', she says, 'and you'll not get any time in there', she says. 'They're hated. Nobody'll go and work in there now'." It is interesting that the point immediately made in this encounter on arrival was about the influence of the "two

kingpins" on piecework and wages and not their bad language or the atmosphere that was generated, although from what Audrey went on to say these were also issues.

When Audrey started to work in the department - which she did in spite of the fact that one of the kingpins said to her, 'I don't know why you got started because I told (the foreman) we didn't need anybody. There's not enough work for us let alone another full time. I think he's going to send you to A Department', - she discovered how the "system" in D Department worked. "The girls on the department then used to go and pick whatever job they wanted off the floor. I mean, the only department in the factory that was allowed to do that. And the poor operator, Jock, he - even if the job was in the middle of fifty stillages - he had to move all those stillages and get that job out. That was how stupid it was worked."

Caroline : "And I mean what happened about orders that were waiting to be despatched, that were unpopular. Did they just get left?"

Audrey : "Didn't matter! They got left and you see the new ones (i.e. workers) that came on didn't know what they were picking. So you went down and just said, 'Well, I'll just have that', with the result you were getting the rubbish all the time and these two girls, their time was way up high, you know. And of course, the foreman, just

did it for peace. He was too nice to be a boss as far as I was concerned."

Expectations about Wages

The views of the women at Jameses lend support to the observation of T.Lupton : "It seemed to be that every worker in Workroom X had a clear idea of what her "wages" ought to be each day or week. The expectations of the workers corresponded closely to those of management. The management had decided on the £5 15s 0d datum as a reasonable level of earnings for an adult semi-skilled worker, on the grounds that it offered a good deal more than the minimum time rate to the average worker, and more still to the worker with greater skill. It also compared favourably with the rates in comparable jobs in other industries. The workers were quite prepared to accept this figure as a datum. The other element in the concept of "my wages" was derived by reference to past earnings. But if the workers were prepared to accept management's view of what constituted "a fair day's pay", and were prepared to work hard on piecework to "make it", they also expected management to create the conditions which made it possible for hard work to produce the "wages".

... It was when, in spite of hard work and of willingness to work hard, the worker found herself not able to make her money that she expressed dissatisfaction.

Although there was no fundamental disagreement between management and the workers about the principle of the scheme, the workers judged it unfair if for any reason other than a refusal to work hard, throughout the day, they failed to make their wages." (op. cit. p43).

In Audrey's opinion the workers in the department where they were left to help themselves were not really happy. "There was an undertone because everybody knew it shouldn't be allowed". After a time the two "kingpins" left; "and you know that department changed completely. The work was shared out evenly and no bother whatsoever... from then on the department just seemed as though everybody got friendly. There was no nastiness because the jobs were shared out fairly and instead of you going picking your jobs they were brought to you by the service operator which was correct. If he used to get a good job he would share it out among the girls. And everything progressed from there." This seems a good example of how "the expectations of the workers corresponded closely to those of management."

The Role of the Union 'Appeals Rep.'

A further refinement of the piecework system at Jameses is that the union has representatives trained in the MTM2 system associated with it. This was described in the 20 Questions & Answers as "a way of measuring work without a

stop watch, timing by analysing the motion the person makes and applying times to these motions which are well established and recognised internationally. Where a machine or process time are involved, a stop watch will be used as well."

Audrey was one of those who became a union "Appeals Representative". She had already taken on the role of training officer for her department and then become its first aid officer "And then they came and asked if I would go and sit a test to see if I could go on the Methods. I wasn't very keen to do that really because I felt as if I was getting older and couldn't be bothered with all these extra things. I had enough to come home to and cope with dinners and cleaning the house as well as going out. But, "Oh well, just go and see how you come on"... But it was a job which worried us; I always felt as if I wasn't quite good enough for that. It might have just been because I was nervous but I didn't like to have to go and time people and think I was going to cut men's wages. I didn't like that, which - this is what happens - and I wasn't very happy in that. I did it but I was glad when it was finished. I was a union representative but, you see, although you were a union representative there was no way that you could get round the Methods' times. You see, the men on the floor, the women on the floor, they would get a time off the Methods and they would say,

'Well, that's not good enough. I can't do that in that time.' So then they would send for the union rep to do a time on them to see if the time was fair. Well, I've never heard of anybody finding a better time than what the Methods gave. Because they - I mean - that was their job. There was no way that they were going to give a wrong time. So you were really doing a job that you didn't need to do. It was just from the top, for face, that you went and did it. In fact in some ways your time was tighter. You could cut that and of course I didn't like that because the job I had to do on a chap in the Flash Department, his times were cut considerably and I couldn't do anything about it because my times came out the same. So that chap was going to lose about £20 a week, which isn't very nice.... So really it was a waste of time. It was just a top show job, the union rep, because whatever the Methods did you couldn't, you couldn't find a flaw in it. How could I find a flaw in a person's job? I mean, that was their job, every day. I was only sent mebbes once in six month to do it. I mean, they were on top of the job, you know. We were groping in the dark a lot of the time and I didn't think that was a fair way at all. I think there should have been a permanent union representative in Methods, which is what I suggested. That was the only fair way you could keep on top of that job, because once I was back on the benches for six months, that job went out of my mind. There were so many formulas to that job, to work out times, you couldn't keep

them in your mind so really you weren't being fair by being took up (they maybe would give you a freshener for a day) and throw you on to the floor to time people. You weren't qualified. It just wasn't fair and that's why I said I wouldn't go back on it again. I think there should have been a permanent representative from the union employed in the Methods Office all the time as an Appeals Rep, so that you could be as good as the Methods Department."

Audrey here expressed a pessimistic view of the role of the union appeals representative. Her view that the union never wins appeals over timings of jobs is not borne out in practice. A whole department, on at least one occasion, had their times improved as a result of an appeal. Her point about the discrepancy between union appeals representatives, who only work occasionally on timing jobs, while those who work for the Work Study department (the Methods) are doing this all the time, is an important one. More recently, two union representatives only have worked on appeals, which must help to get over this discrepancy.

Piecework in the Clothing Industry

At least at Jameses there was some kind of union check kept on the management timing system. The issue of union monitoring of the timing of jobs was not one discussed by

T. Lupton in his study of the Wye Garment Company. This was very likely because the weakness of the unions in the clothing industry meant that they had not managed to negotiate such an arrangement.

In the chapter on The Clothing Industry we heard how Julie left a job in a clothing factory when she found herself at loggerheads with a manager about how many skirts it was possible to elasticate in a day. There was no union appeals procedure and Julie's frustration arose because although "the work study man came and stood over (her) all day" no facts were produced about which she could argue. The manager just said, "I'm sure somebody else could do it quicker." This assertion of belief as opposed to factual argument is an aspect of the piecework philosophy explored in an article which will be discussed shortly. Before leaving the subject of piecework in the clothing industry, however, it is worth noting the views of Ron Burton, Chairman of the Industrial Relations Committee of the British Clothing Association Ltd., and Head of Industrial Relations in one of the largest clothing companies. These views were expressed in an interview recorded in an article, "In Defence of Piecework" in 1982.

In discussing incentive systems in the clothing industry, Burton concluded that piecework was the best because "the alternatives demand a lot more management effort if they are to be equally successful. He said, "We've tried

practically all the alternatives that are advocated in various books. We had our period of T.V. sets, trips to Majorca and so on. If you go round our factories you'll see the birthday cards and little boxes of chocolates the girls are given on their birthdays. I don't think at the end of the day it produces a lot more work, because after a time it becomes the established norm. But it produces a family-type atmosphere and I wouldn't like to see it stopped." (Fielding (1982) p.33). He went on, "Wherever we changed from daywork to incentives, performance went up around 25-30% fairly quickly, and as we kept working at it we could lift it a bit more. Other factors also affect the performance, of course - the general working atmosphere, time of day, whether it's before or after a holiday, and so on." (op. cit. p.35)

The combination of the hard-nosed and blandishment approaches implied here in Ron Burton's views is summed up in this : "Let's take another example. Suppose a woman is machining away and she notices that the material has not been properly cut, so she draws it to her supervisor's attention. It would be unfair to then pay her 4/5 of her average because there is no work available - you'd be more likely to say "thanks a lot", pay her average and probably give her a kiss on the cheek as well" (op. cit.). It would be hard to imagine a manager getting away with the kind of approach which Ron Burton describes in this article in an engineering works. Certainly supervisors

use sexual banter and blandishment in their dealings with women employees but where a question of wages was involved, even if the woman concerned was persuadable, her colleagues would appeal to the shop steward to make sure that no detrimental precedent was being set. This will happen, for example, if someone works outside the hours signalled by the buzzer. The shop steward will reprimand the offender and make sure the practice is discontinued.

Piecework as a Belief System

It has been clear from this examination of how piecework systems have been experienced by workers at Jameses that while they are supposed to be "scientific" and objective and therefore to eliminate matters of feeling and subjective argument from industrial relations that in practice they become the focus for intense feeling and the subject of historical comparison with what went before them. In this context an article by Hilde Behrend : "Financial Incentives as the Expression of a System of Beliefs" (1959) offers some interesting reflections on British management philosophy in the period after 1945. After the second world war, "British management was confronted with an acute shortage of labour, made worse by what management considered particularly low standards of effort. Many firms found that action was urgently required to deal with the problem of the shortage of labour. Under increasing pressures they tried payment by results as a solution. This trend is illustrated by the

fact that the percentage of workers in British manufacturing industry who were paid by results rose from 33% in 1938 to 40% in 1951" (Behrend (1959) p.137). By 1954/55 when the author of the article was visiting companies she found that of the 50 firms visited, one third had recently made changes introducing or refining incentive schemes; others were in the process of change.

Hilde Behrend found that the benefits of incentive schemes were assumed rather than proved. "We should note that practically no valid statistical proof seems to be available to demonstrate that payment by results raises labour effort and maintains it at a high level. Statistical data on the question of the relative labour productivity of payment by results and time rates which stand up to a scientific scrutiny do not appear to exist. The reason is that the effect of incentives on effort cannot be isolated" (op. cit. p.138).

Management tends to introduce several changes at once.

"In spite of this lack of statistical proof most of the managerial staff I interviewed believed that payment by results raises labour productivity" (op cit. p137). "It thus appears that in most firms the use of incentive schemes rests on faith in - rather than proof of - the effectiveness of financial incentives; the results expected from payment by results, have acquired the status of achieved results in spite of the lack of factual proof of the achievement" (op cit. p138). Whilst these findings

were obviously based on a very small sample (200 firms communicated with, 50 visited) and the research related to the particular period when it was carried out, it is nevertheless interesting to find evidence of the power of belief in this field of incentive schemes. Hilde Behrend also found that other unproved conclusions influenced the thinking and practice of managers, for example, about the motivation of workers. Examples of such widely held beliefs were : "for men, money is the be-all-and-end-all", "today the wage packet is the thing" (op. cit. pl39) ; that managers tend to divide workers into "good" and "bad", but then to justify the generalisation by pointing to exceptions, "Thus, I was told young single girls see no point in working hard, as they have to hand their wage-packet to their mothers; they have the "wrong" outlook and do not respond to incentives" (op.cit. p.142). This last point, of course, raises wider issues in relation to women as workers than the specific question about incentives. It is such widely held assumptions that this study and other recent studies of women workers have sought to question and refine. As Hilde Behrend points out, the widely held belief about young single girls referred to here is very close to an observation made by Max Weber in "The Protestant Ethic & The Spirit of Capitalism" originally published in 1904. The point made by Weber was : "The type of backward traditional form of labour is today very often exemplified by women workers, expecially unmarried ones. An almost universal complaint

of employers of girls, for instance German girls, is that they are almost entirely unable and unwilling to give up methods of work inherited and once learned in favour of more efficient ones, to adapt themselves to new methods, to learn and to concentrate their intelligence, or even to use it at all. Explanations of the possibility of making work easier, above all more profitable to themselves, generally encounter a complete lack of understanding. Increases of piece-rates are without avail against the stone wall of habit"(p62). Reading this expression of frustration and even of exasperation makes one wonder what account the German girls in question would have given themselves about why they preferred the old ways of working to the new and potentially more profitable ones. Did the new systems interfere with human interaction? "Eyes down when the buzzer goes and that's it. No time for 'clarting' about or anything like that" as one young woman at Jameses put it!

An interesting point made by Behrend is, "What the managers consider holds for the workers is quite different from what many of them think applicable to themselves.... As one manager put it : he, himself, would hate to be paid by the piece. The implication would appear to be that managers' standards of effort are all right and do not depend on pay. Managers are not primarily interested in money, they are interested in their work. The beliefs with regard to financial incentives, thus, are applied

primarily to workers" (op. cit. p.145).

What lies behind this attitude on the part of managers is presumably the feeling that their integrity as workers would be being questioned if it were assumed that their efforts could be influenced by incentive payments. On the other hand it is this assumption which underlies much of the present government's approach to the tax system. The belief here is that people, and in particular high earners, will not exert themselves if they see very large proportions of their earnings going in tax.

To end this chapter we will hear the description by two of the women in this study on the impact on themselves as people.

The first is Sally, reflecting on why she preferred working at Jameses to her job in printing. "I like to be able to do something what I can see I'm doing, you know. I like to say, 'Oh well, I can get 200 done now'. I don't know, I've always got to be working against myself, like piecework. I love piecework, 'cos you try to better yourself all the time... it makes the time fly over... You couldn't rush a book. If you rushed it you made a mess of it. Half the time the printing side of it, you're just standing watching reams and reams of paper going through a machine.. it was just boring. I wasn't seeing anything at

the end of it, I mean. At the end of the night now, I can go down to the bottom of the department and say, 'Well, I've done them'. I can actually see something what I'm doing. I've always been the same. I just like to see that I am actually doing something... I race people all the time.. I need a pacemaker... It wasn't trying to better anybody or get recognition. I need it for myself. I have to have a goal to aim for."

The second is Nancy, describing how the rhythm of piecework now informs her whole life : "You see, with us rushing all the time it's hard to unwind and slow down. Even when I'm busy doing my housework I think I'm on piecework. I can't just take my time doing the dishes, they've got to be done. I want things done before I start!" - which might be an apt description of how managements feel about production!

Here we see that like other belief systems, piecework is a powerful influence endorsing and sustaining the way people conduct their lives. As Nancy makes clear its influence is not confined to the workplace but can extend to the lives of workers at home. This pinpoints a specific mechanism by which our society has socialised citizens into workers. With the breakdown of full employment we see the employed retaining attitudes appropriate to a working culture while the unemployed are left to discover other disciplines by which to structure and make coherent how they spend their days.

CHAPTER 10

THE WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF BEING SUPERVISORS

Five of the women in this study had had experience of being supervisors themselves. Their experience ranged from Audrey's brief period as a chargehand in a laundry to Margaret's twenty-nine years as a supervisor at Jameses. The others who had been supervisors were : Julie in clothing; Vera in light engineering and Phyllis in a sweet factory.

Phyllis at Fields'

In many ways it was Phyllis who gave the most detailed account of her experience in the role. The saga of her experience at Fields' illustrates both the strengths of women supervisors and their vulnerability. The principles which she followed as a supervisor were those which the other women in the study endorsed as good practice for supervision whether they had been supervisors or not. These included : fairness towards those supervised, combined with sensitivity towards individuals; a pragmatic approach to the job rather than a theoretical one; and a commitment to straightforwardness in relationships, particularly with managers.

Immediately after the second world war, Phyllis worked as a van driver, having learned to drive in the army. Her

sister worked at Fields' sweet factory and Phyllis also knew the head supervisor, Betty. "Betty arranged that I should go for an interview and I went for an interview with John Field and I got the job. It was just as simple as that.. And I started on the ordinary factory wages which was £3.9s which was almost £1 more than what I was getting driving the van." This was in 1949. The hours were 7.30 a.m. - 5.00 p.m. Monday to Friday. Saturday mornings were worked on overtime mostly on cleaning the factory and machines thoroughly. "It was a very clean factory, Fields."

Phyllis was to be the supervisor in the Packing Department where she was impressed by the deftness and speed with which the teams of girls packed the bags of "Sixteen Favourites" by hand and, until heat sealing came in, tied them with clips. At the beginning she had thirty young girls to supervise, though by the time she finished seven years later she had sixty girls and two younger supervisors. This was Phyllis' first experience of factory work and I began by asking her if she was expected to train the girls.

"Well, there you see, I couldn't, which I thought was stupid. Not knowing the job how could I show anyone, if they were going wrong or anything? At first I couldn't, you know, but new starters after that or new lines coming

out, you know, or new packing designs, then, yes, I made sure that I knew what I was doing before I put it on to what they called the benches, you know. But at first, well, I couldn't, I was just... I felt surplus. I wasn't going to stop there a week. Because after coming from Fabers and having a full day and always being busy, I took very badly with just standing around watching. I took very badly. And of course the head supervisor, Betty, she was always busy. She did all the samples and apart from that she was sort of, personnel, as well you know. And I used to think, 'Well, I wish I could fill my time in like that.' But after a while - it didn't take really so very long - I got so that, well, I would mix sweets up if they were doing jars and what-not, and I got so that I filled the time in great."

This solution to the problem of "standing around watching" would not have been open to Phyllis in a more highly unionised workplace. It was one of the problems which Margaret encountered at Jameses. She used to do a little discreet work on the benches if the industrial climate was not tense.

Phyllis felt that she had been appointed to this job because "they wanted an older person, you see. They thought perhaps that the younger ones would respect an older person and take more notice of an older person. I mean the girls on the packing at the time when I started,

they ranged from fifteen years to about eighteen and at that time they were still just young - young girls."

"When I started I was just on a normal top line factory wage, you know, agewise. You used to get a rise every birthday or something till you were twenty-one - something like that - and then there was a ceiling you see. That was more or less the same all over. But after a while they decided O.K., I was O.K. and I decided, 'Oh well, yeah, I would stop.' Then I got a five shilling rise. It doesn't sound a lot but it was a lot and gradually I got more rises. You really had to ask, you know." Phyllis chose the time to ask "when it was a busy time or when I thought, well, I was having a little bit more responsibility and a little bit more responsibility, you see. So eventually when we moved, when the Packing Department moved from the factory, when they were sort of expanding.. and I was put in charge of that you see, we started more girls, began to get machinery in. I asked Mr. Field what was in it for me, you see. He said, "Well, I've decided we'll put you on the staff and give you £7 a week. Now Betty at that time - that was the head supervisor - she had £7 a week, so they rose Betty's wages to £10 a week, you see. And I was quite happy with £7 a week because I knew I would have that whether I was there or whether I wasn't - funny that, though. When that

happened I don't think I ever lost a day, you know. I didn't stop off even with heavy colds."

"Then the Packing Department grew and I gradually got one junior supervisor and then two. I tried to get extra for the girls on the end of what they called the teams, you know, because she was more or less made responsible for the other girls, spot checking, you know, heat sealing, one thing and the other. But I never managed that. He was a funny chap. Actually he was a good boss in lots of ways. But like anyone else he liked his pound of flesh, you know. And of course there was no incentive at Fields... but you also had a target to get out. Every week when I got the rota, you know, 'two thousand boilings of such-and-such'; all this. I got this sheet that had to be packed in that week and you had to really go at it. So you had to more or less work with them, you know, to let them see that you were working just as hard as they were. You had to - well I felt I had to. I've always felt, 'Why are you asking someone to do something you can't do yourself?'

Caroline : "So the incentive just worked from good will did it?"

Phyllis : "Oh yes. It did.

Caroline : "So how was that maintained by him? How did industrial relations work there? I mean you probably might not have thought of it in those terms."

Phyllis : "Well no, no we didn't you see. I mean girls had off days when they were not so well... Well, you just had to sort of tolerate that, you know, and maybe 'I'll give you a spell at that for...' You know. You had to - well, I felt as though I had to let them see that I was quite willing to make a go of it if they were. And it was amazing - they were a great bunch of girls, really."

"And of course John Field sometimes lost his blob you know. He used to park his car at the bottom, come through the warehouse and come through the Packing Department... And if there was a sweet on the floor, he would see it. Passing a stillage full of 7lb jars, 6lb jars, 4lb jars - if there was a sweet half wrapped - John Field would spot it... He was a hard taskmaster - the labels on the jar, no way could there be one 'skew whiff' or wrinkled. He knew presentation was salesmanship and if his jars looked just any old way, well people wouldn't buy the sweets."

The factory was run as a family concern with Christmas parties and parties when John Field's children got married. His son, Alan, came to work in the firm after going to university. John Field knew everyone and Mrs. Field knew everyone. The other side of this comfortable state of affairs was that Mr. Field would make advances to the girls and "one or two of the girls didn't like to go into his office."

Phyllis' immediate manager was Jim Green. The first sign of impending trouble with him came for Phyllis one Christmas when things had been going well in the Packing Department under her supervision for some time. "They were bringing out Christmas novelties and I don't think Jim Green had a clue as to how to really set about doing these. There were some novelties that were like children's building bricks only they were boxes... with various sweets in the boxes. And he didn't really have a clue, I don't think, as to how to set up a bench, so that we were doing these in the quickest way. Well, of course, you could only do it by a process of elimination couldn't you? And when I went in the office on the Monday morning for the targets for the rota, he said, 'By the way you're on your own in there. I won't be coming in there.' I said, 'Oh well' (that suited me fine really). But the dainty jars and the Christmas packs and what not, we just worked them out - Betty and I - you know, we just worked them out. 'Oh well, perhaps it might be better to do...' before we asked any girls to try them so at least I would have a little bit knowledge. And it went great guns, you know. Mr. Green never ever came in to see how we were getting on or what was happening - not while I was there. But the girls used to have half an hour for dinner and after the buzzer went they all dashed down to the canteen. It was a mad scramble - half an hour wasn't long. But once or twice when I'd been a bit later going down, if I

was in the middle of doing something before I went down, I would see Mr. Green come in, just stand by the office and stand smoking his pencil and having a look - saw me and he would go out again. He never came while I was there. He would have a potter round probably when I wasn't there, or after we went home at night time. I don't know. But I managed better without him."

Later on there came a period when work was slack and six girls were to be made redundant. Jim Green called Phyllis into the office to ask for her help over this. "Well naturally I thought, well the last ones who were in should be the first ones to go, because to me they were all worth their salt. But there was one particular girl that must have been a bee in his bonnet." As it turned out he had confused the name of the girl he wanted to get rid of and refused to believe Phyllis when she tried to convince him of this. "But this was Jim Green. He wasn't a manager really. He was actually a sugar boiler." (He came from another factory). "But he eventually became factory manager, but he didn't have it in him really."

"But after that Christmas - I don't know if he was secretly hoping that we would get into a tangle - but he got more and more off-hand." A lad, Bobby, who worked in the warehouse and who had been an errand boy at the Co-op and brought Phyllis's mother groceries, began to make his

presence felt. "He was a canny enough lad. But Mr. Green was always sending for him and he seemed as if he was spending more time in the packing department." One of Phyllis' duties was wheeling the stillages of packed boxes down to the warehouse. "Well it got that, 'Oh, I'll take that for you', you know, and 'Oh how do you do that?' and 'What's that for?' I would just say, 'Well, these are export.' You know, export sweets have special flavourings, special colours and what not. You did things a little bit differently for export. And I thought he was just interested. Well, anyone who's interested you're quite willing to talk to them you know. And I don't think he really realised at first because I can't think it or that he wouldn't have told me what was happening, this young lad. He was a canny lad."

"Anyhow on a Friday, he told me on a Friday, that he was coming in you know, that he was having a white coat. And I said, 'Oh, that's news to me. What am I doing?' He said, 'Oh you'll be in an' all.' I said, 'Bobby, no way can there be two bosses, conflicting ideas, conflicting opinions. It wouldn't work.' And I says, 'I could no more work under you - ' I says, - 'Now I know why you've been so interested in the packing! Why didn't you tell me'? He said, 'I didn't know at first. Mr. Green has just told me to spend a bit more time in the packing.'

"So I went through to him, Jim Green, and I went barging into his office. You know I hate underhandedness. And I asked him. he says, 'Oh yes, he's coming in on Monday and he's going to be in charge'. I says, 'Oh, very nice! What am I going to do?' he says, 'Oh well, you'll be there to help'. I says, 'I won't! You can take my notice...'. "

"John Field, the boss, was away then or otherwise I'd have gone straight to him. But Alan Field was there... So when I saw Alan come in I thought, 'Oh well, I'll give him five or ten minutes and I'll go in and see him'. (Which was another thing that was nice about the place. You could knock on their door and if it was convenient they would see you. There was no making an appointment or anything like that). "

"So I went in and said, 'Mister Alan' - "Master Alan" - that was what we used to call him - 'have you any fault to find in the work I'm doing?' 'Not at all Phyllis, not so far as I know.' 'Am I doing the samples all right?' 'Of course'. You know. 'Are there any complaints about the way I'm tackling the work at all?' 'Not to my knowledge'. 'I don't know. Why is Bobby coming in in charge on Monday?' I says. 'Why is he being put in charge over the top of my head?' He says, 'That's news to me'. He says, 'As far as I'm concerned you're supervisor in the Packing Department.' I says, 'Well, that's good enough for me.'

Phyllis went back to see Bobby. "I've just been in to see Alan, and he tells me that as far as he's concerned I'm -"

- it wasn't a question of being in charge. It was the underhanded way in which it was done, you know. 'Ee well, Phyllis, that's what Mr. Green told me'. And right enough, on the Monday morning Bobby comes in with his white overall on and the girls are - 'What's Bobby doing?' 'Well, I says, 'He's in charge'. 'Bobby's in charge?' 'Yes'. So by this time I was up to here, and I was being awkward. If you asked me anything - 'You'd better ask Bobby'. But I was miserable. I was absolutely miserable. And at the finish I says to Betty, 'Oh I'm going in; going to see Jim Green; going to give my notice in.'"

"'Oh', she says, 'Phyllis, don't. Think about it.' I says, 'Betty, no way will they treat me like they've tret you'. They just picked her brains and just stepped over the top of her. They did. But of course Betty was that very placid, gentle nature. I was more fiery then than what I am now. 'Oh', she said, 'I don't know what I'll do if you leave'".

"So I was just going to go in to Jim Green's office when he came round the bottom end into the Packing Department, smoking his pencil. He used to literally smoke his pencil you know. And he's just standing looking and he says, 'Well, how's it going then?' I says, 'It's not going. What you asking me for?

Why don't you ask Bobby? I'm not standing this', I says. 'You can take my notice.' He says, 'Hm'. I says, 'Well, now I'm giving you a week's notice'. (That was all you needed). 'Well', he said, 'I'm sorry to hear that. I don't want to lose you'. I says, 'Well, you've gone the right way about losing me. I'm not going to stand treatment like that.'

John Field was away till the Wednesday and Jim Green eventually told him about Phyllis' resignation on the Thursday. "On the Friday when I was leaving, Jim Green didn't come in. He didn't come in at all. And Betty was saying, 'John Field will send for you and ask you to stay'. I said, 'Well, he's leaving it a bit late'. Eventually she was sent for at 4.45 p.m. when the day ended at 5.00 p.m. John and Alan Field were there and another manager. John Field says, 'What are you leaving for?' I says, 'I haven't got a job. Bobby is apparently doing my job - why, I don't know. Master Alan said that as far as he knew I was still in charge of the Packing Department. He didn't know anything about it.' And then of course John Field started to bluster and he said, 'You swore at me once.' And I said, 'Because you swore at me'. (There had been a dispute over mis-sized jars). Phyllis continued. "'Just because I swore at you and you swore at me and one thing led to another.' I says, 'Have you been dissatisfied with the way I've been doing my

job?' I says. 'I can hardly think so because you'd have had me in on the carpet'. He said, 'No, but I had sort of...' (I could tell that he was trying to think. I think it had been sprung on him). He says, 'I thought a good job for you would be sort of liaison between the Packing and the factory, you see.' So I said, 'No. You're just making a job for me'. He says, 'It would be a very good job, a very responsible job'. I said, 'No. You've left it until now to tell me about this job'. I says, 'My notice has been in for a whole week'. And of course he then said, 'Well, Mr. Green hasn't really been satisfied with the way you've been doing.' I says, 'How does Mr. Green know?' He's never been in the Packing Department, not since Christmas and before Christmas. He's never been in the Packing Department to query, to look, not while I've been there. And', I said, 'Of course he isn't here so I can't talk to him today. He isn't here.'"

"Well, by this time the girls in the Packing Department outside were shouting 'We want Phyllis. We want Phyllis.' And I said, 'I've given my notice in and as far as I'm concerned I'm finished tonight'. So he said, 'Look, think it over, over the weekend. Your job's here.' I said, 'I'll leave it like that but I know that I won't be coming back.' Because it was getting louder and louder" (i.e. the shouting outside) "and Betty was beginning to

get worried, you know. She hated raised voices and this sort of thing."

"'Course when I went out, here, they had a bouquet of flowers for me. They didn't know till the Wednesday or something that I was going to leave. I hadn't told them... I was as full as a gun, you know. They says, 'What you going for? Oh, come back, come back' - you know. I said, 'No, you'll manage all right with Bobby'. He was a canny enough lad, Bobby, he really was. But he wasn't the right type of lad for that job, he was too highly strung."

I asked Phyllis what she felt lay behind all that had happened. "I don't know whether he thought it might be better to have all men in charge. I don't really know." Was it because she stood up to him? "Well, maybe so. But you see the way I looked at things, if I managed to complete a week's target and complete it correctly, satisfactorily, then I was doing my job. It wasn't always easy because often he would send word in - 'Marks & Spencer want so many boxes of minted gold' or something like that, which hadn't been planned for that day. You would set your machine up for another type of sweet... so it wasn't always easy. And I thought if I got that with the girls - you couldn't do it without the girls - then I was doing my job satisfactorily and keeping the girls happy at the same time, keeping a happy atmosphere - I

mean, hot weather... working in a hot factory, you know, getting towards 4.00 p.m. and the girls were withering, and it was hard going for them. I appreciated what they did."

In this account certain themes come out clearly : first, there is Phyllis' desire to do a good job, to earn her money. She disassociates herself from the kind of supervisor who stands round watching others work. She appreciates the work of those she supervised - "to me they were all worth their salt" - and does her best to further their interests, for example, by trying to get a pay increase for someone who had additional responsibility for checking others' work. Phyllis clearly saw herself as much closer to the girls than she did to the managers and her method of drawing the best out of the girls was to work with them : "I've always felt, 'Why are you asking someone to do something you can't do yourself?'"

Underlying Phyllis' experience in this job was her experience of the insecurity of life in the North Shields of the '30s in which she grew up. Her father was unemployed and she had started work as a domestic servant at the age of fourteen for four shillings a week. So she appreciated the security of being put on the staff and being paid £7 a week regardless of whether she was there. Characteristically, her response to this was to make sure

that she was never absent. She would have hated to be thought to be taking advantage of her situation. Even when she left Fields in 1956 when jobs were easy to get she said that in her last week she applied for a job at Jameses because she felt, "I'd better get written somewhere. Because the instinct of being out of a job was still there."

Changing Industrial Relations after 1945

In fact her time at Fields clearly spanned the period of post-war recovery. The factory was expanding and taking on new staff, buildings and machinery. What is also suggested by this account is how the old "family firm" method of working was becoming unsuited for the scale of operation Fields had reached. It is clear that in the final conflict the manager, Jim Green, had acted on his own authority in promoting Bobby and that the owners of the firm were left covering up for their manager. The days were numbered when the production system and industrial relations could depend on good will and on the good example and personal relationship skills brought by Betty and Phyllis and, in a different way, the Field family. Shortly after Phyllis left, the factory was unionised. The men who were appointed to her job did not stay in it long. "The whole pattern of the place changed. Instead of going in for lots of 4oz packets and what not, they did more loose for shops like Littlewoods and what not. They did big packs."

No doubt these changes reflected the rising expectations of the workforce at the time; the expansion of jobs for women with the development of the small industrial estates in North Shields and the changes in patterns of retailing so that chain stores like Littlewoods were developing sweet counters.

Phyllis' participatory style of working with those whom she was supervising was endorsed by the other women in this study who had worked as supervisors for considerable periods.

Julie & Supervising in the Clothing Industry

Julie became a supervisor in a clothing factory when she was nineteen. The previous supervisor left to have a baby and Julie was asked to take on the role. Julie felt very unsure about this : "They thought I was capable, but I don't think I was at the time. I did take it on a trial period... I said I would do it while she was off and then they could form their opinion of what they thought - if I had done a good job or I hadn't. So I did it. I think it was for five months and I think I was successful. I quite enjoyed it. But I missed being on my machine - any chance I got I would sit at a machine and sew, you know. And she came back. But they didn't want us to go back on the machine. They wanted us to take over another line."

Caroline: "So you obviously must have been successful with it then?"

Julie : "Oh, they thought so. I mean the production didn't go down. I didn't have any commotion or anything! Just everything went the way it was when she was there."

Julie did take over another line for a time. "And then I thought I didn't like it. See, I don't know whether it was because it was all different girls or what, but you see sort of working with all the girls" (i.e. on the first line) "and then taking over as a supervisor, I thought I sort of fitted in. I always had to fit in Caroline, you know. If I thought I didn't I couldn't cope." She tried to leave but the management didn't want to lose her and a system evolved in which Julie took over as temporary supervisor whenever one left. "It suited us because it was a change. But I didn't want it all the time." I asked Julie what sort of skills were needed for the job as opposed to being a machinist. She replied, "Well, you had to know every job, the whole job through. I mean you had to sit down and show somebody, learn somebody, how to do that job; how to cope with it if anything went wrong; and about their piece earnings. Me, as a member of staff, I shouldn't have been doing this, but I always did. I would say to the girls, 'if you do it this way or that way...' (because with me being on the machines as much) I would say to them, 'Well, you can do it a quicker way this way. You'll make more money'. I mean, I shouldn't have been doing that but it was the way I was. If there was a

spare machine I would get on the machine. I would do a few jobs for the girls and I would say, 'Here's the tickets. You's get the money'. Because you were paid whether you worked or not."

By this method of alternating between supervising and machining and by showing those she trained the short cuts, it seems that Julie was skillfully avoiding any antagonism from fellow workers about her position of authority as supervisor. By being a useful resource to the management when they were short-staffed she avoided any accusation that she was over-identified with those she supervised.

In All Day, Every Day , a book about a clothing factory in the Midlands, Sallie Westwood analyses the problems of women supervisors in terms very close to Julie's experience : "For the women working at the machines, the power of management was mediated by the person of the supervisor. It was the female supervisor who organised the day-to-day running of her unit, disciplined her workers and judged their skills. She sat uncomfortably at the interface of management and workers, occupying a deeply contradictory position - not only because of her position in the authority structure but also because, as a woman, she shared in the celebrations of the shop floor. She had been a machinist and knew what it was like to be on the line. Equally, she was called upon to be a counsellor, to offer guidance and sympathy while, at the

same time, she was in direct authority over the women workers." (Westwood (1984) p32)

Westwood makes the point that management find difficulty in recruiting supervisors. "Certainly there was very little financial incentive; supervisors earned little more than the top-grade machinist with a bonus. There was the security of being a member of the staff grade rather than an operative, but this was bought at a high price. For most of the supervisors the compensation was that the job was "much more interesting", and the older women seemed to enjoy the extra responsibility. But for many, the job was marked by the tensions of being both a woman on the shop floor and the vital outpost of the management structure". (op.cit p38). An additional responsibility for supervisors came out in the chapter in this study on The Clothing Industry, where Nancy described how Mrs. Hodge and Mrs. Taylor vied with one another to recruit her to "their" lines. With skilled machinists chronically in short supply, at least in the north east, it fell to the women supervisors to send messages to women they knew who were at home with young children to see if they could be persuaded to come back to work.

The point made by Westwood about the lack of financial incentive in becoming a supervisor was a point made both by Julie in relation to her experience in 1968, and by

Nancy in speaking of 1983. Nancy also underlined the disadvantages of supervising : "You've got all the running around; take all the back-wash; put up with all the stick off either side. It's all right if you get a good team. But you can get some awkward ones, contrary and awkward and shouty at the least thing and not think for theirselves. If you're on a good team it's O.K., you get your work down, you get your work out, you get your bonus - 'cos there's loads of clauses against you for your bonus." For these and for family reasons, Nancy has never taken on being a supervisor.

A tribute to a good supervisor in the clothing industry was given by Alice, who described how, in 1970, she went for an office job at Brentford Nylons. She was told that there were no vacancies but that they were desperate for machinists. This was Alice's first job after bringing up a family and she was feeling both determined to make the break from her role as housewife, and also very lacking in confidence. "When I went down into the factory it was (the supervisor) who came to see me. And I was shaking like a leaf and of course I explained... what I'd come for. "Oh, don't worry. We all know that you're nervous on your first day"... "She put me beside this machine. I'd never seen a machine like it in my life. She said, 'Well, watch the girl next to you and see how she's working it.' And it looked easy and I thought, 'Well, I'll have a try'." The machine ran off the edge several

times but the supervisor said, "Don't worry, it will come to you." She said, 'Could you start on Monday?' And I thought they're either very, very desperate or she can see things in me that I can't see in myself." Once she got started, Alice very much enjoyed her years at Brentfords. It was another supervisor there who she described as a "true supervisor". Explaining what she meant by this Alice said, "She would get down and show you. She wasn't a domineering type. She could get through to you. She could get people to work for her because she was so nice to them. The other supervisors used to try to get work out of you by bullying you. Well, you can't work with anybody like that. I can't work with anybody like that. Once they start to bully me I seem as if I want to go the other way."

Margaret at Jameses

The person with the longest experience of being a supervisor - 29 years - among the women in this study was Margaret. She went to Jameses in 1949 at the age of 23, was made a supervisor eighteen months later and remained in the job until she was made redundant in 1980. She succeeded a woman who left, and in her period as a chargewoman she could remember four other women who had been chargewomen. In 1979 four of these, including Margaret, were in post. By 1982 there were none. As the factory has shrunk and departments have been amalgamated,

women supervisors have been squeezed out. This could partly be explained by the rule that the "unskilled", i.e. those who have not successfully served their time as apprentices may not supervise men who are "skilled." Thus women are automatically excluded. Most departments at Jameses include some skilled men who are there to "set" the machines when they need to be adapted to work on different jobs, for example to produce components of different sizes. An exception to this is the Press Shop, a large department of unskilled men doing the most strenuous jobs in the factory. For several years, the foreman of this department was unskilled - a matter of remark in the factory. When this man was promoted to a manager's job it was a matter of some astonishment.

There is an unspoken assumption in Jameses that no woman could be made supervisor of a department in which a considerable number of men worked even if they were unskilled. When Margaret started as a supervisor she had 70/80 women working on machines under her care. She would also have had a few men acting as "service operators", i.e. men bringing in and carrying away boxes of work to and from the department and sweeping the floor. This scale of things is a thing of the past. What Margaret was here in charge of was a "section" of a department that would have been supervised by a foreman. Now to find 70/80 operators you would have to look in two or three departments and you would find a manager or perhaps a

foreman in charge of them with help from a number of assistant foremen.

Margaret had originally taken a job at Jameses temporarily. After she was demobbed from the Land Army she came back to Tyneside bringing with her a friend, Mary, who stayed with Margaret's family. Margaret's mother was working at Jameses and "spoke for" Mary. Margaret went with her for the interview, and Mary got the job. The manager then asked Margaret if she wanted a job, and she explained that she was starting a job as a lorry driver (a skill acquired in the Land Army) in three months' time. He offered her a job to fill the gap which she took, and stayed for thirty years. I asked her why she had stayed instead of going on to what would have been a skilled job. She replied, "I think it was the mechanical part of it, the machines and that, you know. I think that interested us, because I am interested in mechanical things - and then I just got interested in the work." Added to this the factory was close to her home and they were able to go home for lunch. Her mother, aunt and sisters were all working at Jameses and her mother discouraged her from moving, saying "You'd be a fool if you gave it up now when you've got a good job", which it was."

When it came to being made a supervisor her interest in machines was again responsible. I commented that she must

have made her mark to have been made a supervisor after so short a time. "I don't know about making the mark, but I was willing to do any machine, you see. When you worked in the Flash you weren't just a stoner, a grinder, which they segregated all them later on... you didn't know what job you were going on the next morning till you went in and Mr. Milton used to say, 'You're over there. You're on there'. So you didn't get sunk in one job. Well, I went through them all."

Caroline : "And when you were supervisor, did that mean that you just organised the people who were doing those jobs or did you in fact join in and do it too?"

Margaret : "You joined in ; you done it all. You taught them, you joined in. You done all of it. You were a working supervisor then."

Margaret's strong views on the effect of the new piecework scheme in Jameses and how it crippled people, were reported in the chapter on piecework, as also was her experience of how it affected her as a supervisor. She described how she found it impossible to "sever" herself from work when she went home and of how she had to even people's chances of "making a good time" by sharing out the "good" jobs and "bad" jobs fairly. When I recorded my conversation with Margaret, Mary (a friend of hers who worked in her department) was also present. Margaret, describing the care she had to take in making it clear she

was sharing out the jobs fairly said, "I found I had Mary working for us - I'm not praising you mind! I found I had to put her on the worst jobs first. Everybody got their fair share but you had to be the first. I don't know if it ever struck your mind or not? You were the first to go on that job because if not they'd have said, 'Ee, aye, they're mates'. You were always the first to be moved, just for the half day or the day, and then they followed suit. But had I gone the other way round, anti-clockwise, they'd have said, 'Oh, aye', for all they're good people. Because that's where the B.S.I. come in. I had to work all that out, you see."

Margaret also made several points about her role as supervisor in relation to policing the piecework system and to the effect of the rundown of work in the factory towards the end of her time there. In the context of a discussion of fiddling piecework returns, Margaret said, "Not being discriminating against the male sex - but males - I don't know how it comes into them, but they are more liable to cheat than women are. Women have this, 'Ee, no, I couldn't', where men have this, 'Oh, book it in. They'll never find it'. They're cute, and some get away with it a length of time and then they're caught, you see. But it's very rare that I ever caught any of my women, very rare. I'm saying 'very rare'. I didn't. It was only one, and it was just she said she'd put the figure wrong, but it didn't go any further and I made her work

her hours. I didn't go to the management and say, 'She's cheated'. I worked it out between the girl and myself. She never did it again, you see. It might have been a genuine mistake but, there again, I just had to watch... she could have been snuffed out of the factory - like that! You've got to give a bit... There might be a reason as to why they're doing that."

Mary : "You always looked on that side"

Margaret : You don't know how their mental - could have trouble at home, or things like that, and they need the money and they want the money, things like that. That was just an instance. I never found anybody there, deliberately shall we say, doing it on and on and on."

"When you're in the supervision capacity you find you get to know. I got to know their very moods, their very ways. Oh, there's something wrong at home, you know. You got to know them, personally."

Caroline : "Did the people that worked for you tend to use you as a confidante?"

Margaret : "Oh yes. A lot of confidence was put into me and I can honestly say I never repeated. Probably the people who have confided in us thought, 'Ee, I wonder if she ever said?' But I never did, not even to Mary, though we were close friends. Anne was the self and same way. You could tell Anne you'd committed murder and she'd never breathe. And for all the three of us were close, we never

talked really about work, did we?"

Mary : "No. Just if something big happened"

Margaret :"with the unions or the management or if somebody passed on."

Anne was a highly respected and much-loved person at Jameses, not least because of the courageous way she faced successive operations for cancer over the years before her death in 1983.

Thinking about what Margaret and Mary were saying in this conversation and the underlying assumptions that seemed to be implied, I reflected that Margaret, Mary and Anne were all Roman Catholics. The value of confidentiality as an element in pastoral care would be an important part of their experience. The whole model of what authority should be and how a supervisor should behave, implied in what they said, seems to me to be modelled on that of priesthood. The supervisor, in their view, is not in the job for personal advantage but as a servant to, and pastor of, the people who work in her department. The supervisor is expected to have a particular concern for the individual person under her care but also to be responsible for the general welfare of the department. As with a congregation, or indeed a family, there is a fine balance of priorities to be kept between the needs of the group and the needs of the member. When this model of pastoral care is translated into industrial terms the added ingredient is, of course, the need for productivity

and profit. It is significant that Margaret, while being clear about her responsibilities to the company, was concerned not so much about maximising output from her department, but of making sure that those who worked there had an equal chance of making money. It could be said therefore, that for her, pastoral care was a priority over productivity. Margaret would no doubt have retorted that this would have been to propose a false conflict : that productivity is best when people feel cared for and secure.

Indeed she almost made this very point when looking back over her experience of thirty years she explained why towards the end she had just wanted to leave : "The thirty year I enjoyed, till the latter two year."

Caroline : "So in the end were you quite pleased to go, or what?"

Margaret : I was very pleased to get out of it. Very, very - I volunteered. I thought, 'Well, I've got a job here till I retire' but I was just dying to get out of it. I was relieved to get away from it. They come 'I'm not doing that', and, 'I'm not doing this'. And you had to be Job's comforter, the confessor - the liar if you like. You had to tell little white lies just to get them to do the job, you know."

Mary : "You were really in between...."

Margaret :"In between the management and the..."

She felt she was being blamed by both management and workers for problems that really arose because of shortage of work.

Margaret : "I think it was getting through to people that their job was insecure. They were frightened. They were frightened and it was one beating the other. I'm sure this was where all the fiddling come into it because they were frightened for management to check their sheets and say, 'Look at that person, she's hardly done any work', and added another nought on to it - 140 and made it 1,400. And management believed it because they had no checkers. They didn't have anybody checking. Now fortunately where I worked I had done the job myself. I had worked and I knew exactly what could be gotten out of a human body and if there was an extra nought on the end I knew it was physically impossible. But with the likes of your other sections, where your supervision didn't have an opportunity to work on it, they were believing that till it finally got right down to the end of the product and instead of the management having, say, 15,000 parts they only had maybe about 7,000..... That's where all the fiddling come in. But it was money, money, money, money and insecurity."

Mary : "Yes".

The Dilemmas of the First Line Supervisor

Margaret's description of the problems she faced in her role as supervisor are very close to those which T. Lupton

in "On the Shop Floor" analyses as being inherent in the supervisor's role when working within a piecework system:

"To "make your wages", even when prices were such as to make this possible without sweating, meant that a worker had to have work on her table or machine throughout the day. The chargehand did everything possible to ensure that the workers were kept supplied with work but she was often defeated by factors beyond her control, and her efforts often raised a fresh crop of difficulties.

The difficulties of the chargehand were well summed up for me by one of the workers who said, "The system runs the chargehand, the chargehand doesn't run the system."

(Lupton (1963) p.45). Lupton goes on to describe a situation where workers were finding it difficult to "make their wages" and sums up the chargehand's position by saying : "The chargehand was seldom blamed for creating situations such as I have been discussing. The workers saw that she had a difficult task, and they were aware that she did not play favourites. Further, they appreciated that she made the attempt, within the strict limits imposed upon her since she could not directly alter the job prices, nor decide which work would be done by which unit, nor control absenteeism, to give everyone work on which they could "make their wages"..... Since management's chief interest was to maximise the output of the depleted units" (suffering from absenteeism) "they

were obliged to deploy the working force and the work to gain the best possible output. This was seen as the chargehand's responsibility since she alone was able to assess the best mode of deployment in the workshop. She alone knew intimately the skills and capacities, and the temperament, of individual workers. But any deployment of the working force was likely to offend against the principles valued by the workers, i.e. the proprietary right to the job, and the capacity to make one's wages. Since management itself had helped create these expectations, workers were more aggrieved. But their anger was tempered by the knowledge that the chargehand was faced with a tremendous problem in trying to reconcile these two conflicting principles. This attitude of sympathy was fostered by the workers' experience of the behaviour of the chargehand. They knew that while she was strict in her insistence on hard work, she would try to create the conditions which made it possible for them to make their wages. And they knew that she worked tremendously hard to this end. They also liked her as a person." (op.cit. pp 47-48). This analysis confirms much of Margaret's description of what it was like to be a chargehand and shows that her experience was not just personal to herself.

Vera as a Supervisor

Finally, what was Vera's experience of being a supervisor? Unlike Phyllis, Julie and Margaret, who became supervisors

early in their careers, Vera was in her late forties. She had come in to factory work, away from working in the fishing industry as a filleter, when she was drafted into a torpedo factory during the war. When she came back to North Shields at the end of the war she worked in two engineering works until in each case she was laid off - after seven and fourteen years respectively. The second time was in 1968. She was immediately offered another job in a small Ronson's factory in North Shields making hairdriers. This was to be a temporary unit because the company was building a large factory at Cramlington. She described what happened :

"As it happened, we finished work on the Monday, started work on the Tuesday morning. So I was straight - I mean it doesn't happen now - but then things worked out well for me. We went in, we went training making these hairdriers. Well, as it turned out, I fell in, they wanted a chargehand. During the first month they must have been watching out and they decided I was the one so I got the chargehand's job. There was a chap above me and between the two of us we ran this hairdrying division at West Chirton." They had 54 women working for them and on the whole things went smoothly. "But you can get one or two girls in that 54 who can make life very, very unpleasant for you. But I got over that because I rather liked the job plus the fact, well, then I was 48 - 47/48 years old and I thought, for me to be made supervisor, I

felt a little bit chuffed about it! We knew when we started, mind, that this job was only going to be for two years because they were building this big factory at Cramlington whereby they wanted their electrical toothbrushes and shavers, hairdriers, everything, under one roof, which was feasible." Vera, like the other women in this study who were supervisors, adopted a co-operative approach to those she managed. In discussing the role of trade unions she described how she had been involved in setting up what she felt to be a well-run union organisation at Ronson's. Vera's view of what this should be was founded on her experience in her previous jobs in engineering works where the unions were well organised and consulted their members in a systematic way. Fortunately two other women who had worked with Vera and had had this experience moved with her to Ronson's. Otherwise the women at Ronson's"had no idea. They must have been in a couple of factories where they had bad unions and I had to sort of it was a funny position to be in because when you're a supervisor you're not union. But I was lucky inasmuch as a couple of girls I had worked with were with me in Ronson's and I suggested to these lasses that they put it to the new girls exactly how a union should be used. And it worked out very, very well. Because if they had an argument, they would get their heads together. Then they would come and see me and it was only a final resort that the union was called in. Because we could discuss it among ourselves and I'd get

in touch with Cramlington." (Head Office). "I would discuss with my boss how far I could go and then I would put it back to the union, to the girls and I'd say, 'Well, that is what Cramlington says. Now it's up to you.' Then they used to bring the union in. But you got a fair crack of the whip on both management and the girls." By "bringing the union in" Vera presumably meant bringing in the external union officer as opposed to the shop stewards.

In his book Working for Ford , Huw Beynon describes the hostility that existed between shop stewards and supervisors at Ford's. This was particularly acute in the case of supervisors who had once been stewards. These were "pointed out" to Beynon "like lepers" (Beynon (1973) p134). In analysing the position of the supervisor at Ford's, he writes : "On the shop floor of many factories the division between the supervisor and the men can be characterised as a "frontier of control" - the management's rights on the one side and those of the workers on the other. It is in this way, in disputes over control at work, that the class struggle has been fought out by the British working class during this century. At the lowest, and most fundamental level, it has involved a conflict over how much work the men do and how much they get paid for it. At its most developed level it has produced an ideological conflict over who runs the factory

and why, to a questioning of the essential nature and purpose of production within a capitalist society.

(op. cit. p.139).

We shall return to the concept of the "frontier of control" in the chapter on the women's experience of trade unions. In the present context, however, we may note how far removed from the situation described by Vera, is that described by Beynon with its emphasis on confrontation and class struggle. There would be those who would say that Vera, by helping the women she supervised to set up a union structure, had effectively emasculated it before it began. The male sexual imagery may not be inappropriate. The situation described by Beynon was one of conflict between men and between essentially male power structures. The situation described by Vera was one in which women got together in a company run by men to use what power they had, to develop what they would have described as sensible working arrangements. No doubt "the union" when it was called in, came in the form of a male officer. What Vera suggests is that she and "the girls" preferred to "sort things out" in their own way without involving the male world of trade union officers and managers whose procedures might be agreed and official, but might not suit the detailed needs of the women members/workers.

Vera's aim, as a supervisor, was to establish a good working relationship with those she supervised. The world

she was supervising in, had more in common with the Jameses of Margaret's experience than with the Fields of Phyllis's experience because there was a union and procedures to be followed. Nonetheless all three women would have said that their success as supervisors depended on establishing a give-and-take between themselves and those they managed. All three found themselves in the "in between" role between management and shop floor workers which means that personal qualities are the key to success or failure.

Before we leave Vera's personal experience to look more generally at the issues arising from the women's experience as supervisors, it is significant to know what happened to Vera at the end of her two years at West Chirton. "As the time was coming for the factory to be finished, they asked me then, 'Would I care to go through to Cramlington, train some girls there?' Well, I did that daily, but unfortunately for me I was a terrible traveller, hopeless. From being a kid I was always bad... However, I was offered the supervisor's job in this department. Really I was reluctant to turn it down because I liked it. Everything about it. They even went to the point ... I said, 'Travelling - no way, no way'. And they were very good and you see at the time the shipyard was getting a little bit dodgy and there was a chance that my husband would be made redundant and things

were really at that bad pitch. But I said I couldn't go to work on a morning knowing I had to face that journey back home at night. So they said, 'We can even get you a house on the Cramlington estate.' I says, 'Ah, it's one thing me moving house for my husband's benefit'. 'But', I says, 'no way. If he can keep his job in that shipyard, he's going to keep it and no way would he travel.' So of course I had to turn it down."

This incident was for me one of the most poignant described by the women with whom I talked in the course of this study. Here was a woman being offered a chance of exercising and developing her abilities in management, being thwarted by the traditional assumptions of Tyneside - that her husband's job, even if "dodgy", was more important than hers, and that to move house on her account would have been out of the question. The importance of the shipyards in the culture of the area no doubt also influenced the situation. Had her husband worked in engineering he might have been prepared to see if a job in Cramlington was available, but since he was a shipyard worker there was no chance of that.

It is easy, however, to be swept into a middle class feminist view of the incident and to assume that for Vera to have taken the chance of promotion and of going to live in a new town would have been advantageous and have made for her and her husband's happiness. This would be to

make several assumptions which might not have held. Vera, like Margaret, might have found that the industrial relations climate in a large factory in the seventies did not suit her. It is also likely that a move away from the close-knit community of North Shields with its shops, pubs and easy access to Newcastle and the coast, to the new town of Cramlington with its mobile population of predominantly young families and its central shopping precinct might not have suited Vera and her husband, childless and in their early fifties. Vera's mother lived close to her in North Shields and soon after this period was needing an increasing amount of looking after. Again, Tyneside's expectations meant that there was no question but that Vera would make a priority of caring for her mother and then of nursing her till she died. To do this she worked part-time and split the money she earned with a neighbour who looked after her mother while Vera was at work. Vera did this gladly and, in spite of finding her life at this time very tiring, she was so close to her mother that to do otherwise - for example by having her mother cared for in a home - would have been unthinkable.

Common Themes

We have now considered what was said by all the women in this study who had experience of being supervisors, about that experience. A number of themes emerge out of their accounts. First, there is the prime importance of being

fair in dealing with those supervised. This always included not having favourites and being straight in one's dealing with people, but where piecework was involved it included a kind of "positive discrimination" i.e. trying to even up people's chances of earning a good wage. Margaret did this through the allocation of work and Julie, by making sure her trainees knew the short cuts. Anti-authoritarianism was strong and supervisors with dictatorial attitudes were disliked, but these attitudes were combined with approval of efficiency. A pragmatic approach to organisation was approved rather than a theoretical one. The isolation of the supervisor was touched on, as was their position as buffers between management and workers. Apart from these last two issues - isolation, and being a buffer - all these themes were endorsed in what was said and implied by the women in this study when they gave their views on management.

CHAPTER 11

WORKING AS AN EMPLOYEE : WORKING AS A MEMBER

THE WOMEN'S VIEWS ON MANAGEMENT AND TRADE UNIONS

What makes a Good Manager?

Phyllis, in speaking of Jim Green, the manager to whom she was responsible at Fields, said, "He wasn't a manager really. He was actually a sugar boiler." "He eventually became a factory manager but he didn't have it in him really." The question this sentence raises is what is "it" being used to convey? What, in the eyes of Phyllis and the other women in the study, made someone a "good manager"? Even in these few remarks Phyllis conveys a good deal of the ambivalence that was shared by the other women in this study. On the one hand, the kind of managers they respected were those who had demonstrated that they could do the manual jobs which those they managed worked on; on the other hand they were critical of those they felt were 'jumped-up' managers who gave themselves airs - "He was only a sugar boiler". This feeling came out in Julie's account of her clash with the factory manager whom she had known as a works study engineer in a factory where they had previously worked together. She said, "I don't know. I used to get on with this lad so well. He'd changed so much I just couldn't stand him. I don't know if it was the position he had. I don't think people should change because of the position

of their job you know. I hate snobbery and he, to me, he talked down to me. Well, that annoyed me. I mean, he only lived round the corner." In the old days he and Julie went to play bowls together when she was a supervisor and played in teams from their factory. So she resented it when "... he really talked down to me as if to say, 'You're a worker', like, and 'I'm the boss'. Well. I mean I don't have to be on like that with anybody 'cos if I've got a job I do my job and I pull my weight. He annoyed me. He really did. 'Well', I thought, 'I'll see you like.' I dug my heels in. I thought, 'I'll make him dance here.'"

The manager most generally admired, both by the women in this study who knew him, and those who worked in Jameses in his time, was Harry Joy. Margaret's description of him, already quoted in Chapter 8 would be endorsed by many who knew him. "He used to come down and talk to you as if you had lived next door to him for years.... If you were outside, having a social event, he didn't segregate himself. He walked around. He was a good manager, Harry Joy. I'm saying he was a good manager. He might not have been a good manager as to production, but he was more for the workers. I mean, he started when he was 14, served his time. He grew up practically with the men. He just used to talk to them as if they were mates."

Working in the 'Family Firm'

Margaret's expectations of what a manager should be had been formed at the pottery where she worked before World War Two. In explaining why it was a good firm to work for, she said : "The management cared, personally. They appreciated them. They really knew their troubles and they shared their workers' troubles. There wasn't that class distinction. I mean, I've seen Len Dennis, he was the head one, managing director, and if someone wasn't feeling too well in the kilns or something, he would take his coat off and go in, not saying 'Oh, we'll get someone else....' He moved in with you, Len Dennis. Len Dennis managed the pottery for the family who owned it, just as Harry Joy managed Jameses for the James' family. The pottery was a "family firm" both in the sense that it was owned by a family and that it was worked in by families. All Margaret's family worked there : her mother and father and five aunts. The only one who didn't was a sister who was too young. "Jameses was like that, on the old place. If I had a sister or a brother leaving school I spoke for (them) and they just employed them."

This kind of family firm was a type of industrial organisation being gradually superseded in the period covered by the working experience of the women in this study. Maling's pottery in the '30s, described here by Margaret, was a classic example of the family firm. It failed to make a transition to some other kind of

organisation and perhaps for this reason went out of business. Margaret said, "It was a family firm and then Mr. Maling died and they made Len Dennis manager, and he took it over. But then, of course, you see, it wasn't paying and it had to close." Jameses which, when Margaret started after the war, still retained its family character, did make a transition and at the end of the sixties became part of a multi-national company.

Fields', where Phyllis worked as a supervisor, began to make the transition from being a family firm while she was there and immediately afterwards when the trade unions became involved. Her description of her conflicts with the management as a supervisor, described in the last chapter, show the limitations of the family firm as an organisation. She offers a different perspective on what it was like to be an employee in such a firm from the warm reminiscences that Margaret had. Phyllis described Mr. Field, who in her day worked full-time in his business, with a shrewd eye for his strengths and weaknesses :

"John Field sometimes lost his blob, you know. He used to park his car at the bottom; come through the warehouse; come through the Packing Department and, if there was a sweet on the floor, he would see it. Passing a stillage full of 7lb jars, 6lb jars, 4lb jars, you know, if there was a sweet half-wrapped John Field would spot it.

Whenever you saw him coming up the Warehouse with a jar in his hand, you know - "Now what?" He was a hard taskmaster

- the labels on those jars - no way could there be one skew-whiff or wrinkled. He wouldn't stand for that at all." "He knew presentation was salesmanship, you know, and if his jars looked just any-old-way, well, people wouldn't buy the sweets."

It was this issue which caused a row between Mr. Field and Phyllis in which they each swore and it was this incident that he brought up in his final conflict with her when she resigned. Phyllis told the story : "It was one occasion - oh - the girls were having great difficulty with the jars going into the crates. Some jars were just slightly broader than others, you know, and no way could the girls get the jar into the crate without scraping the label. No matter which way they put the jar in, you see. Well, of course, John had seen a jar in the warehouse with a scraped label and come up with this jar - 'Bloody bad workmanship this'. I said, 'No it isn't. Some of the jars are bigger than others you see'. 'And', I says, 'they're a tight fit in the crates and the girls find it difficult, very difficult'. I says, 'The labels are straight enough when the girls finish them.' And this was in front of the girls, you see, and the girls, the particular girls that just packed the jars, were just standing, looking, you know. I mean respect for bosses was respect for bosses, you know, from young ones! He said, 'Um, label that jar!' to one of the girls. So she quickly labelled a jar and

made sure it was... and he got hold of it and put it in the crate and he said, 'Nothing bloody well wrong with that!'. Well, we'd been having trouble with one particular jar and it was still on the edge of the table. So I said, 'Jane, label that jar'. So she labelled it. I said, 'Now put that bloody jar in there!' And of course he couldn't put it in. No way could he put it in, you see. Went tearing off. That was it. 'Course all the girls were sniggering you know. He went off and the next thing, he sends a chap over, he's collecting all the crates in. He's going to alter the crates. I said, 'It's not the crates' I says. 'It's the jars'. But after that he got a different sort of crate and we didn't have any trouble. But that was the sort of chap he was, you know."

Phyllis clearly respected John Field for being a stickler for detail - "he knew presentation was salesmanship". But what annoyed her most about him was his underestimating the abilities of "the girls" and the care with which they worked. A small detail in her report of this conversation is that she describes herself addressing "Jane" by name while Mr. Field gives an order without a name. Here she wished to underline the contrast between her own close working relationship with her workers and his remoteness from them. In her remembrance either he did not know the woman's name or he rudely did not use it.

The other thing which Phyllis clearly disapproved of in his behaviour was his tendency to "lose his blob" in a manner out of proportion to the cause. Swearing in any official exchange in industry is a violation of industrial codes both written and unwritten. Here the manager did it to women which also infringed a social code. He did it to a supervisor in front of those she supervised, which infringed good management practice. An additional element in the exchange of which he may, or may not, have been aware, was that Phyllis had been brought up and practised as a faithful Methodist. The fact that she came to the point of including "bloody" in her retort is a measure of how roused she was.

The most important characteristic of the family firm was that of personal contact. In this exchange between Phyllis, her workers and the company owner, we see that this could be a mixed blessing. On the one hand such a manager assumed a right to behave in high-handed ways; on the other, at least as a worker you knew the man who made the decisions in the company you worked for and face-to-face confrontation was a possibility. In the old-style family firm, all aspects of industrial life were decided on a personal basis, including recruitment, work-organisation and wages. When people speak positively of such a system (and it applied more widely than just to companies that were literally family firms) they stress the family atmosphere and the sense of being known as a

person. When they speak negatively it is to say that "if your face fitted" you did all right; if it didn't, you were exploited.

Such a system was linked with other traditional Tyneside practices : there were companies that until the thirties recruited either Catholic or Protestant workers; there was the custom of foremen at the shipyards recruiting casual labour from the men who "stood on the stones" at the gates hoping to catch the foreman's eye. This method of recruitment gave foremen considerable power and they could be suspicious of Employment Exchanges. This comes out in a Memorandum encouraging the use of Employment Exchanges by companies, which was put out by the Newcastle on Tyne Employment Committee in 1934 : "It is difficult to overcome the opposition of foremen, who sometimes think that the Exchange will usurp their functions and their right of selection of labour. This view, however natural, is quite mistaken. All that an Exchange does, is to make a preliminary selection from among the workers on its books. These it submits to the Employer or his foreman for their final selection. The final choice is entirely within their hands." (Newcastle Employment Committee, February 1934). Preliminary selection by the Exchange would, of course, have gone some way to preventing corruption and favouritism in the handing out of jobs by foremen. Other "informal" methods of obtaining jobs were

through the network of societies such as the secret Masons or the Friendly Societies like the Buffaloes, which operated to help working-class men to "get a start", to get on and to support their families in case of death or sickness. Women, of course, did not belong to these societies. They did not "stand on the stones" but they could speak and be spoken for in the workplaces that employed female labour.

The experience of the women in this study spans the period from 1934 - 1984 and their views on the management styles they encountered reflect the changes that took place during that time. In the earlier part of the period, as in the examples just discussed, the family firm, owned and managed by local people was common, and the old-style "personal" kind of management was widespread. This style hung on in the clothing industry but in engineering and other industries things changed. Many Tyneside companies, like Jameses became part of multi-nationals or conglomerates and the managers of the Tyneside units had little power, it seemed to their workers, to influence the decisions made by management boards remote from Tyneside. By the end of the period other changes were beginning and some of the women in the study were working in their own workers' co-operatives.

Working in Industry in the Post-War Period - New Styles
of Management and the Workers' Response

In the period after the war some of the women worked in the companies newly established in the area, typically on new industrial estates, which were brought in to replace the jobs being lost in the traditional heavy industries of the area. Hence the women worked at Osram, De La Rue, Ronson and Wills where they described the strict regimes and the tight time-keeping that were the style of the time. As the post-war recovery got under way, the demand for labour increased and the power of the trade unions began to grow as the expectations of labour in terms of pay and conditions became greater. Various aspects of these developments were commented upon by the women in this study.

It was not until 1957 when Phyllis went to work at Jameses that she really became conscious of the presence of trade unions. As we have heard, in her time at Field's they had no influence. Although she had worked on the railways in the early years of the Second World War and had belonged to the union, it had not really impinged on her. "The man in the power house" collected the union dues but that was all. "Because it was war-time, unions were farthest from people's minds." In Phyllis' opinion it was with the Labour Party's victory in the 1945 election that unions began to play a greater part.

Vera, whose experience also stretched back to pre-war days, commented on the impact of trade unions in improving conditions in factories. She had worked on the Fish Quay in North Shields before the war and contrasted the harsh conditions there with what she experienced in factories :

"You stood in yards where, because of the nature of your work, the heating was limited so it was a very, very cold place to work in.... You had to wear rubber boots all day. Nearly all the women that have worked there have ended up with varicose veins." No wonder that when Vera came back from war-work in a torpedo factory in Gourock she decided to stay in factory work. "I was (working) from 14 and I started in the factories when I was 21.

Things were so much easier in the factories. When I first went in the factories you started at 7.30 in the morning and your finishing time was 5.30 p.m. Now that whittled down to 7.30 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. Well, that made an awful big difference on your day. When you worked in factories you had proper toilet facilities which were a good thing; you had proper tea breaks which was something we'd never had on the Fish Quay. You started at six in the morning. You got half an hour break for your breakfast. To break again before dinner time, before twelve o'clock, was unheard of - but on an odd time, if it was exceptionally cold, the boss would let someone make a cup of tea. But you had to have it standing so you can imagine a mug of tea in among the herring and you were having your filthy hands! But when you went into the factory you had your

hands washed and you sat down and you had your cup of tea and your cigarette. Oh, things changed enormously! And you started to have a little bit more say in factories. If you didn't like the way the foreman was treating you or something like that you could go and complain either to management or union and something was done about it. But prior to that, on the Fish Quay, if you had a complaint to the boss he would say, 'Right, you're finished', and there was nothing you could do about it. You were finished."

I asked Vera if the changes were the result of the work of unions. "Yes, I would say unions had a lot to do with it. You see, I've always been union-minded." She corrected herself. "I wouldn't say I was union-minded inasmuch as they're a necessary evil to me." She went on to explain her reservations about shop stewards who became "power happy". We will come back to this issue which arose from her experience in Jameses in the early '70s.

Although Vera's experience on the Fish Quay was the harshest experience of work of any of the women in the study, several other women recounted similar experiences of working in factories where management control of workers was both minute and extensive and untempered by union counterbalance.

The experiences of June who had her first spell of working at Pelaw Tailoring 1944 - 50; Joyce who worked at

Ronson's 1952 - 59; Audrey who went to Wills in 1955 and Jeanette who was at Osram 1958 - 59, give us a picture of life in factories predominantly employing female labour where there was none of the tradition of union organisation that obtained in the heavy industries of the area employing men.

In our conversation June had been telling me about some of the changes she saw brought in in the clothing industry which were described in the chapter on the Clothing Industry. She told me about changes in the hours of work and that when the finishing time was altered from 5.45 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. the dinner hour was cut from an hour to half an hour. I asked her how the changes had come about : had they occurred because of union pressure?

June : "Management - I suppose - I mean I never used to interest myself in unions. I used to pay my union but I was never involved that side of it. It was just like going to work and doing your job and coming home, you know."

Caroline : "How active was the union? Did you have a shop steward that you knew?"

June : "There was never any disputes ever when I worked at Pelaw. The only time that we kicked up - we used to have all glass roofs and on the top floor you got the blaze and we used to be always complaining about the heat and could they not put something on the roofs to - paint it or

something. And then in the winter it used to be freezing. And they were the only two disputes that I ever knew about. There was never any disputes about wages or... like there is now."

Caroline : "And was anything ever done about the roof?"

June : "Why no! Naa! We used to sit - well, some of the old women - when you're young you do laugh at older people. You think, 'What does she look like sitting there with that newspaper on her head?' But she made it like a hat with a funnel so it shaded the sun off her eyes for sewing and stopped the heat. It used to burn your head, you know Caroline, the constant sun on your head."

June's response to my question about union involvement in the factory assumed that this would necessarily concern a "dispute". In the clothing trade she would not have experienced the day to day involvement of shop stewards in issues of work allocation and industrial relations that would have been customary in, for example, shipbuilding and heavy engineering, at this period.

Joyce worked at a small Ronson's unit (of about 70 or 80 people) on a trading estate in North Shields from 1952 - 59. She worked on packing flints and "service units" for cigarette lighters. These contained spare flints, little brushes and screwdrivers. That there were such things was part of the smart image of smoking being marketed at the time with expensive metal lighters run on lighter fuel.

Joyce found Ronson's a contrast to her experience of working in the canning factory during the war :

"Ronson's wasn't bad, because they were very selective in their staff, very selective. Everybody that worked at Ronson's at least had to be clean and they wouldn't take anybody who didn't care or didn't want to work and a lot of them were married women. They paid very well but, like all American firms, they wanted their pound of flesh. You really had to work from the moment you went in to the moment you came out. You couldn't talk. Well, if I ever did I was always caught. But they were quite pleasant people to work with and for." I asked if there was a union and Joyce replied, "Not then. They did after I left, but they didn't then." All the workers were women and so were the supervisors. The manager and his deputy were men and there were a few men working in maintenance and the warehouse. The factory had opened after the war "when they started building these industrial estates". All this was in line with the philosophy and marketing policy of trading estates at the time as we shall see later in this chapter. The image of the pleasant factory employing respectable married women was very much the image they hoped to project and thus to recruit a new segment of the workforce into industry in the north east where factory work for women was not an extensive tradition. As Joyce put it : "A lot of the women there were very pleasant, certainly clean, and not coarse or nasty."

Audrey went to Wills' in 1955 but only stayed there nine months because she hated it so much. In the chapter on "Shop & Factory - The Pull of Different Worlds" we heard how she hated it, partly because it was such a contrast to the cosier world of the shop where she had worked before. In the context we are now considering, we can see that her experience was also a result of the style of factory management of the time. The word that Audrey kept using to describe the regime at Wills' was "strict". "I found Wills', of all the factories I've worked in, I would say it was more like a prison-camp than anywhere else - very, very strict. If you didn't work on a Saturday morning, then you had to sometimes bring a doctor's note in to say why you didn't come in, you know. It was really strict." The management at Wills', as in other factories we shall hear of, were concerned to control the personal areas of eating, drinking and going to the toilet. For the employee such control can feel like being treated as an animal. For management, toilets and tea breaks were dangerous areas of personal freedom, ripe to be abused by lazy workers. Audrey described the breakfast break at Wills. "What happened was each floor went at a certain time in the morning up two or three flights to the canteen. They all went together like cattle! There was a bell would ring and you would all jump up and you would

run up these stairs and all you could hear was clatter, clatter, clatter! And sit down and eat your meal, you know, your toast or whatever, for your breakfast as quick as you could, and then all run back again. Very, very strict it was, very strict. If you went to the toilet and you were in the toilet more than a minute or so the door was banged on and you had to get out!... There used to be an old dragon in the toilets. She used to 'Get out of there!' you know. I wouldn't like to tell you what she used to shout! Well, I thought that was terrible."

By the time I myself went to Wills' in 1977 for a month's work experience, such strictness was only current in bogey stories of the past. Each floor had "tea bays" like trams in the wide corridors where the workers could go for a smoke and a cup of tea or coffee from a machine. In many of the manual jobs you could spend nearly half the day in the tea bay if you wished.

Control over toilet and tea breaks was something that Jeanette remembered about her time at Osram's at the end of the fifties. "You couldn't go to the toilet. You just couldn't get up and go to the toilet. You had to ask someone to look after your work. And it used to come along a belt to me and a girl used to see the solder was on the top of the - you know the two little marks on a bulb? She used to see if that was on. I used to have to say to her, 'I'm going to go to the toilet'. Now she used to put them

in a skip and I had to catch up on them somehow during my day. Now! So I couldn't stay at the toilet. There was no way. I mean, I had to go to the toilet, come out and really it was best if you didn't go to the toilet at all. Because you couldn't bear to catch up on all these, because sometimes it took you till next day if you went to the toilet, to catch up! It really was. You know Jameses, now? They would never put up with it."

Caroline : "When you had your periods that must have been a bit difficult not being able to go to the toilet?"

Jeanette : "I mean, honestly Caroline, you couldn't go! You got a break which was ten minutes in the morning and it went with a buzzer. And it was ten minutes. You had to go to the toilet then. I mean, they were so efficient at saving time in those days that there was a lady came round with a trolley. She put tea out and then the buzzer went. You always got your tea - it was cold when the buzzer went. You got it free. In the afternoon you got a cup of tea but you didn't stop. She gave it to you. Well, I mean, you didn't have time really to drink it. I mean, you know, when you say piecework, in Jameses they don't know they're born! I mean, you literally worked from the minute you went in at half past seven, except for ten minutes and an hour for your dinner. You worked. You never lifted your head. You didn't know anybody because you never had time to speak to them, just in the canteen. They had a nice canteen... but you only bought sandwiches.

Didn't sell meals. But there was canteens on the trading estate that you could easily go to and have a nice meal cheap. And you finished at 5.00 p.m."

Nice canteens were part of the vision of the time, a positive vision of industry and its life which sought to counteract the traditional stigma attached to factory work. It was this stigma which had caused Jeanette to exclaim, on being offered a job at Osram's, "I wouldn't work in a factory!" In accord with this vision, Wills' factory, opened in 1950, is an imposing building of architectural pretensions which, now that the factory is closed, may be preserved as a listed building. It is fronted by shrubs and landscaped lawns and behind the factory are sports facilities and a pavilion in which a variety of social events took place.

W.D. & H.O. Wills were model employers of the time and the vision of the factory as a centre of community life based on industry which is expressed in their Newcastle factory was taken up in the current thinking about trading estates. In the Tyneside Official Industrial Handbook for c. 1950, for example, the advantages of trading estates are described : "Much has been done towards providing social amenities. Already playing fields have been laid down and, in a small way, recreation rooms have been provided and social clubs have been born. It is felt that a central social centre on most of the estates will have

to be provided with a library, handicraft rooms, provision of proper changing rooms, space for indoor games and recreation. The trading estates must provide those amenities which large industrial corporations have already provided for their workers, but which the small industrialist coming to the area may find it difficult to provide out of his own resources". (Tynside Official Industrial Handbook (?1950 p.133)).

This vision of a kind of Brave New Industrial World sits oddly with the policy of controlling every minute of the worker's day, described by Jeanette, so that social contact between workers was kept to a minimum. When Jeanette finished work at 5.00 p.m., after the pressured day she described, it would have been most unlikely that she would have had the energy to make use of sports facilities. Although, had she been a man and without the responsibility for cooking her husband's tea, it is just possible that a quick game of something before going home would have been an attractive idea. Another flaw in the vision is that trading estates, especially large ones like the Team Valley Trading Estate where Osram's factory was, were deliberately sited away from residential areas. It is difficult to imagine workers returning in the evenings for social clubs and handicrafts. Jeanette lived about five miles away and what she actually did when she left work was to call on her mother, who lived less than five minutes away from Jeanette. If Jeanette's husband was at

work (he was on shift work) she would stay for her dinner with her mother. Otherwise she went home to get her husband's meal. The lack of shops on the Team Valley Trading Estate and the lack of time for shopping, meant that she relied on her mother to buy anything she needed in the week and did her main shopping on Saturdays. In this way the old community life of Tyneside centred on the family, continued to predominate over the planners' vision of an industrial utopia.

To return to the world within Osram's factory, it appears from Jeanette's description, that the management was mainly conducted by remote control : by buzzer, by moving belt and by time pressure, rather than by a great deal of the human interaction described by Margaret and Phyllis as being central to their task as supervisors.

When I asked Jeanette whether she had a woman supervisor at Osram's she replied, "No, no, a man. Over us there was a chargeman. But he was all right. Nobody bothered really. Well, nobody had time to bother. And the girls did nothing. They didn't have time. Staff changed quick." While Jeanette was at Osram's a woman in the Stores started a union. "And I actually joined. It was the first union I'd been in... and I paid my union till I left. Didn't do anything. I never knew why I paid it, but I did. I thought it was the right thing to do."

Jeanette's father was a miner, "... and he was mad keen on the union, and when I had been at all these other places he used to say, 'Is there a union?' 'No, no, no, there's no union'. There was only about a couple of dozen in the union. Because, you see, they used to say, 'Well, what you paying that for? It doesn't do anything for you.' It didn't. But at least when we were at the factory"

(Jeanette contrasted this with her experience in shops), "there was only twice I worked overtime there... and at least I was paid. Oh, but there again, that was funny as well, because if there was no work (you know, you have to do so many a week) and sort of on a Friday afternoon at two o'clock, that was the finish for the week. They would send you home and took your money off you. You lost money. You lost two hours pay." I asked why people had not spun the work out till the finishing time. Jeanette replied, "Well, I don't think they realised. I mean, all of a sudden it was just shut down and they said, 'Oh, well, you can go on this other job. But you'll only be paid - ' (sort of the equivalent that we've got of waiting time) ; 'Or you can go home'. Well, most people said, 'Well, I'm not staying for that much. I'll go home.' I mean sometimes I've seen people being - there was only about two or three times I was sent home - but some girls were every week, you know, nearly every week, at lunchtime on a Friday." Looking back from her current experience as a shop steward Jeanette sounded nonplussed that this was how things could have gone on at the time.

During her time at Osram's, Jeanette had an accident at work. There was no question of there being a union to step in to demand compensation. Such a thing was not even considered. What did happen was that one of the managers coaxed her through her fear and got her started on her job again.

Jeanette's job was to fit the glass bulbs over the filaments which then passed through a cylinder which sealed the bulbs, removing the oxygen. The other part of her job was inspecting the bulbs for faults as they were test lit on a moving belt. She had to wear goggles and to view the lit bulbs through a blue screen. This was just as well for, as she told the story : "This day it was hot and I was sitting doing this and, all of a sudden, I thought a bomb had dropped... Because the noise was absolutely deafening. And I just sat and I was covered in glass and one of the cylinders had fallen". The bulbs on the belt were bursting as they reached it. "And I don't know how many had burst before somebody had turned the machine off and I was, by this time, absolutely covered in hot glass. And it was hot in there and I only had this thin blouse on and somebody had to take us to the First Aid : well, the noise in my ears! And I was all bandaged, all my arms and all my chest... I had burns all over. But you know they said, 'Well, if you had moved away!' I was so frightened I was rooted to the spot!... Course, I wouldn't go back. There was no way on this

earth I would have went back. They tried all kinds. I wouldn't go near I was so frightened. I cried."

"And then, the next day, the manager come and he said, 'You're going to have to. Come on, sit with me. You know, it was a mistake. It'll never happen again.' And I went back with him at the finish and he put all the lights on for us for a morning." I expressed surprise that Jeanette had not had to be off work for a time after the accident. She replied, "No, I was O.K. really. Some of the burns weren't as bad... And I was still bandaged the next day but I was sort of all right. I've never been a one for staying off."

At the time Jeanette felt that the job at Osram's was "the best job I'd ever had" in spite of the event just described and the relentless pressure of time. Looking back, as she described her experience to me, it seemed as if she was describing a different working world from her current one - "In Jameses they don't know they're born."

Sally worked at another Team Valley company, De La Rue, a decade later - 1969/70. She described the tightness of the security there, occasioned by the fact that they were working on foreign bank notes. Superficially this strictness resembled the strictness at Wills, Ronson & Osram described by Audrey, Joyce & Jeanette, but the

underlying tone of Sally's description is different. The world she describes is more of a workers' world than the post-war world - it would be hard to imagine anyone doing a tap-dance at Osrams! Although Sally did not say anything about union organisation at De La Rue's it would have been assumed by her since she was a member of N.A.T.S.O.P.A. which directly controlled the jobs its members were entitled to hold. Sally had served her time in printing and went to De La Rue's from a bookbinding firm :

"My sister worked at Thomas De La Rue's and they were starting women on about £30 a week, which was marvellous money. So everybody sort of dashed over to there. So after a strict interview and what-have-you I eventually got a job as a re-numberer" (of foreign bank-notes). After a time in the training school Sally started on the factory floor. "You were in little cages and every different department had different coloured overalls and they had cameras on one side of the wall to the other, looking down, scanning you all the time. So every morning you were allocated your work and you had a little black book and you had mebbes about a hundred, piles of a hundred notes, where when they've been printed they've gone wrong. So say they've got ten, they give you exactly ten, or three, exactly three. And you're sitting in the cage and you re-number them. If you spoil it you've got to knock to be out of the cage. Knock to be into the

other cage where they have the unmarked money, without the numbers on. Show them the thing. They take it off you. They take your name - it's a right clart! Very high security you know. Then take it back and you used to get paid on how many notes you numbered. Very, very primitive machines they were. It was like a little press. You put your own type in, your own numbers... You know it was painstaking. It was such a large factory that only one boss came up every twenty minutes or so, you know. It was all women on the shop floor. The men did the printing and the labourers were all men."

"So one night different sections would get off early so they had a chance of an early bus. Well, they had the security guards outside at the gates and on my early nights I always got searched so I never got an early bus in all the time I worked there. I don't know. I must just have looked a right rogue, so I used to get searched all the time!"

"So any way, being a bit of a - what's the word for it - anti-establishment type person, I got up one day off my machine and the cameras were facing us and I did a tap dance. I walked over to the supervisor and said, 'Right, I'm putting my notice in'. That was it. So I come out of there."

"The toilets were magnificent you know. You couldn't smoke of course on the floor. You had to go to the toilet. You had to put your hand up - permission to go to the toilet. If there was somebody there, you had to wait till he come back. There's just no way they'll let two of you go together. But for all it was such tight security, the woman that worked in the toilet, the things they used to sell! Anything from a wig to a chair, you could get any mortal thing you wanted. How they got the stuff into the factory, I don't know, because you were monitored every time you went in and out and what-have-you."

What Sally here describes are aspects of the "underlife" of an institution so carefully analysed by Erving Goffman in his book Asylums : "In every social establishment, there are official expectations as to what the participant owes the establishment.... behind these claims on the individual, be they great or small, the managers of every establishment will have a widely embracing implicit conception of what the individual's character must be for these claims on him to be appropriate."

"Whenever we look at a social establishment, we find a counter to this first theme : we find that participants decline in some way to accept the official view of what they should be putting into and getting out of the organization and, behind this, of what sort of self and world they are to accept for themselves. Where enthusiasm

is expected, there will be apathy; where loyalty, there will be disaffection; where attendance, absenteeism; where robustness, some kind of illness; where deeds are to be done, varieties of inactivity. We find a multitude of homely histories, each in its way a movement of liberty. Whenever worlds are laid on, underlives develop." (Goffman (1968) p.267)

Goffman describes the subverting of the rules and rituals of institutions by those who are part of them as "secondary adjustments". He explains that he means by this term "any habitual arrangement by which a member of an organization employs unauthorized means, or obtains unauthorized ends, or both, thus getting around the organization's assumptions as to what he should do and get and hence what he should be. Secondary adjustments represent ways in which the individual stands apart from the role and the self that were taken for granted for him by the institution." (op.cit. p.172)

Goffman's analysis is relevant to more in this study, and to more in this chapter in particular, than what Sally described, but it is especially relevant here. While Sally's dance was not an "habitual arrangement" because it was a final gesture towards an institution of an inmate who was free, as a paid employee, to leave; nevertheless it was also a classic example of a member of an

institution asserting her individual identity in the face of expected conformity. Sally reversed the role of the security cameras from being monitors of her compliance as a worker, to being a means of showing the management how she could perform in a role which had nothing to do with what she was employed for, dancing. In this way she challenged the management's ability to define her as a person and asserted her right to be different - a homely history which was in its way a movement of liberty. In this case she felt that she could only follow this by handing in her notice.

Sally's description of the unofficial business conducted in the "magnificent" toilets is also part of what Goffman defines as underlife. The toilets here fall into his category of "free places" in an institution. These are "bounded physical spaces in which ordinary levels of surveillance and restriction were markedly reduced." (op.cit. p.205) Here the "secondary adjustment" was not over an issue of the identify of the individual over against the institution, but of a group activity involving, we gather, many different members of staff in unofficial commercial activity. This activity did not directly infringe the security of the factory in the sense that staff were not acting improperly with its products (foreign bank notes) but they were having to infringe the security set up in consequence of the high-security nature of the product in order to engage in what might or might

not have been illegal activity - i.e. the chairs and wigs may have "fallen off the back of a lorry" or have been legitimately acquired for sale by individual members of staff. Either way the toilets were not provided by the management as places of private entrepreneurial activity and hence their use for this purpose was a "secondary adjustment".

While Sally would not have used Goffman's analytical language to describe her experience she was quite aware that the matter at issue was one of authority and of her sense of who she was as a person. She described herself as an "anti-establishment type person" and it was a consequence of it that she left the factory on a note of defiance.

So far in this chapter we have been concerned with the experience of the women in this study when working in the traditional "family firm" kind of industrial organisation and in the world of the new post-war industries of the north east. In neither of these types of industrial organisation did trade unions, if they existed at all, have a significant role.

We now turn to the experience of the women in workplaces, particularly Jameses, where trade unions were important and where some of the women in this study played a significant role within them.

Working in a Unionised Factory

Margaret, Phyllis and Vera all started work before the war so they lived through a period of great transition during and after the war with the period of post-war reconstruction and on into the industrial relations world of the 1970s. They saw the rise of a professional management and as a response to this an increasingly professional trade unionism. They all had experience as supervisors and both Vera and Phyllis had the experience of going back to being ~~stop~~ floor workers afterwards. h/
Phyllis also became a shop steward.

They all shared the view that trade unions were important and necessary but they also had ambivalence about the growth in power of shop stewards. The industrial philosophy they held was that relations between management and unions should be conducted on a give and take basis. On the whole they accepted that management was well intentioned though ignorant of the realities of actually carrying out the jobs workers did. Unions were there as a kind of insurance policy against the exploitation of workers. They saw the shop steward as being very much one member of the workforce chosen to represent the rest rather than as filling a role for which specialised training was necessary.

Brenda and Jeanette belong to the generation which started work after 1950 and therefore their early experience was

of, in many ways, a different world from that of Margaret, Phyllis and Vera. They were both shop stewards but had no experience as supervisors and they tended to see the roles of management and unions as more formalised than the older group. Their experience as stewards was all of the industrial world of the sixties and seventies in an engineering works where familiarity with the details of the substantive agreement between the company and the unions, and the implications of government legislation were necessary for the everyday work of a shop steward, complex though these might be. They also benefited from attending union training courses which both increased their knowledge and their confidence in operating as women stewards in the male-dominated world of engineering.

Margaret went on from the appreciative comments she had made on Harry Joy's style as a manager, to reflect on her later experience. I asked her how it was that in the large factories that Malings' and Jameses were, it had been possible to engender an atmosphere where the employees felt themselves to be known personally by the managers. Jameses, after all, employed over a thousand people.

Margaret's answer was, "They made theirself known to their workers, managers, where I found later on in the years of working in engineering factories that they wanted that class distinction. They wanted to be known as that high,

and you that". (She gestured with her hands to make the point). "That's the impression I got. They wanted that class distinction."

Caroline : "And did that come in with the whole trend towards recruiting managers from, you know, who'd been to university and on courses and that, rather than promoting people that had come up from the works?"

Margaret : "From the shop floor up over? They get them in because then I feel there's not that friendliness with them. I mean anybody in the management side then, they came from that and went up, you know, they grew into their managerial position and they knew exactly what that person ... is going through. And they have that compassion for that person, say doing a horrible job. They've done it and they know exactly how to talk to the person. Where you get these university managers - not that I'm against anyone with a university degree - and they haven't experienced it... They do the job in theory. They haven't done it in practice."

Caroline : "So that part of the feeling, when you're a worker in that situation is a certain respect for that person because you know that they have done the job and survived, if you like?"

Margaret : "Yes. ...They say, 'I've done it and my fingers have been bleeding. I can appreciate what you're going through', and all this. "Where you get these theoretical managers, coming down and saying, 'I want it done this way'. And you know for a fact that it

cannot be done that way but you do it that way to satisfy them. And then they find the other way was the best. So who do you argue with? You just do as you're told. This is what I found later on in my working life."

We went on to discuss the importance of trade unions and I asked Margaret whether the trade union had been important when she had worked in the original James' factory before it moved to its new site in 1956.

Margaret : "I feel it was important. I feel everybody should have a union. Because if there hadn't been unions formed, this present day and age, the manager still would have worn the white scarf and the dutch cap and the heavy boots, so as to kick! I'm not being malicious or anything---You've got to be unionised to stick together (unless you have someone who is a dictator and saying, 'I want it, never mind what my people want, I want') the place would be in an awful state if we didn't have unions. I believe in them."

When the factory was on its original site women did not take a leading role in the union. "The men led you", said Margaret. I asked if when the factory moved to the new site in 1956 the union grew in importance?

Margaret : "It grew important. Because, I mean, you worked hour for hour and then they brought the piecework in and they were trying to push two hour's work into an hour's work, the management. And the union stepped in and

said, "Oh no. We don't mind an hour and ten minutes but we're not going to have two hours, you know. You follow what I mean? And the union then was a good thing. It's still a good thing if they're led right. But you get them now, they're bombastic. They go to their management and say, "But I want...!" And the management say, "But we haven't...." "Yous are liars!" They won't listen."

Mary : "There's no trust is there?"

Margaret : "No. There's no trust now in the unions but there used to be and you had a man who was your leader and he spoke for you after he had a meeting with you, with the force. But now they're speaking before they have a meeting and they're telling their force, 'We have said...' Hands up! And that's all it is. In my estimation a person on a union is just a spokesperson."

Caroline : "And when you say that, are you thinking particularly about your own experience at Jameses or are you talking in general, you know, about what one gathers from newspapers and television and the general situation?"

Margaret : "I'm gathering it from some experience and some from newspapers."

This conversation was taking place in January 1984 during the run-up to the Miners' Strike which began later that year.

Very similar points were made by Vera. As we heard in the chapter on the women's experience as supervisors, she had

been involved as a supervisor in helping to establish a satisfactory union organisation in the Ronson's unit where she worked. Before that she had worked in engineering companies and knew what it was to work in a unionised factory. At The British Thomson-Houston where she worked she said, "We had a convenor who would never accept or turn down anything from the management till he first put it to his shop stewards to put it to the workers and thereby we knew everything that was happening, even the slightest little thing. Even if they had, we'll say just for argument's sake, if they had decided to make a collection for some charity. The shop steward wouldn't dream of saying, 'Oh yes, I'll collect in my department.' It was a question of, 'Yes, I'll go and see my workers, see what they think and then we'll come back and discuss it.' That way we had a really good union."

This experience was what she judged her later experience at Jameses against when she felt that there was a tendency for shop stewards to become "power happy". "Because they are shop stewards they think they're the 'bees knees' and they're inclined to neglect the necessities that they are there for to serve the worker, not the worker to serve them. They are there to represent the worker. I used to resent if our shop steward would go in and have a discussion with the foreman and it was signed, sealed and delivered in the office without it being discussed with the worker. That was a beef that I always had. But

having said that, to me - a union - if they acted as I thought they should for the worker, they were a good thing. But we certainly wouldn't have had the earlier finishes when the finishing time was whittled down, that would never have been, without the union. To me there's a lot that we have to thank the union for. But, well, as I say, unions, they get that way that they think they have to rule the roost. To me they're trying to take over - course that's being a little bit politically minded like. But I don't like the way that - before it was the worker and the union was the worker and I had quite a few little tizzwazzes in Jameses about these sort of things. I used to say, 'Anything to be changed in this department should be discussed with the worker. Let the workers have a little talk about it and if they think it's going to be beneficial to both themselves and the firm, fair enough. But discuss it first. Don't let anybody have the authority for to go and accept or refuse on our behalf without them first discussing it with us.' And I got myself in a few little pickles about it because I've been a firm believer in that. I don't think anyone should control anybody else's working life to that extent."

When Phyllis went to Jameses in 1957, a year after it moved to the new site, she found "relations within the factory were O.K." Harry Joy was still the factory manager and he was "on first name terms with all the men -

and a lot of the women who had come down with him" from the original site. "As regards union activity, well, there really wasn't any." Phyllis started on a wage of £5. 7s. 6d. "Then, after a while, I can't remember how long, we were all told we were going to get, I think it was a three shilling rise, that the union had negotiated this. And then after a while there was another time when they'd negotiated, over three years, a five shilling rise, and a five shilling rise the following year, and then supposedly a big rise. But it didn't work out like that. And it was after that time that the union sort of became more active, I think. Prior to that there really wasn't any."

I asked if the takeover of Jameses by a multi-national company, Latec, in 1968 had changed things. Phyllis replied, "Yes, it did really. The atmosphere wasn't the same. The place seemed to change : lots of new faces coming in and sort of taking over. Things just didn't seem to tick over the way they did before - not overnight, you know, Caroline. After a while, Latec's policies crept in.... things that you used to do, 'Well, no, that's not Latec's policy. They want this'.... The unions, I suppose, were becoming more active. But I wasn't all that interested."

Nevertheless Phyllis, because of "opening her big mouth" got made shop steward. "They were re-organising. They

were negotiating a new method of pay. It was prior to the spell before it was supposed to be equal pay for women and men doing the same or similar work. And they were negotiating a whole new wage structure, you see? ... what happened? Ah yes, it was the sort of grading system that they were on about. You had grade A, grade C, D or whatever. And this was prior to the thing being accepted."

As we heard in the chapter on the Influence of Piecework, the issue that Phyllis felt strongly about was the proposal to divide her department into sections. She felt this was mistaken, since it would divide the workforce within the department by splitting them up into jobs with different grades and rates of pay. This would cause problems if people from higher grade jobs were transferred in an emergency on to a lower grade job. Their wage would be protected but it would mean people being paid different amounts for doing the same job and would inevitably lead to friction. Another result of having "sections" would be that in the event of a redundancy the policy of "last in, first out" would be applied to each section and not to the department. This would mean someone with long service on a section where redundancies were occurring would be made redundant before someone with less service on a section that was flourishing.

As a result of her involvement in this issue, Phyllis was made shop steward at a period when the negotiations over the new wage structure were giving the trade unions a prominence which, it appears from what Phyllis said, they had never had before. Phyllis found her role an uneasy one. She felt that a lot of time was spent unnecessarily in protracted negotiations "and the whole purpose of being at work - to work and earn money - had been forgotten about, Caroline. Work was less than secondary in the eyes of most of them. What they were going to get for nothing was uppermost, you know. And that used to rub me the wrong way too - inwardly".

There followed a difficult period when, as Phyllis had foreseen, the issue of redundancies, or in this case transfers, caused conflict. Some women in her department were to be transferred to another and the manager sent for her "and said there was going to be transfers and that there was five going to be transferred. So I said, 'Oh, well that will be last in, first out then?' (That was the policy that the union and everyone had agreed, you see). He says, 'Yes. So it will be such-and-such, and such-and-such, and such-and-such'. I says, 'No. It won't.' I said, 'It'll be the last ones on the benches, not the last ones to start.' He says, 'No it won't'. I says, 'Yes. It will. Your department's in sections now.'"

Caroline : "So you were making the same point to the management you'd made to the lasses before?"

Phyllis : "Yes... I explained to Mr. Berry. He says, 'Well, that's fair enough then.'"

Phyllis asked if she might call her members together to tell them. It was the steward's job to explain the situation and the manager's job to tell the particular people affected although by the time he did it everyone had worked out who it would be. The steward was therefore the first person to deal with the questions and the anger. When she called them together she was once more faced with explaining the same point all over again : that "it was negotiated that the Cutting Room now wasn't the Cutting Room, it was sections". The members' response naturally depended on how they were affected. "It suited some of them. I mean you can't suit everyone all the time." Phyllis's verdict on all this was : "They hadn't looked at it hard enough."

Margaret and Vicky both made the point that shop stewards should consult their members on every issue. It is easy to see, however, that faced with a situation such as the one just described, it was easy for a steward to get out of touch with her members. Here Phyllis needed a minute understanding of the grading system and of the redundancy and transfer agreement. She was better informed than either the manager or the members and it was easy for her to be seen as an adjunct of management and some kind of

industrial relations expert.

In fact Phyllis was "sent to Coventry" by her members at one point. This arose partly because of a manager whom she described as "a devious man" and partly because she was absent from her department working as a union representative on work study appeals. When problems arose, her members felt, "Phyllis is never b... well here". The trouble with the manager was that, "you'd go and see him and he'd tell you one thing, so you'd go back and tell the girls, and then he would do the other. He would do something opposite." This caused the members to get irritated with Phyllis. "I didn't seem as if I was getting anywhere at all either with the management or the girls." Eventually matters came to a head and Phyllis insisted on a meeting with the "devious" manager, the foreman and some of her members where the manager's conflicting arrangements were exposed. Phyllis said to the manager, "This has been the trouble all along. You've been telling me things and then just changing them and you've caused a whole lot of trouble." "And I said to these girls, 'You see what I'm having to put up with?' 'Oh yes, we realise now.' But of course the damage had been done then.

Phyllis' account of her experience gives a very clear picture of the transition from a paternalistic style of management to a style based on negotiated agreement

between management and union. It is clear from her account that the managers were finding it difficult to adjust to the new environment. They found they had not sufficiently studied the agreements to be able to argue with the stewards whose knowledge was better and they did not immediately grasp the implications of managing by negotiation. The "devious" manager imagined that he could deal with Phyllis by negotiation and then continue to manage by instruction in the traditional manner. The result was explosive. Phyllis also notes the effect the new style had on the workforce. It made them aware that they had power to improve their position which, in Phyllis' view, became an ill-considered scramble for money.

We can also appreciate from her account of her experience the stress that a shop steward came under in the new situation. It is clear that she drew on her experience as a supervisor in her work as steward : she had a grasp of what management of a department entailed and the effect the proposed structural changes would have on industrial relations and relationships between workers. She was not afraid to challenge managers. In all this, Phyllis felt herself to be an isolated figure and said of herself, "I didn't feel as if I fitted in."

The Roles of Shop Stewards and their Expertise in Management

Phyllis described how it was that shop stewards came to be important figures at Jameses. Another of the women became a steward at Jameses in 1979 by which time the role had become a more established and institutionalised one. Like many others she found herself thrust into the role without having particularly sought it. "At first I never thought very deeply. As long as the job I was doing was O.K. I never really gave much thought to what the rest of the factory was doing. And I can honestly say since then I know more people; I know about their jobs; I know when they're only fooling and saying to me they can't make money and they can - which at first I was taken in a lot of times with that. And I still think some of the things they say now are unfair. I do really... If they say, 'This job's disgusting. I'm not making it pay.' It's not the jobs - there's more things done by the management other than your bonus and your jobs.. I'm more concerned with people being paid off, moving departments, moving people where they're not happy. They're going to a new place... and they're picking people up from where they're happy and moving them. That's a bigger injustice than they cannot make a job pay. Or even the state of people's fingers and hands. And they get good money and you find they get upset over trivial things and they don't bother with the things that are really affecting them."

She felt that her members tended to rely too much on her as steward. She gave as an example of this that when she had been away the others had agreed to something she had warned them against. When she returned the others complained to her about it. She said, "But I wasn't here!" She went on to reflect, "You know what they like? They like someone to blame and I don't think there's any glory in it at all." (Being Shop Steward). "Because I'm just there to get wrong off Geordie (the convenor); off Charlie Wells (the manager); and off the women themselves... At times, Caroline, I get sick of being the one that every body's got the right to tell off. And I think that that's what I'm there for. It keeps the girls happy that they're telling me off. It keeps Charlie happy because he's telling me what I should've done to them and, in the middle of it is George, who says, 'Well, you're to blame for letting it happen.'"

When I asked Jeanette what had been the good things about her union involvement she replied, "The good things is the people I've met when I've been away on courses. And the things I've learnt about other people... I mean we are tret like royalty compared with what some places are tret like." (i.e. in other workplaces). She also valued her pastoral role : "The people you work with, they tend to tell you more, about - you know - 'Don't say anything, but....' And then they tell you about their parents or

their children or about their husbands - '....where can I ring up?' But they think you know everything about law; you're a mathematician. And you acquire these overnight, Caroline. It's not that you've been to any school. One day you're normal and the next day you're a mathematician, definitely; you're a marriage guidance counsellor; you're a policeman because you know all about fines and everything, going to court. Overnight you know everything! And if you don't know, I mean, they're very disappointed!"

This exchange came towards the end of our conversation in which Jeanette had told me about the very difficult time she had had as a single parent and so I responded to what she had just said by saying ; "But in many ways you do. I mean you have got a range of knowledge about all those things, haven't you? I mean, some of it you've acquired because of your own experience, like the mathematician bit". (I was thinking of the experience she had had dealing with accounts when she worked at the grocer's before she was moved). " But I was just thinking, listening to the story you've just told that you seem to have acquired an education and a wide view of things, if you like, and I'm wondering how that happened when you were having a life when there wasn't much space in it for one thing. How have you managed to acquire the wide vision do you think?"

Jeanette : "Well, I don't think I had any at first. I think it was because I had really to look after Elizabeth (her daughter), not so much when my mother was alive and I thought all the world was against us then, I've got to admit.... I've always put loads of hours in at work. I'm never.... I'm not cheeky you know. I couldn't go and shout at (the factory manager) and I always listen to what they say. And a lot of times, you see, I know what they're doing is right and I can't knock it. I can't find it within myself to criticise. Because somehow I know what they are doing, they're trying to put the factory right. I don't think I used to be like that." She went on to describe how her present partner had influenced her in this direction.

What is striking about Jeanette's reply is that she should have put first and with such emphasis the deep influence that caring for her daughter had had on her, and also the instinctive connection she made between her commitment as a mother and her commitment as a worker. It is not surprising that as a woman she should so naturally have held together her personal and family world with the world of work. But we can imagine how surprising it would have been if a man had replied to a question about his vision of the world and involvement in trade unionism by saying that it was looking after his child that had been the most important influence. Even if he felt it, it is unlikely

that he would have felt that it was an appropriate thing to say.

In the chapter on the Women's Experience as Supervisors I suggested that the role model of a supervisor assumed by Margaret and Mary in what they said was that of a priest. In what has been reported in this chapter about how those who were shop stewards experienced the role, we again hear echoes of the role of minister. Shop stewards are expected to act as representatives and advocates of their members with management. They also have responsibility for the welfare of their members in their departments. But what is clear from these accounts is that the women were on the receiving end of other needs - for a parent figure and for a scapegoat - both traditional elements in ministry. One of the results can be the loneliness described by Phyllis.

Recent writers on ministry (Reed, (1978), Carr, (1985)) have examined the dependency needs which people use ministers of religion to carry for them, "they are asked to solve the insoluble, cure the incurable, and make reality go away" (Carr, (1985 p.14). In Christian Priesthood Examined, Richard Harrison writes, "most men find it difficult to understand or approach God without the aid of a man who in some sense stands for God, represents him, and feels called to devote himself to this representative ministry.... priesthood consists of a

ministry of men or women who stand for God to their fellow-men and represent their fellow-men to God. This definition does not necessitate the person who exercises the priestly function having an exclusive monopoly of access to God, only that his function is to represent men to God and God to men." (Harrison, (1979) p.100). He goes on to comment that the fact that so many religions have had such persons, "suggests that there is something natural and universal about priesthood" (op.cit.)

It seems that the shop stewards and supervisors in this study were collecting in the micro world of industry similar needs to those which in the wider society are collected, amongst others, by ministers of religion. This raises interesting questions about what might be called the religious needs of people in a secular society. For in a secular society the roles once filled by ministers of religion may be taken on, often unconsciously, by others. Human needs find ways of being met. On the other hand those who become shop stewards, or indeed managers, may take on the role, as it were at its industrial face value, and then find themselves the focus of complex needs and interactions.

These needs and interactions take us from issues of the psychology of individuals to political considerations. A major issue highlighted by what the women in this study said about trade unions was that of the nature of being a

representative. Margaret and Vicky particularly felt that shop stewards had a tendency to abrogate to themselves power to act on behalf of their members without sufficient consultation. Others felt the burden of the responsibility of carrying the hopes and frustrations of those they represented. In sensing that their members tended to become childishly dependent on their steward and to deny their power to act as responsible adults, they sensed perhaps one of the most important and unresolved issues of our democratic society and of trade unionism as an institution within that society. That is : how can the increase of individual and group awareness and participation be reconciled with a representative democracy?

The system within which the shop steward operates is one of representative democracy. Therefore the problem highlighted by the steward who described her members agreeing to a management proposal while she was on holiday is, in many ways, intrinsic to the system. This precludes a "liberation theology" or "community work" approach which encourages all the people in a community, for example tenants on an estate, to claim their power as people and to participate in groups to transform their own situation. It may be necessary to elect representatives to deal with the Council or to form an official tenants' group with elected members and officers but it is important that this group shall not become institutionalised and isolated from

grass roots' opinion; neither should it control everything in the way of community development that is going on.

In theory the same could be said of trade unionism within the workplace but in fact representation through the shop steward system does not allow for flexibility of representation and the field on which negotiation takes place has been formalised, for example, by substantive agreements. While not in principle ruling out other topics, in practice this is what occurs although an occasional issue such as a demand from the shop floor for cervical screening or increased parking space may be dealt with by the shop stewards' committee taking the matter up with management through the convenor.

Frustration with the rigidity of representation within the union hierarchy in Jameses was expressed by Sally. She had described herself as an "anti-establishment type person" in relation to the management at De La Rue's. She continued in this role at Jameses both in relation to management and union. She was a shop steward for a year and found that the role did not suit her : "I'm not a good shop steward because I'm too quick to jump. I lose my temper too quick and I can't say anything rationally. So really it was just as well it was only for a year 'cos I think I'd've had the factory closed down! I pick people

up the wrong way. I only half listen." She got impatient at the management's attempts to encourage participation and instanced the production meetings she had to attend when she was a steward : "You can get it over and done with in five minutes. All they've got to tell you is the amount of work and the box count and what-have-you, overtime. But the manager would say to somebody, 'Well, is there anything you want to talk about?' you know. And you're sitting there for an hour listening to somebody rabbit on about their dogs and somebody talking about what they did last week. And I was the only woman stuck in - and all smoking pipes and they've got the windows closed. And the likes of them meetings I find are ridiculous. They could just come down with a bit of paper and say, 'Well, that's the overtime we want'. But you see, it's a bit skive for everybody. But I just didn't like it."

Sally said, "They do a lot of good, the unions in there. Geordie (the convenor) and them want a medal - I mean people call them - but they want a medal the size of a frying pan for what they have to do. Mind, I'll tell you what I do disagree with, 'cos I was always getting wrong for it, is they didn't tell everybody on the shop floor what exactly was said at the meetings. They told them what they want and they still do. And I used to go round and tell everybody the true facts, you know... I didn't realise at the time that you had senior shop stewards and assistant convenors and that. And it was the same five

people you used to see trip - 'cos I used to call them the Famous Five. Every time they went past I used to say, 'Where are the Famous Five?' and say, 'Where's Timmy the dog?'"

In the end Sally confronted them : "By the way", I says, "how come we don't get to go to these negotiating meetings and learn things?" I says. It's always the same five you know. In fact we've started to call you "the Famous Five". Geordie went all flustered as usual. He says, 'Well, go back to your department' he says, 'and I'll have a word with the management'. So they rung down for one of w' to go as observers you know. And we had to take turns. Otherwise I'd've never been to a meeting. Mind, I wish I'd kept my mouth shut for half of them were a load of rubbish anyway. I keep telling people when they say, 'Oh, ask Geordie if we can do this' - 'He's working for us, man. We're not working for him'".

Some of Sally's strictures and some of what was said by others in this study connects with the insights into the role of shop stewards which come from seeing it in terms of an "inter-hierarchical role", to use Max Gluckman's terminology. His work and that of Ronald Frankenberg examined the particular stresses and social significance of people who act on the boundaries of social groups and therefore relates to the work of George Simmel whose

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analysis of the role of the "stranger" was quoted in the Introduction to this study in relation to the role of industrial chaplain.

Gluckman explains inter-hierarchical roles as, "administrative positions in which distinct levels of social relations, organised in their own hierarchies, gear into each other." They are at the point where "distinct sub-hierarchies within a total hierarchy meet in one person, who is the lowest member of the superior hierarchy and the highest member of the subordinate hierarchy." (Gluckman, (1968) p.70). Gluckman includes in this definition both first line supervisors and shop stewards since they are on the boundary between workers and management. They therefore have to contend with what he calls a "particular 'frailty in authority'" which pushes them into seeing the other side's point of view while at the same time having to hold on to their task of representing their own side's interests. His particular study was of how this dilemma affected both African chiefs (shop stewards) and colonial district officers (supervisors).

Examples of this phenomenon in action were given in this study by Phyllis and Margaret who described how, as supervisors, they closely identified with the interests of those who worked in their departments, and by Jeanette who

said of the management, "a lot of times, you see, I know what they're doing is right and I can't knock it."

At least as far as rituals are concerned, however, the inter-action between management and unions in British industry is an adversarial one. Because trade unions operate almost entirely on a basis of reaction to management proposals any dynamism within the industrial organisation tends to be formalised. Thus attempts by management to encourage some participation, albeit limited, in initiatives such as the development of Quality Circles, tend to be viewed with distrust by workers. The pattern of British industrial life is that management makes a suggestion or gives an order and the role of the workers', and of the unions formally on their behalf, is to look for the catch in management's proposals from the workers' point of view.

This is where we see Beynon's "frontier of control" between management and workers, discussed in Chapter 10 in operation. This adversarial approach to industrial organisation can be seen as beneficial since at least to an extent it ensures that workers' interests are safeguarded, but it can also be seen as having a negative effect for it means that the ideas and experience of workers are not usually welcomed by management and vice versa. The assumption that there are "two sides" in industry suggests that the other side must only have its

own interests in mind. Shop floor workers on Tyneside, at least until recent times, often spent the whole of their working lives in the same factory and, indeed, in the same job. They outlasted managers who tended to come and go. While the effects of habit can mean that people are unwilling to try new ideas it is often the case that workers' knowledge and understanding of the job is underestimated and ignored. Recently, for example, someone was appointed at Jameses to look at the production problems of one of the products. He did not talk to the operator who had been hand polishing them for years.

The way that workers' expertise can be wasted emerged in my conversation with Brenda. At the time when the conversation took place she was very involved in issues arising from the fact that the part of the factory where she worked, and where many of those she represented worked, was to be vacated and all departments were to be re-located in the older part of the factory. Brenda had been a shop steward for about fifteen years and was currently a senior shop steward. She has worked in most departments in the factory in a wide variety of jobs and represented a great many of the sections employing women. It was therefore not surprising that she had a very comprehensive view of what was going on. "To be a good steward, you've got to think of everybody, not just the people you're picked to represent. 'Cos what's

necessarily good for your few people in your area could backfire on somebody else in another area."

She had thought a great deal about trade unionism : "I think you are either interested in trade unionism to spend a little bit of work on a night time doing things and not just floating around the factory getting A.P.P.¹ and doing stupid things. I mean, the likes of our substantive agreement and that, when we were making it up, I mean I took it home and I've read it and even now I go back to it for different things. And I would say now there's some stewards there don't even know what it's like or even opened it. And many a time I do things, I do things at home for the union, like, that I could do at work shall we say. But I find that when you go home and you sit and think about it, sometimes things seem different or better when you go home and think about it. You see, a good example is, I've spent a fair bit of time recently on - We know the new extension's got to be shut and we've all got to be moved into the old extension. Nobody's objecting to that. They can all see the logic of it. People just want to move with their jobs, with their work. And I know for a fact we'll have trouble in the assembly over it. But I went home one night and spent nearly three hours on it." ...

1. Average Pay & Performance (rate of pay given to those doing official union business)

"I started from the amount of operators we have; all the different types of machines we have and why you can't separate this'n from that'n. See, it's all right for somebody like the Alan Barnses and Jim Mckenzie (the managers) of this world to say, 'Oh, we'll take the Painter and we'll stick it there, 'cos we'll call this an "In Process Department"' (which is what they want to do). 'Now we'll stick so many machines in the Fabric'. But that's breaking up people's work practices that they've been doing for years and I don't think, I don't think really if it went to a Tribunal that they would get away with that - something that's been custom and practice for your job over years, that they can just chop little bits here and there and segregate it. I mean, for instance, the Painter is part of the rota in our place where we do one day in five. Now they want to take it away 'cos there's a new Painter coming in and just take an operator out of the Assembly to work them Painters. Nobody in the Assembly wants to work the Painters for forty hours. They don't mind working it for one day a week on a rota. But nobody wants to put up with the fumes and the mess and that for forty hours."

"There's lots of jobs in there where they're physical and we'll only probably do five hundred each per person on a rota and then we'll come off it. It's all right people just saying, 'Oh, I'll take that, that and that' but they don't know the consequences behind it. We've got heavy

casings where we only do half a day's work for each person. If they take that Punch away and just take two operators with it, somebody may have to sit on there for two or three days off the trot. They couldn't do it. I mean, some of the Punches is that big, you know, you lift them up, you're worn out before you start punching. And I mean I spent a lot of time at writing all this down. However, whether or not it's going to make any difference to the management at the end of the day I've no idea."

I asked Brenda about the issue of keeping people together who had worked together when the move occurred but she dismissed this as unimportant. It was keeping the job shape intact that mattered. "Why it's so difficult in our end is we've got eight different types of machines which they could say, 'We'll stick two here, two there, two there and two there.' But once you start doing that you could be starting to take money off people because you've been evaluated on all that which comes out at a grade. But once you start chopping things off like that then your evaluation's got to change on your job. Instead of coming out D you might get C, you might get B, which means people could lose financially, plus the fact on a lot of our jobs there is physical effort attached to it where we only do so many of each. And depending on what type of job they move where, people's not stupid, they're not going to volunteer to go. And that could cause a bigger problem...

It's not just keeping the people together, that doesn't matter. It's the type of machinery and the work that's got to be kept together in our instance."

Caroline : "Do you feel that the management relies on your judgement at all?"

Brenda : "Up to now they've always gone along with us. But since Alan Barnes took over from Jim Johnson it seems as though Mr. Wilson hears more what he says than what anybody else does. For instance, I've heard that they've got areas marked out where they're splitting Assembly up and going to put them. Now to me they're going to do that before they've even bothered to sit and talk about it and find out the complications. That will be where the clash is. Because you can see that they're going to do it. It doesn't matter what anybody's got to have to say."

Caroline : "I'd been wondering if there were going to be any preliminary discussions when the management asked for the union's view."

Brenda : "Well, they're supposed to before they shift anything but the way they're marking the floor and that out, and putting things on the floor, what machines is going where, it gives me the impression that it doesn't matter what I try to say they're going to do it. And all I've told the members is that at the end of the day we'll just take them through procedure on it and claim custom and practice - that's been your job for twenty odd year - you know. And I says, 'At the end of the day, whatever

happens - and I don't know what'll come out of it - because you bring a District Official in. He'll ask you ... 'What are you willing to do about it?' And what they've said is they'll be quite willing to come out on strike. So I don't know whether they'll change their minds on that."

What comes over in what Brenda says here is not only the feeling that her careful thought about how the department should be organised may be ignored, but also the sense that she is describing the change in the industrial relations climate brought about partly by the recession and partly by the policies of the government in the early nineteen eighties. Much of her experience as a steward had been in the industrial relations climate, the inauguration of which we heard about in Phyllis' account of her experience as a steward. Brenda and Jeanette were accustomed to operating in a system where management had to seek approval from the unions for moves they wished to make. The assumption that industrial action might be taken was a potent threat. In Brenda's account we hear that this system is beginning to crumble. Management are beginning to take unilateral decisions, not to bother with consultation and to risk strike action. The union's power is undermined by the weak position of the factory as a whole. At one point in our conversation Brenda said, "I'll be greatly surprised if Latec's keeps us open."

In Brenda's view, however, the problems were not just caused by the external climate : "It's definitely something within the place. I mean, I know we've lost orders and that but we've picked up a bit on a few orders... It's not working right. It's a multitude of things really. But one of the things that surprises me is that we've had that many changes in the managerial side, some of the people we've got in - I'm not saying - they're probably brighter than me in any case like - but at least I reckon I fairly well know the product from this factory from the Mill Room till it going out the door... We seem to have a lot of people in here coming in now - I'm talking from Managing Directors right down to the likes of Mr. Wilson, Rampton and that, who still haven't got a clue what goes on in the factory and how many processes that product has to go through. I think they just think it's like making a tyre where it's one commodity, something gets done to it there, it goes to the next place and it's finished. And I think these people that think like that are living in Walt Disney land, like, because it doesn't happen that way."

An example of what Brenda felt to be a mistaken management policy was the adoption of "cell units" in the factory. The idea of these was to bring together all the stages of production of particular products rather than having large departments concerned with one particular phase of

production across the whole product range. Brenda's view was that this would not work. Her view was based on her experience of working, several years before, in the New Projects Department which had been set up precisely on the cell principle. It was found that such self-contained units had to send work out to other departments when a backlog built up. There was also the problem that some jobs didn't need certain stages of the process and operators were left without work. The current "cell unit" plan was being tried out with Department B as a pilot study.

Brenda explained the thinking behind the policy : "The theory of it is that instead of it (the product) lying around from it being moulded till it's finished, which sometimes can be a gap of months... it's supposed to stop that gap so the work'll come off the presses, get knifed, inspected, sprung, straight out the door. That is the principle behind it, so you've never got a build-up of work; it's coming in and going out. It's not happening. I mean we've got some (work) from Department B now which is coming out into the finishing areas. It wasn't meant for that... I brought it up at last week's Production Meeting, the same thing : 'Why are we doing stuff for Department B when it's supposed to be a self-sufficient unit?' Yet we're getting into deeper trouble in the finishing areas. We're not getting work out. Now if people higher up don't know this and they're going into

Department B and they're saying, 'Ee, mind, the work's going down smashing. There's no boxes in here like'; but they're not seeing the stillage loads that the bloke's bringing out like - who's trying to justify what, like?"

I commented that it seemed that the lessons learned in one five year cycle got forgotten and had to be learned again. Brenda said, "You see, every Director we've had and every Works Manager we've had all come in with something bright. But it's always something that the other one said was 'nae good'. Well, I mean, an example is when Mr. Grey was here : 'We're only going to take large orders' They wanted nothing to do with small orders. It caused headaches wherever you got them from and there was no value in it at the end of the day. And they were going to write to customers and say if you couldn't order a large batch they more or less didn't want to know you.... And then he left and we've got Mr. Wilson now... but now we've got to take any order that comes in to keep w' going. So if it wasn't profitable then to do it, why are we doing it now?... Really, I've never been so depressed and miserable as what I am at Jameses now. When I see half the rubbish that's being turned out which we know the operators themselves know is no good, and you're told to run it. And you keep seeing stuff coming back and back for rectification. I keep saying to myself, 'No wonder we're not making any money, like'."

Perhaps not surprisingly, in view of what Brenda says here, her mother regrets Brenda's union involvement : "My Mam just says, 'You should chuck it'. She says, 'You're going greyer and greyer.' She says, 'You worry too much. You bring your problems home with you'." Brenda, however, said, "I don't think I could give it up, because I like... I enjoy being a shop steward. It gets you down sometimes like. But I don't think I could give it up because I believe in Trade Unionism." On the other hand Brenda is aware that her union activity does not endear her to the management : "I don't think it does you any good, like, at the end of the day. I don't mean from the workers' point of view. I mean I've been told by the management that I'm a right pain in the neck to them."

Reflecting on what Brenda had said I felt that her role as steward is the only role open to her that gives scope for her obvious management abilities. Even had she wished to do so there would really have been no way for a woman of her generation and situation to have moved up the management tree.

Trade Union Education

What has helped Brenda and Jeanette to sustain the stresses involved in being shop stewards, to develop their confidence and their ability to think systematically about the issues facing them, has been going on Trade Union training courses. The training they received,

particularly on residential courses, they found valuable. They enjoyed meeting one of the lecturers, a woman who came originally from Tyneside. She shared much of their background and therefore gave them confidence. Brenda said of the training, "I found it very beneficial. The thing I liked about it is they kept you in groups and that. You weren't stood out on your neck on your own, like, worrying all the time, you know. You were in a group of people."

Jeanette's view was : "While you're there you think, 'I've learnt nothing.' But when you come home and you think - you have. Especially that I used to be embarrassed if I had to go and speak to Bill Wilson. The very fact that they get you thinking about things. They get you up to speak. They let you say what you think without everybody laughing at you. You're encouraged to say your own thing, what you believe in. Whether it's right or not doesn't matter, you can say it to them. Yea, you learn a lot. You learn a lot about the law. You learn a lot of bits that you think, 'Ee, I never knew that happened'." Jeanette gave examples of the working of Parliament and of the Labour Party. "You learn about the structure of the union. I hadn't ever thought of things like that. I never thought of the money we'd paid, where it went to. You learn a lot about people; how people work and the conditions they work under, because these

people tell you... You also have to tell them something about your place of work and what goes on there, which makes you think about what happens at your place. Because I'm so used with what goes on... Jameses is a very unionised factory."

Conclusion

In this chapter we have heard, filtering through what the women said about their experience, an account of the development of industrial relations on Tyneside from the period just before the Second World War until the beginning of the 1980s. We have heard of the influence of different styles of management - paternalistic, scientific and remote, management by negotiation. It is a history of the growth of workers' influence and of the beginning of a decline as the recession began to take effect. Some of the changes were brought about by large scale factors such as changes in the national economy, the impact of government/legislation, and the impact of technological development. The legislation introduced by the Labour Government (Equal Pay Act 1970, Sex Discrimination Act 1975) did make an impact on the position of women even if this was short lived (progress towards equal pay has now halted) and limited. The introduction of the "new wage structure" was identified by Phyllis and Brenda as being at least in part a response to the impending Equal Pay Act. As we heard in this chapter and in Chapter 9 this new system was in some ways a mixed blessing. What is undisputed is that it increased the pay of operators even

though it increased the pressures under which they worked. Some of the changes were brought about by more personal, human factors such as the way in which authority is exercised in an organisation and how power shifts in response to organisational change. In this context we heard about the complex roles shop stewards are called upon to play and about how, though they are in some ways powerful figures, their insights could be ignored by management.

In the next chapter we will explore how women who embarked on running a workers' co-operative fared and how they dealt with the problems of authority in an organisation very different from a large capitalist company like Jameses.

CHAPTER 12

WORKING IN A CO-OPERATIVE

What is it Like?

"When I first started at Marie Sutherland, I was just dismayed. I just couldn't make head nor tail of the place. There was June and Alice and they were the bosses and Paul Cane was there and he was the boss and I used to think, 'My God, I've never worked in a place like this before in my life.' I mean, you had the boss and the workers - not everybody was the boss! And you didn't know who to speak to. I was just bewildered and I couldn't believe it." (JULIE)

"We've had to learn the hard way. And we've had a lot of strife, lot of heartache, lot of upset. But at the end of the day - and we're still learning and we've still got a long way to go - but at the end of the day my opinion about the co-op - it's the best thing that anybody could do. For all the ups and downs it's better working for yourselves than working for someone else." (JUNE)

"I mean, it's not right. They should have a boss in here, definitely." (PAM)

"I think it would be hard to adapt yourself to someone telling you when to come in, when to stand up, when to sit down - when to go to the toilet and when to come out! But

I think we work harder. I think we've got more incentive to work whereas when you're working for someone else, if you can skive you'll do it." (ALICE)

These thoughts of women working at Marie Sutherland, a clothing co-operative started in 1981, reflect the mixed feelings which the experience has produced. On the one hand it was "the best thing that anybody could do" but on the other hand, as another member said, "I wouldn't start another one." It has been a costly endeavour in personal relationships, physical effort and determination, and in corporate responsibility.

This chapter will not attempt to cover the history of Marie Sutherland, a task which is being undertaken by Dr. Mary Mellor of Newcastle Polytechnic. Instead I will describe, through the accounts of June and Alice, something of how the co-operative came to be set up. Then some of the issues will be explored which have arisen in the running of it and which relate to the themes of this study. In the other chapters we have heard accounts of women's experience of working in shops and factories on Tyneside. In these they were employees with very little influence over the direction taken by their employers. We have had some glimpses of their experience at home where their influence was more powerful, particularly in relation to the care of their children. But in this account of the setting-up and running of Marie Sutherland,

we hear from women who found themselves caught up in a situation where they were taking initiatives, attracting publicity and assuming business responsibilities.

The Fortunes of the Clothing Industry in the North East

Before going on to an account of the sit-in which was the prelude to the setting up of Marie Sutherland, I will refer briefly to the industrial background against which it took place. As will become clear, an important issue in the event was the resentment felt in the north east at the time about companies using regional development grants to help set up and equip factories, only to close when the statutory two year period had elapsed. It is important to be aware that as far as the clothing industry was concerned, the period from 1972 - 1981 was a very difficult one. The United Kingdom clothing industry was in major decline, chiefly because of overseas competition, and what was happening in the north east has to be understood in this context. In her article, Is There a Future for the Rag Trade in the North?, Irene Hardill reports that between 1972 and 1981 the Northern Region lost 40% of its workforce in clothing compared with 24% in manufacturing as a whole. She reports that in the period before this, 1966 - 71, there had been much movement of clothing firms to the Assisted Areas and she refers to the fact that in a survey by the Department of Industry in 1973, 45% of clothing and footwear firms agreed that

"government regional policy initiatives" had been "a major influence on their migration and location choice." The Regional Employment Premium "was particularly influential with regard to clothing firms, owing to their labour intensive nature." (Hardill (1985) p.32). In the period from 1978 - 81, the period in which Shirley Kendal's closed and Marie Sutherland opened, the Northern Region lost 2,489 jobs in clothing, a figure proportionately above the national average (op.cit. p.36). More recently according to Hardill, "the fortunes of the industry are improving... Spending on clothes from 1979 - 1983 grew at an (inflation adjusted) annual rate of 4%, against an average annual rise of 1.2% in general expenditure" (op.cit. p.37). A new Multi-Fibre Agreement came into operation at the beginning of 1982 which "regulates much of the world trade in textiles and clothing through the imposition of quotas." (op.cit. p.39).

This background of expansion, followed by decline, followed by some expansion, lies behind the account which follows of the experience of women machinists working in the north east throughout this period. Shirley Kendal's closed in the period of decline and Marie Sutherland managed to survive into the period when the industry began to revive. It has to be remembered, however, that even in stable periods, the clothing industry as a whole is a volatile industry. It is subject to fluctuations in fashion, works on tight profit margins, and has a sweated

sector of the industry always in existence. All this means that small clothing firms, such as Marie Sutherland, have a precarious existence.

The Sit-in which Led to the Setting-up of Marie Sutherland

It is very interesting, though perhaps not surprising, to discover that in some ways the whole thing began accidentally. The sit-in, which began on September 23rd 1980 at Shirley Kendal's, the factory where the original members of Marie Sutherland worked, was not planned. It just happened.

Before hearing June's account of this it is important to understand something of her personal situation at the time since this helps us to understand her enormous determination to make Marie Sutherland succeed. Shirley Kendal's was only open for eighteen months altogether and June worked there for its last three months. At the time she was emerging from a very difficult period of her life when she had been married to a professional man who proved to be mentally unstable. Her children were still young and she was anxious about leaving them with her husband if she went out to work. After two or three years when June was at home without a job but being tormented by domestic problems and anxieties over her husband, he left. She began, very gradually, to recover both from what she had been through and from her grief at its ending as it did.

Going to work at Shirley Kendal's was, she said, "like a new life, a new episode for us. And I was only there three months and I think that's what really hurt me so much because I was just starting. I mean I was broken hearted... and it took us a long time to sort of get over him and then, when I got this job at Shirley Kendal's, I got that when I was at work and talking to girls... I wasn't thinking, he wasn't on my mind as much.. and I was happy where I was and it was like a new start. And I thought well, you know, you've just got to make the best of life. And the kids were a lot more contented. So it really hurt me and shocked us when I had only been there three month when it went into liquidation."

Just prior to the announcement of liquidation the factory had been working on a huge, £26,000 skirt order which the manager, Mr. Morton, said was for his partner, Mr. Baumgarten, in London. The pace of work had been such that the women had taken their own irons and ironing boards into work to press the skirts and they had been working overtime. With hindsight June said, "And it had all been a swindle, man, and we never got paid nor nowt for it."

To begin with the women supported Mr. Morton. But when the last group of workers, not laid off, were told that they could work for the week but that they wouldn't get paid, Marion (one of the workers) 'phoned round and called

a meeting at her house in the evening. She managed to get Mr. Morton to come to it saying, "the girls were all in an upset state" and wanted to know what was going on. June was at the meeting : "So he come into the house. Now we were all sympathetic towards him because he was telling w' the tale that this partner, Baumgarten, the London-based, what you call "the silent partner", had sprung this on him... and we were all feeling sorry for him and said we would work till he could get hisself out of the mess, for no wages for a certain length of time, to help him. And he says, 'Girls, I don't want you, very kind of you, but yous only going to make matters worse.' 'Cos we were all saying we would get up a petition and we'd get this Baumgarten for you Mr. Morton, and all this, for the dirty trick, 'cos he was making out that he had left him in the cart... so when he went and Marion seen him to the door he says, 'I've got a few pairs of jeans if you want them.' Well, Marion started to think, and when she went right up to his car, his car was loaded from the bottom to the roof with all the jeans that had been made that day in the factory....."

"When we come back in Marion says, 'I don't like the sound of this. We offered to help him and he doesn't want us. There's a rabbit off somewhere. I think he's just as much in - and it's a con racket, this'."

After the women had gone home, Marion's husband came home. He suggested they should all go to the factory first thing in the morning and see what was going on. Marion 'phoned round again telling the other women to meet at the bus stop near the factory for eight o'clock.

June went on with the story : "I didn't expect what happened that morning. So we all meets. It was cold - a chilly morning and we got there for half-past seven. So we had a walk down, round the bank to the factory. There was nobody around. Well, we stood a bit and we thought, 'Well, we're stupid'. Cos they have still, little tea rooms on the front. So we went back and had a cup of hot tea to warm w' up. And we come back over again. Still no signs of anybody. So one of them was dying to go to the toilet so we went round the back of the factory where there was grass and all that, spare ground, nobody sees you, to use it as a toilet. So on w' way back - it was an act of fate - on w' way back to the front entrance, we just gets to the corner and Marion comes (hoarse whisper), 'There's Morton and Mr. Deer.' Mr. Deer was the foreman. One of the doors was open so we just opened the door, they didn't know we were there, you see. And we just all walked in... and we just sat down on w' chairs. Well, Morton was at the other end of the factory in the office. Well, he come out and he seen w' and he says, 'What are you doing here, girls?' And he was, like, trying to be pleasant. Well Marion wasn't pleasant back to him. She

says, 'We're in here and we're here to stay. We're not budging.' She says, 'This is a sit-in!'"

"Well, I was a bit frightened. I didn't expect - I wasn't like then what I've learned to be and what's made us like I am now. I was a bit frightened... I had never been involved in anything in all my years of working, in any dispute or aggro or anything like that, till this happened. So I says, 'Ee, well, what does that mean, Marion'? She says, 'It means-'. I says, 'Well, what about when we've got to go home'? She says, 'We don't go home tonight. We're staying here.' 'Ee', I says, 'Are we? We'll get wrong off Morton!' She says, 'It doesn't make any bloody difference!... he'll lock w' in won't he? He'll not stay here all night. He'll have to go home. We'll just stop here.'"

"I didn't want to desert them, you know. I didn't want to say, 'Oh well, I'm not avail....' I says, 'Oh well', I says, 'Well, how will I get word home for the bairns, like?' I mean I always called them "the bairns" but they were old enough to see to theirselves. So, anyway, I think I 'phoned a neighbour up.... the telephone wasn't cut off you see.... so we stayed there. I was choking for a cuppa tea. I never went prepared for anything like that."

Some of the others 'phoned friends who lived near : "Can you bring w' a flask of tea? We're starving, we've got

nowt, we're having a sit-in. Are you coming over?" Well, they started all coming with groceries and stuff and they were shoving them through the letter box and through the toilet windows and everything! Ah, but we got it organised. It was smashing."

The first night they just sat in chairs and Mr. Morton told them the burglar alarm was on and they must keep to a restricted area. It was not clear whether this was actually true but by the second night a local councillor had organised bedding and told the manager there was obviously no need for the alarm since the factory was occupied. June continued. "So we had all the area of space. We could go to the canteen and cook hot meals if we wanted with the oven... Well the beds and the bedding had to be handed - and they couldn't stop them from being took through the office to bring into the factory.... The people were coming in cars. There was nurses coming. Then the newspaper people started coming. Then the television cameras. And the Union was keep coming down. And then we'd get these militant political and Workers' Revolutionary Party, the Newslane, coming and wanting to know about w' dispute. And politics was getting in to it and oh, my God, ee! And I was starting to get more aware of things, and my back up, and interested, and felt I wanted to fight for your rights."

June was made a shop steward. "'Cos they said, 'You're a good fighter and you know what you -' I don't know, something just seemed to click. I'm not a stirrer or an aggro person that would cause trouble. It's got to be for unfairness done to somebody.... but I think it was because you were so full of anger at the dirty trick and how you knew what when you worked for them employers you put your heart and soul into it and you sweated your eyeballs to get this £26,000 skirt order out and it was the dirty trick that had been done and how willing we were going to be to help to save his business because we liked working there."

The management of the factory called in the electricity board to cut off the supply. But Marion spotted the van and ran out and said, "Do you know there's a dispute here? There's a sit-in here. So the lad said, 'Oh, right pet, we won't cross your picket line' and away they go. So this got Morton's back up, and Mr. Deer."

In the first week of the sit-in the women had arranged with the Union to have a bus to take them to London to picket Baumgarten's factory. June said, "'The Cowboy', as we called him. 'The Cockney Cowboy coming up to exploit the North East Workers' and all this slavver. And wasting, abusing grants and ratepayers for the free two years. We blasted all this out and we were going to stop all this racketing. And it got to the politicians up

at Tyne & Wear and we had them coming from all over."

They ran a shift system on the sit-in so that they got a chance to go home for a bath and "to get away from the pressure". They suffered from bites for which a nurse gave them T.C.P. "And our eyes were all starting to go blotchy and red and sore. Oh, it took it out of w', Caroline." As the ten days the sit-in lasted went on, the number taking part dwindled so the few left had to carry it on among themselves. When it came to going to London, two, who had never sat-in before, came to do so.

June and the others went to London "and picketed this factory. And the police car come and luckily he was a policeman from Shields, because they don't let you loiter around in London... so when we told him all what it was about - you see when we got there with all w' pickets and shouting, 'Come out you bum, Baumgarten, the bum who... da di da...' And there was workmen building new factories and we were telling everybody what he was. And they were supporting w' and they were banging their hammers on the corrugated iron... They were banging, supporting w', 'Come out, you bugger'."

"Well, our Mary (June's daughter) was working down London doing the nanny work... and she got the Tube... and here's me picketing and I'm standing at the gates 'cos there was

a big lorry with things on going in and I was stopping it like this and I heard Betty shouting, 'June, June'. I says, 'He's not getting - Ee!' I says - 'Mary!' - and the lorry went!"

Two of the women and the union official went in to see Mr. Baumgarten who took the line that a great fuss was being made unnecessarily and that other orders would have been forthcoming.

After the visit to London, the union official wanted the women to abandon the sit-in. They were unwilling to do this because they hoped to "save" the factory and to re-open it. Things were exacerbated when the managers succeeded in getting the electricity cut off by managers from the electricity board. This meant there was no heat and no light except for a calor gas stove lent by workers in a neighbouring factory.

The women were determined to remain and June rang the local radio to publicise their plight, emphasising the fact that men had cut off the electricity on a group of women. What turned out to be their last night in the factory was bitterly cold. June was worrying about the radio interview she was to have in the morning.

When the call came she was asked if they were still going to continue. "And I said, 'Oh yes, no cold is going...

they're not going.... to drive us out. When we leave here it will be because we want to go and it's in our interests that we're vacating it.' - You know, like nobody will force us out and this martyrdom on the 'phone!"

"He said, 'I think yous are very brave women.' 'Do you know', he says, 'it's been the coldest night of the year?' (All this slavver!). I says, 'Well, we've never really felt it' I says. 'We're so full of aggro and passion....' I told him about the way that the rag trade is being exploited by these cowboys, con men. He says, 'Now be careful...' I says, 'Oh, well, that's exactly what they are. Using ratepayers' money, getting government grants, making out that they're going to give the north east workers jobs and what are they doing? They're abusing w' - free rent, grant money - and then when the two years' up they play back voluntary liquidation. And then you're thrown out on the scrap heap. Well, this time they've played with the wrong ones when they've played with Shirley Kendal's crowd.' - All this slavver. And that ended that and, ee, was I glad!"

June went on to describe how, after this demanding beginning to the day, the women tried to resist attempts by the management and the union to persuade them to abandon the sit-in. They were threatening to chain themselves to the machines and were preventing the

liquidator from getting on with his task. By this time the women were very tired and it seems that they were only able to see their aim as being to stay put until the factory was reopened and their jobs somehow restored.

The union official eventually persuaded them to go home, June explained by saying, "You cannot do no more sitting-in. You can do more on the outside. Your fight isn't over. Don't think we're deflating yous... It's just beginning. But you're tied in here. But when you get out you've got a meeting with the Leader of Tyne & Wear."

So they decided to move out and June's home, where there was a telephone, became the headquarters of the process that led eventually to the setting up of Marie Sutherland in a small factory unit with grant-aid from Tyne & Wear. June was glad to offer her house where she was just on her own with her children: "To me it was a new lease of life. I'd found new friends."

June's vivid account of the sit-in makes clear how quickly the group of women, who crept into the factory on that first morning and started the sit-in on the spur of the moment, became a group surprised at their own power and at the amount of publicity and political interest they attracted. June herself described how "something just seemed to click" for her personally as her political awareness and personal role in the affair grew. When she

describes some of the rhetoric they found themselves using, in response to the media and on the demonstration in London, as "slavver" and as "martyrdom on the 'phone", this was not because she did not believe in the truth of what was being said or in the justice of their cause. It is clear that the women felt tricked by the managers who had, they felt, manipulated them into working for nothing and spurned their offers of help. This was the immediate cause of their anger and energy. What also happened was that they realised that they could stand up to people in authority and make demands of them rather than simply feeling afraid of "getting wrong" if there was any kind of confrontation. More deeply buried feelings also began to emerge about how as women machinists they were expected to put up with being taken on and laid off by companies with a fleeting interest in the north east.

June, looking back, was aware of how much she grew through the experience of the sit-in and subsequent experiences when she said, "I wasn't like then what I've learned to be and what's made us like I am now." For all that she showed unease, certainly with hindsight, at using phrases about "exploited north east workers", "wasting ratepayers' money" and "no cold will drive us out". Why was this? In a sense her unease was surprising since the issue she was pointing to over companies that have set up in business in the north east with the aid of regional development grants

and closed down after the statutory minimum period has elapsed, is an important issue of regional policy and experience. Perhaps her unease was something to do with using expressions that were ready-made and presumably offered by the press and the politicians who arrived on the scene of the sit-in. This was not an issue I took up with her so I do not know what her explanation would have been. Throughout her description of the sit-in, however, there is a sense that she is describing an experience which was rather like being in a play. It was as if the group of women who opened the door that morning and entered the factory that was no longer a factory, had stumbled from backstage on to front stage. The lights suddenly went up (on) they "were on". No wonder the parts and the words seemed unfamiliar.

Another element in the drama was the interplay between their ordinary lives as wives and mothers and their professional lives on stage. Alice left the stage after the second night because her first grandchild was born and that was a priority. June was distracted from her part as a picket holding up the lorry. She ran to embrace her daughter and "the lorry went".

The sit-in also touched community feeling in the area. June said, "Everybody was bringing groceries for w' - bread - and it was all getting handed through the toilet window. The bread was getting flattened!". June went

round the pubs and clubs collecting money to help pay for the bus to London and came back to the factory to report progress. "I had my Sunday dinner shoved through the letter box - outside!" They had a full-blown Sunday dinner with Yorkshire pudding and apple pie with double cream - "We didn't starve!".

One of the shipyards had a collection which raised £200 which was used to pay the 'phone bill while June's house was being used as a headquarters.

On the other hand a local Labour M.P. whom June went to see declined to give the women even verbal support. At this time (October 1980) there was much concern in the Labour Party about the activity of Militant for this was the period leading up to the founding of the S.D.P. on March 26th 1981. This, added to the interest in the women's campaign shown by other Left groups, probably made him wary. From June's account it seems that the trade union concerned was also somewhat wary of encouraging the sit-in unreservedly.

In Women in Control, Judy Wajcman documents the experience of the women who set up the Fakenham shoe co-operative after a similar sit-in at a shoe factory threatened with closure in Fakenham. In response to the sit-in there, the union - the National Union of Footwear, Leather and Allied

Trades - "told the women that the Fakenham factory was now the property of the Receiver and warned them that they might be regarded as trespassers. Showing scant regard for the women's efforts, and even less concern for their employment prospects, they maintained they could see no real point in the action. Natalia recalled that one of the NUFLAT officials told them 'not to be silly girls and go home'." (Wajcman (1983) p.48). While the Tailor & Garment Workers' official was more positive than this with the women from Shirley Kendal, coming on the bus with them to London, he was anxious to see the action ended, perhaps for the same legal reasons as the NUFLAT officials.

It was therefore left to two members of the Workers Revolutionary Party who came to June's house to support the women. Through them the company records of Shirley Kendal were investigated. It turned out that the company had failed to pay workers' National Insurance contributions and amounts deducted from wages for private savings had not been paid. The Fraud Squad conducted an investigation.

The women were not anxious to see their campaign as part of some larger political struggle. June said of this time, "We got involved in politics and we started to get frightened". What the women wanted was secure jobs and they negotiated with Tyne & Wear County Council for financial support.

The Setting-up of Marie Sutherland

This financial support was forthcoming. The local Co-operative Development Association, at that time a voluntary organisation with no paid workers, found someone to conduct a feasibility study. Geoffrey, who did the study, stayed on to help the co-operative to get established. Much of this process was not, according to June, really understood by the women : "We didn't realise what we were getting into. We didn't even realise it was going to be a co-op. We just thought it was going to be a factory with a job and it hit us and we thought... Geoffrey was going to be our boss and he would just tell us what had to be done. And the shock really hit us when we realised we had to run it ourselves eventually."

Alice, who had left the sit-in when her grandchild was born, came back into the picture at this stage. She had been rung up : ... "They said that they were thinking of starting a co-op. Did I know anything about them?" I thought, 'Well, I have an idea what they are', you know, and how they were going to go about it. And they said they were going to see a solicitor and see about the legal side of it and was I interested if they did happen to form one? And I said, "Oh yes."

She was called to a meeting at which Geoffrey was present. Alice had known him as a "time and motion man". "He didn't look the part somehow - I mean I knew he was going

to be the manager. I thought, 'time and motion man?' I thought, 'Well, maybe he's got more prospects than what I give him credit for.'"

Alice got involved "going to Newcastle, shopping around for materials and patterns and so forth." Geoffrey seemed to want them to work in someone's home to make up samples. Alice felt, 'that's a bit much, working in someone's home.' So June had said she knew someone in "The Norseman" - 'that might let us have a room'. This was arranged at '5 a week. Three of the women, including June and Alice, were chosen to be the sample hands. This caused upset to some of the others who had been leading figures in the sit-in but who were not machinists and could therefore not do anything useful at this stage.

Beds had to be cleared out of the room and chairs and tables installed. Alice's husband brought the women's own machines in his car. Alice said, "I enjoyed it. I really enjoyed those three weeks I was there. It was a laugh. It was an experience!" From there they moved to the newly-built factory unit found for them through Tyne & Wear Council. While finishing touches were being put to the building they sat round the fire they had brought "and talked about what we could do, what we could make. And Geoffrey had weird ideas, you know. He wanted all this ethnic material and we didn't know what he was talking

about half the time.... I thought that sort of thing doesn't sell. And then he was going to start a knitting group and I thought that's not going to sell either. We're going to have to mass-produce things for the working class really if you wanted to make money quick."

Marion, who had initiated the sit-in, was a "passer" - someone whose job was to inspect and tidy up garments at the end of the manufacturing process. Her skill was not needed to start with so she was not one of the first who started as paid workers. This caused a row between Marion and Betty, who was to do the accounts. They had been close friends for years and this row soured the beginnings of the co-op. In a sense this was an omen of things to come. Alice commented with hindsight. "We were warned when we started the co-op that eventually they would all leave and it would all be new members. And it's happening."

Working in the Co-operative

Marie Sutherland was registered as a co-op on April 27th 1981. The first eighteen months were very difficult as they tried to get established, mainly undertaking "cut, make & trim" for clothing wholesalers but also exploring the possibilities of selling their own products direct to local retailers.

Initially, management was in the hands of Geoffrey and the women left the financial side of the business to him. When he left, at the end of 1981, they discovered, to their surprise, that their financial situation was serious. The initial start-up money had been spent and sufficient income was not being made to cover overheads. From the Spring of 1982 until the September of that year a local authority agency provided management support in the shape of Paul Cane, mentioned by Julie in the quotation which opened this chapter. His role was ostensibly to give training to the women and help them run their own affairs. In practice he was a martinet who kept all power in his own hands. Julie described what it was like when she went there.

"The girls couldn't talk and June used to whisper to me, you know, and she used to say things to me and she used to say, 'We are a Co-operative, you know. We are bosses here... don't take notice of him. Take notice of us'."

The task that Paul Cane was given was, it has to be said, a very difficult assignment. The central problem for Marie Sutherland, as for other small companies, has always been that it has been difficult to give time to devising management and problem-solving procedures. When the co-op has had work the pressures of production have made this difficult and when the members have been worried about

lack of orders, they have been too preoccupied. In the early months of 1982 the most pressing need of the co-op was for orders.

At a meeting at the end of April the members reluctantly agreed to work for a minimum of £10 per week to enable Paul Cane to employ a supervisor. In making this decision - Edith said her man said she was a fool to work for nothing - June and the others were absolutely determined not to give up the struggle that had begun for them with the sit-in. At the meeting June declared that they would "work to the last gasp, till the legs are taken from under w'". In the notes I made at the time I described the women at the meeting as being "determined to realise their vision if they could, for reasons of personal pride and determination; they did not want to appear as scroungers to Tyne & Wear; and there was no real alternative for them." The feeling that they did not want to appear as scroungers is easily understood when we know all that had been felt and said at the sit-in about cowboys who took grants and closed down after a few months.

In spite of the determination felt by some, several of the original members left at this stage, either because they could not afford to stay, or because they were fed up with the situation. An hierarchical management structure was in operation in which the supervisor identified members who took leading roles as "trouble-makers". Some weeks

after the April meeting June was suspended from work by Paul Cane for insubordination. The situation was a ludicrous one in which the owners of the business, the members, were being treated as employees by those who were in fact employed by an outside agency, as trainers or, in the case of the supervisor, were in part employed by the co-op. Those who were recruited to work there at this time were, as we heard from Julie, unaware that they were working in a co-op and had to have the information clandestinely passed on to them in whispers by June!

The departure of Paul Cane in September was closely followed by Skinner's, a well-known local Company showing an interest in placing a regular order to have their weatherproof jackets made up by Marie Sutherland. Taking on this assignment gave the co-operative a long period of stability in which they were able to pay off their debts and establish a regular pattern of working. This arrangement meant that the co-op became largely an outworking department of Skinner's with relatively few management responsibilities and decisions to be taken. Skinner's delivered all the necessary materials, including thread, to enable the jackets to be made up and came to collect the finished products.

The tasks the co-op had to perform were : to negotiate the initial price per jacket (here they were helped by the

Co-operative Development Association) and subsequent revisions; to organise to meet the weekly targets; to deal with finance and the paying of wages and tax (again initial help was given by the C.D.A. and then an administrator was appointed); to deal with matters concerning the building and equipment and recruitment and personnel issues. As time went on the question of whether the co-op should expand into larger premises has arisen from time to time, so far without a decision to go ahead being taken.

As might be expected, the greatest problems have arisen from staffing questions : how to keep production up when members are away sick; how to deal with members whose rate of work is slow; and a number of other disciplinary issues. On the whole recruitment has not been a problem since the area is one in which there are many skilled machinists but there have been problems over whether people are able to "fit in". The most difficult problems to handle have arisen because of interpersonal conflicts and tensions among the members. Inevitably members have fallen out with each other and this has led to disputes between sub-groups within the co-op as members have taken sides. Very often these conflicts have hinged on issues of authority. Something which begins as a personal dispute, such as when one member swore at another, becomes an issue of authority when the question arises of whether or how the co-op is going to take any action about the

matter. At other times there have been disputes directly concerned with the exercise of authority, for example, when someone has taken unilateral action without getting agreement from others first. Although the co-op has an official management committee elected from the members, this has never functioned as an effective focus of leadership or decision making.

From its foundation the co-op has typically had eighteen members and up to five employees. Decisions have mainly been taken by meetings of the whole co-op called during lunchtime. There have been continual attempts to make these meetings a regular weekly commitment but in practice they have been held in response to crises or when things are going fairly smoothly but there are practical problems to be sorted out, for example about holiday arrangements. When production pressures are great or when there is potential conflict in the air, meetings have not taken place - in the second case because people have been afraid of what might be unleashed if a meeting were to take place.

These comments are based upon my own observations. I have visited the co-op as an industrial chaplain since November 1981. I had been seeking an introduction for a little while but since the co-op was in its early days and attracting a great deal of interest of various kinds, they

were overburdened with visitors. Fortunately I happened to meet the members with their banner taking part in the "Back to Jarrow" March held in November 1981 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Jarrow Crusade. Having made contact with them on this occasion, I followed it up with a visit the following day. I offered to give any help that was needed. In the first instance what was needed was help to make the toggles for the anoraks the co-op was currently working on. I remember being struck on that first occasion that someone had to call that it was lunchtime several times before anyone responded - a very different response from that you would get in an ordinary factory.

The first day I was there I sat next to Betty who had been involved in the sit-in and was learning to do the accounts. She said that some people in the co-op still viewed it as "just a job" but that in her view it was more than that and that they had to work harder. She also told me that they should have had a medical at the end of the sit-in because it took so much out of them. In saying this she perhaps said more than she knew, for in December she died after a heart attack. Her funeral was conducted by a woman Methodist minister and myself, which the members felt was appropriate. They all attended and I was glad to be able to speak about Betty's contribution to Marie Sutherland since the other minister knew nothing about this. This was a good example of how little the

church is usually in touch with people's lives at work and how it is usually assumed that it is family, not work, relationships which it is important to remember and affirm at funerals.

Betty's death came at a time of crisis for the co-op : their financial situation was becoming apparent and Geoffrey left soon after. Her loss was a shock but it also contributed to the determination of other members that the struggle to keep the co-op going should be continued in a sense as a tribute to the vision of those, like Betty, who had been in the sit-in.

Since that beginning I have continued to visit Marie Sutherland each week, sometimes performing practical tasks, but after the early days more usually having a pastoral and advisory role. This involvement has meant that I have caught at secondhand the vision of the women and felt their commitment to making the co-op a success. The struggle has been a difficult one attended by hardships and very painful conflicts between members. It has been good to see how those involved have gained in confidence as the co-op has become more secure. Members who had no experience of management or of running anything, other than their own household (in fact a much underrated skill) have learned to talk to bank managers and negotiate with Skinner's and with grant-making bodies, etc. Over

time, the co-op has learned more of how to deal with conflict without its becoming extremely destructive. This is, however, always easier to see after the event than before or during it. Each fresh conflict feels as if it may lead to the break up of the whole organisation.

If much has been learned, the most basic problems about the exercise of power and authority in the co-op have not really been resolved. This is not surprising since these are some of the most intractable problems in any human organisation. In this study we have heard about some of the ways in which management and unions have sought to institutionalise conflicts over power and attain a working relationship in large capitalist industrial organisations. The fact that so much energy goes into this and so many rituals have been evolved to make the handling of power in this context safe, shows just how intractable the issues are. It is not surprising that Marie Sutherland has experienced their intractability also.

The issue of how leadership was exercised in the co-op was discussed by all the members I talked with in connection with this study.

The Members' Views on Management in the Co-op

"At first we said we had to have a working supervisor; we couldn't afford a supervisor just to walk up and down. We

had to have a working one. And Jill did that for a while and I thought, 'This is going to work out great'. Then she got that she was sitting in the office more and more and more, and that was all she wanted to do and plan things and come out and tell you what to do. So she spoiled herself. She got that little bit power and it just went to her head." (ALICE)

"I mean we know there's got to be some kind of a person to look after the work and to take different parts of what's got to be done to run a place. But in the past - and we're going to try to make it that it doesn't happen in the future - but a few times in the past, when we've selected certain ones to do this role it goes to their head and they become management and employee.... and that never washes in a co-op." (JUNE)

"In all factories, no matter how small it is, you've got to have one spokeswoman or spokesman. You can't have twenty. Everybody says we've got twenty bosses but you can't have twenty bosses jumping up when someone comes in. So you've got to appoint someone to take over and tell people what to do or see someone if they come in. So we appointed Julie to do that but she works. She works as well on the machines and she sort of gets in touch with Skinner's. Now when Skinner's ring up they ask for Julie.... and it's working up to now. She doesn't sort of go overboard. Once or twice I've thought she might have

done 'cos the kids at the bottom, they got to the stage where they wouldn't speak to her because she was being a bit overpowering with them. But you can see the certain ones that come in. They've got that certain stamp about them. You can see it in Julie. Julie's so used - she's a stewardess in the club. She's so used to having people work for her in the club, she can get people to work for her here."

(ALICE)

Julie herself said : "There had to be somebody to deal with Skinner's because they'll only deal with one person. He won't have people running back and forwards to the 'phone willy-nilly. He won't have that at all. So I was voted for that, to deal with him and that was all I had to do. But you find, Caroline, as soon as anything goes wrong, they make a bee-line for you." She described some problems over making up jackets that had occurred that day...."Every minute somebody was saying, 'Julie', 'Julie'. By dinner time I could have screamed. I felt like running away. I thought, 'Well, yous are all supposed to be your own boss. I wish you would just think for yourselves, sometime, you know, instead of trying to pass the buck.' If everything's going all right, everybody's all right. But as soon as something starts to go wrong, they want somebody to blame, and you're it - and that annoys me!

Caroline : "They also want someone for reassurance."

Julie : "Oh aye.... I mean it's like me. If I find something wrong with my job I like to involve everybody and I'll say, 'Now, what do you think?'" She described a process of consultation with various others who couldn't solve the problem. "You know, it was just stalemate today. We were just going round each other. Then I was saying to Susan, 'See, Susan, if I do this that way you're not going to get your hem in.' She saying, 'Aye, I know'. But nowt constructive come out of it. We were just all sort of saying to each other, 'This is not right' and 'That's not right'. But getting it right was the factor and - I think we were tired... I was at screaming point. I mean this was half past three and I was sort of tearing my hair out, you know. But I think that's the way it should work now and it does. I mean we have w' ups and downs and we have w' arguments and that, but it's forgot about. Before it was them and us, where now everybody... You worked in a factory before, you handed your fault to the boss. You've got nobody to hand it to there. You've got to work it out for yourself."

Pam and Pat were not yet members of the co-op. They were "among the kids at the bottom" i.e. sitting at the other end of the small factory unit from the end where Julie, June and Alice sat. Their views on the co-op came from a different perspective. They were frustrated at not getting experience of different jobs. Pam said, "In here... you get stuck to the little jobs... like we cannot

really seem to do anything right, we're always doing something wrong, me and her. We feel like outsiders sometimes, you know."

I asked if the young people felt themselves to be in a separate group. Pam replied, "Us four, you mean? We are sort of different, aren't we?"

Pat : "'Cos we stick with w'selves, really."

Pam : "Well you cannot really say nothing to anyone else 'cos they seem to always find an answer for you and shove it down your throat."

Caroline : "It shouldn't be like this."

Pam : "I mean, they don't think that they are doing anything to us, like, but you know, we feel it."

I asked if they were involved in the lunchtime meetings.

Pam: "They asked w' if we wanted to go up, like. But we'd rather sit down here."

Pat : "They put like a bit of paper up on the wall and if there's owt we want to bring up at a meeting, we just write it down. But, like, if someone's not doing their number, anything like that, we all go up then. She (Julie) tells us all, like."

Pam : "When you talk up there, everyone looks at you and you feel as if - you know - you feel daft."

On the more positive side, Pat said : "I like it. There can be an atmosphere sometimes. Like, one minute you can

be all right and the next minute...."

Pam : "You can be friendly and too friendly, can't you? You know what I mean? I mean, it's not right. They should have a boss in here, definitely."

When I recorded my conversation with June she had recently become aware that another of the women, Amy, had been pressurising the young people into stepping up their work rate and even threatened that one of them would get the sack if she didn't. The young people were all considering leaving. June, whose daughter Mary was one of them, was furious when she got wind of what was happening. She called an emergency meeting at 8 a.m. and told Amy that she was nothing but trouble. Amy retorted that June only liked it when she was the centre of attention. The occasion of the pressurising was the fact that the co-op had begun finishing work at lunchtime on Fridays but had to achieve their production targets to do so. The young people were being asked to help out with other jobs once they had finished their quota. June said at the meeting, "We all like to be off soon but... not to this extreme. I says, 'To pressurise the young 'uns and make them - I'm proud of them', I says. 'They're four good kids we've got in here'."

In June's view the cause of the problem was Mavis, one of the older workers, whose rate of work was slow. Pam's

observation was, "I think they tend to pick on one person at a time though, in here. I mean it was Mavis before and it was Meryl last week. You know it changes from time to time. They always seem to be on to one person at a time."

Scapegoating, or finding someone to blame, has emerged as an important phenomenon in this study. The shop steward at Jameses identified being scapegoated as an important part of her function : "You know what they like? They like someone to blame." Julie, in describing her role at Marie Sutherland said, "As soon as something started to go wrong, they want somebody to blame, and you're it - and that annoys me!" For her, the difference between working in a traditionally organised industry and in a co-op was that in the first, "you handed your fault to the boss" ; while in the second, "You've got nobody to hand it to there. You've got to work it out for yourself."

In practice, of course, people are loathe to accept responsibility for faults and difficulties. A co-operative in theory has no "them" and "us" ; it is all "us". But, as we have heard in these accounts, even in a factory hardly bigger than a large room, groups identified themselves according to age and which end they sat. Alice was also aware that working arrangements could cause division and that members' awareness of their interdependence was limited. She said, "I don't like doing two lots of things in the factory because it's

always split the factory in half and I don't like it like that. And they'd be saying, 'Let them work out their own problems.' They don't realise that the money that's coming in is for the whole factory." She went on to give an example of how, on one occasion, those in the factory who were working on jackets had finished. The rest needed help with what they were doing. "Barbara had said, 'Well, I'm not helping because they've had plenty of time to get that work out and they shouldn't have to have help.' And I says, 'Whether they have to have help or not, they're going to have to have it, you know. Because if you don't help them the work's not going to go out, therefore you're not going to get the money in. Therefore the factory'll close.' And she still wouldn't have it. She sat there all afternoon with her arms folded all afternoon, and we all helped. I thought that was silly because she was cutting her own throat... We have little things like that cropping up now and again, which is understandable, and you've got to skate round it a little bit. The ice gets a little bit thin sometimes you know!"

An Industrial Common Ownership Movement study of Participation, Organisation & Democracy in Larger Co-ops (i.e. those with twenty or more workers which would therefore include Marie Sutherland) highlights many of the management problems that Marie Sutherland's have encountered. One of these, the issue of reluctant co-

operators, is also raised by the incident with Barbara here described. "For some of the larger co-operatives, simply having the opportunity for everyone to meet at all is rare, let alone in regular policy and decision-making meetings. Added to this are the complex questions of membership, who participates and, even more delicate because it can result in serious divisions in the co-op, does everyone want to participate?.... For some workers the answer would be a straightforward Yes. They are eager to be directly involved in decisions relating to pay, terms and working conditions. But for others, the answer is No. They see their jobs much as they did before; they want to put in their time at work then go home. They do not see the co-operative structure as having any direct bearing on themselves. They do not understand what all the fuss is about. Sometimes initial enthusiasm, especially after a successful rescue, drops off and is replaced by disillusion or bitterness when expectations are not realised or take longer to realise than was initially realised." (ICOM (1987) p.95).

Ideal and Reality

One way of summarising the experience of Marie Sutherland would be to say that to work in a co-operative is not to escape or to solve the problems faced in a traditional capitalist company but to be faced with an extra set of problems. What the members were talking about in the last

section was their experience of management within a co-op. But there are also a whole range of problems associated with the co-op's external relations, for example, the suspicion in which co-ops are likely to be held by prospective customers (Skinner's made exhaustive enquiries before placing their order) and the problems they face in getting loans. In the case of Marie Sutherland there was no member with experience of management above supervisory level, marketing, costing or accounting. The administrator who was appointed to work on a basis of equal pay with the women had no experience of office work and has been entirely self-taught by experience of doing the job. The clothing industry is one which works to tight margins; is often carried on in conditions of sweated labour and is subject to swings in demand in response to the seasons and to fashion. All these things mean that Marie Sutherland has a continuing battle for survival. So far they have survived through their association with Skinner's and before that with another company making outdoor weatherwear. Both these companies were in a section of the market less prone to fluctuation because of changes in fashion, though still subject to seasonal changes in demand. While in one sense the association with Skinner's gave Marie Sutherland stability, it also made them vulnerable since they were totally dependent on the one order which could be withdrawn at any time.

While these external problems were in fact the most serious facing the co-operative, they did not receive so much attention from the members. Probably this was in part because they felt too large to be dealt with - every time the question of expansion and diversification has been discussed at Marie Sutherland, it has thrown the group into anxiety and division. Some have wanted to go ahead and to take a risk which they saw as leading to greater security in the long run, while others, aware of how difficult sustaining even a small unit has been, have opposed any move. Faced with these dynamics the impetus to confront external problems has faded away until a crisis has occurred.

On the other hand the day to day problems of internal relationships have been immediately pressing and received more attention in what members said in the conversations I recorded and in my regular contacts with the co-operative.

One issue which did not really emerge in the recorded conversations was that of the role of the trade union in the situation. We noted that as far as the sit-in was concerned, the trade union was involved to a degree in supporting the women but was anxious to see an end to the sit-in. Trade unions have become so used to seeing their roles as advocates of employees over against management within capitalist enterprises that they find other roles

unfamiliar and alien. Judy Wajcman in Women in Control is very critical of the failure of NUFLAT to support the women involved in the Fakenham Shoe Co-operative.

"Unfortunately", she writes, "it shared with other unions a lack of experience in the practices of industrial democracy. Neither have trade unions developed the skills to enable them to provide technical expertise and advice to co-operatives." (Wajcman (1983) p.162). "Unable to assume a conventional role, the union had no role at all within the enterprise." (op.cit. p.163) For much of Marie Sutherland's life the Tailor & Garment Workers' Union has had a similar "sleeping" role. The only times it has been actively involved have been to support the cause of an individual member against the co-op. In the most serious example, a case of dismissal this, in effect, left the co-op, also union members, without professional advice in a complex legal and emotional situation. The only role the union knew how to manage was as an advocate of the "employee" against what was seen at the "employer".

On the face of it unions, through their shopfloor contacts, have an entree which might enable them to help workers in co-operative enterprises to work towards group problem-solving and the acceptance of responsibility for the decisions taken by the co-operative. Unions could also have a useful role in an area putting co-ops in touch with prospective customers through their links with other factories and in encouraging contact between co-

operatives. But to take on roles of this kind would not only entail training in new skills for full-time union officials but also a re-thinking of the unions' role in a labour movement facing a situation more diverse than in the days when capitalist industry, whether privately or state owned, ruled O.K.

As the experience of Marie Sutherland has unfolded, I have often been reminded of the biblical story of the Exodus. The children of Israel were led out of enslavement in Egypt through the vision of Moses. They journeyed towards the promised land but had to spend forty years in the wilderness on the way. The beginning of the story, when the sense of escape was strongest, was accompanied by wonderful happenings - Pharoah was assaulted by plagues and the waters of the Red Sea parted. Thereafter came the time when the vision of the promised land grew dim and the immediate privations of the wilderness were very pressing. The people grumbled at Moses for having ever brought them out of Egypt and he and the other leaders were left holding the vision of where they were going and why.

The exodus from being employees to being co-operators which the members of Marie Sutherland made via the sit-in at Shirley Kendal's was not in response to the compelling vision of one person. But, as time went on, certain people became, in a sense, the custodians of the vision,

while others, who came into the co-op at a later stage, have been more inclined to judge the experience on its immediate merits - whether it paid a decent wage, the conditions were reasonable and whether being freed from an hierarchical structure offered more advantages than disadvantages.

The two founding members with whom I recorded conversations, June and Alice, both expressed their hold on the original vision as well as their weariness at times with the strains of putting it into practice.

Alice said, "I wouldn't start another one, no way, I don't think June would. There's a lot of bickering. There's a lot of nasty things said. But we were told to expect that sort of thing... but now, I think, I've got so used to it that I keep thinking, 'Oh, well, tomorrow is another day'". But having said this she went on to say what I quoted at the beginning of this chapter, that she would not want to work in an ordinary factory after the experience of working in a co-operative. She went on, "I used to get panicky at first. But now I can laugh about things that I wouldn't have laughed at at the beginning... I enjoy it but.. knowing what I know now, I wouldn't start another one... And yet I think the time will come when all these big factories will close down and it'll all be co-ops... everybody sort of managing their own - I think it's a good idea really." When I asked why she felt the

big factories would close, Alice replied "Because I think there's too many strikes. I mean in a co-op you would have nothing to strike about because you'd be striking against yourself. I mean when there's strikes, you're striking against your boss, the owner. Well, there would be no ownership so there'd be no strikes. I think the economy would lift under those circumstances."

June said, "Well, you see, I think it's because of the way that we fought for it. I don't know if it goes for all of them but I know I can speak for Beryl, Alice and myself (the original members still involved at the time) - we've got a commitment to the co-op you know, and there's a lot of people that helped w' and we don't want to let them down. I mean there's many a time we could have said, 'to pot with it' you know, but we wouldn't, I wouldn't. I feel like I helped to fight for that place and no way will I let anybody ruin it because they haven't got the same feeling for it as what I've got. Because I helped with the other lasses... We are the original members but we don't make them feel that we are above them because the ones that are members now, they have as much say as what we have. But some of them really don't know exactly what a co-op is about and this is the hardest part in a co-op. And when we get a full workforce that feels and knows exactly what a co-op is all about, then things'll start and go better."

Though the founding members had a particularly strong hold on the vision that the success of Marie Sutherland represented, those who had come in to it later still had a commitment even if that was at the level of ensuring their job. Julie described the atmosphere at the time I recorded my conversation with her :

"I think it's building up now though, Caroline, the tension. And we've never had it for a twelvemonth. We've always been so happy just doing w' work, paying w' debts, getting w' wages, paying w' bills and it suited us down to the ground you know. And now the tension's there again, you know with the uncertainty, where the next work's going to come from. It's starting again. I could be wrong. It could just be the hassle of this new order." (They were making a different style of jacket for Skinner's). "But I can feel that atmosphere and everybody's worried. They say, 'I'm not bothered', but they are. I've said it myself, 'Oh well, if it goes, it goes. I'll have to send that car back mind...' But that's what I work for Caroline, things for myself. I mean I don't work because it's an absolute necessity. But, I mean, we have a holiday and I run that car and things and we couldn't do that if I didn't work. I mean, we could live and I mean, have a decent living, but we wouldn't be able to have all these other things. Where the likes of June - June's got to work - I mean she hasn't got to but it's either that or the social. It's as simple as that with June. It's not

like that for me or Alice. Alice's got a man to keep her - I have. But I'm not the kind of person that could stay in the house all day."

Overall, therefore, except at times of intense crisis when all would want to say "to pot with it" it is probable that those who work at Marie Sutherland would agree with June's words, quoted at the beginning of this chapter :

"At the end of the day - and we're still learning and we've still got a long way to go - but at the end of the day, my opinion about the co-op - it's the best thing that anybody could do. For all the ups & downs it's better working for yourselves than working for someone else!"

CHAPTER 13

WOMEN AS WORKERS - Some Themes and Conclusions

At the end of the last chapter we heard Julie drawing a distinction between her own position in relation to work and June's. Julie had a man to keep her and having a job was not an absolute necessity, while June had to work, it was "either that or the social". But, while she had choice, Julie said of herself, "I'm not the kind of person that could stay in the house all day."

Julie here sets out the position of women in our society in relation to paid employment - that for married women there is choice, at least while their husband is earning, but for single women or those with dependants there is not. On the other hand, the work available for those with dependants may not pay sufficiently for it to be worth taking on.

Women's 'Dual Role'

This study has not been concerned, except incidentally, with the role of women in the home. It has concentrated on the employment side of women's 'Dual Role or Double Identity', as Sue Sharpe entitled her study of 'the lives of working mothers'. The aim of this study has been to go in depth into women's experience of paid work and of paid work situations which are assumed to have no intrinsic interest. Much less has been written about this than about women's domestic roles. This is not to deny the "double identity" of women as workers, on the one hand, and

as wives, mothers, carers and homemakers, on the other.

In this study, glimpses of the ways that women's domestic roles impinged on their roles as workers have been seen. Julie was not the only one in this study who went back to work after becoming a mother out of choice rather than necessity. Nancy went back to work twilight shifts in clothing, in the first instance, to earn money for Christmas. Later she went back to help herself over the grief of a miscarriage. Alice became a machinist after a long period away from paid employment because she was bored at home when her sons were growing up.

Other women in this study, like June, worked from necessity. One even went to the lengths of concealing the fact that she had a child because she was afraid she would not have been taken on, as a single parent, by the engineering company to which she applied for a job in the early 1960s. This concealment continued after she got the job so she paid unnecessary tax.

For some of those who worked in paid jobs out of choice, it appears there was still a lingering sense that this might be somehow morally suspect - that it might mean that they were putting their own needs as people or their desire to improve the finances of the family, first, instead of their roles as mothers and wives. Nancy, whose children were being looked after in a workplace nursery took herself to task, thinking, "Well, you don't need money that much - your poor bairns!" and when her son hurt himself while in the nursery, she decided "They're not going in the nursery no more ... Well, that's it."

Julie, in talking about the care of her son, declared, "If I couldn't have family to mind him, I wouldn't have anybody to mind him ... I would sooner give the job up as it affect him."

Even when questions of childcare were not an issue, there was still the need to make it clear that work was not interfering with domestic roles. Audrey, who did a physically demanding full-time job at Jameses and was, in addition training officer and First Aider in her department as well as being a Union Appeals Rep., said of her job, "If it interfered too much at home I would stop it. I've always found that it's better to keep your home happy, even if you're hard up. If I found it was interfering too much at home - like when the men come in I have dinner on the table for quarter to five. Now if I found I had to take a job that was going to put that all out, that would be it. I won't work overtime for that reason. I think when the men have been to work all day they have to have their dinner on the table. I'm old fashioned like that."

The only woman in this study who expressed real anger about her situation was one who had given up her job as a hospital cleaner to look after her father. She said, "I'm very very bitter inside me, very very bitter at the government's policies." (This was in 1984). "Because I'm fifty-seven now. I've worked forty-three year of my life, apart from the two year I was redundant. Now I've given my job up to look after my Dad and I can't claim a halfpenny ... I'm not worried personally about my dole as long as I get credits," (i.e. for her National Insurance contributions) "but I can't even get credits, so that's

going to interfere with my pension ... There again, I think if a son went up to a hospital and said, 'I'm sorry, I just can't look after my Dad, I've got my job.' they'd say. 'Oh, you keep your job. We'll see ...' I think it's unfair that they should do that ... If I'd put my Dad in a home it would have cost them about £100 to keep him in the home and yet they won't even give me credits. That should be taken up with the Unions. That's what Unions should be fighting for not for 9½% rise or 10½% rise. They should be fighting for the life hereafter when people don't work. It doesn't say because you're sixty you've got to be thrown on a scrap heap."

This comment about how Unions should support carers expresses the feeling of isolation that women can experience when they are left to get on with working out solutions to problems in the family, their sense that it is usually the women who are left to take responsibility.

What emerges from the comments quoted in this chapter and in the experience described in earlier chapters, is that it has been very much left to women to work out for themselves the practicalities of fitting in paid employment with unpaid domestic labour, childcare and care of the elderly. As Sue Sharpe puts it/ "It is ironic that the organisation involved in combining home, childcare and a job would qualify many women for a management diploma, yet it goes unrecognised outside the home." (Sharpe (1984) p 233)

But is/ is not only the practicalities entailed in managing the "dual role" that women have to cope with, they also have to work out their own self image, the story

they tell themselves about what they are doing. The increasing number of married women in employment has been one of the most striking developments in our society in the second half of the twentieth century. "For the first time since the disruptive effect of industrialization was felt on men and women's work, marriage is not preventing many women from taking a paid job. In 1911, one in ten married women had a job; in 1951, one in five; in 1976, one in two. Two out of three employed women are now married." (Oakley (1981) p 147). What has been suggested in what the women in this study said about their experience is that it has been largely left to the women themselves to work out the immediate consequences of that change.

The Identity of Women as Workers

So what images of themselves as workers, what motivations, do women shop-floor workers have? Before trying to answer this question in relation to the women in this study we will consider some of the answers given in published material. First of all, it is only quite recently that the question has been taken seriously. Before that the assumption was that women derived their sense of identity from their roles in the family and that their work was only important as an extra. The old gibe about women working for pin money was in line with these assumptions, which of course ignored the situation of single women, whose role in the family might not have been of outstanding importance to them.

As late as 1961, we find Ferdynand Zweig, in his study of married women working at Mullard's, sounding quite taken

aback by the positive attitudes they expressed about their jobs. Having detailed the fact that forty-two out of the sixty-seven women he studied were "very outspoken" on the fact that they preferred to go out to work rather than stay at home, and recorded their lack of enthusiasm for spending their lives on housework, he advances a theory about what he calls "domesticated women". "Domesticity is actually an attitude of mind fostered or atrophied by the conditions at home and husband -wife relationship. I believe that this relationship plays a big part in domesticity. If the relationship is very good, the wife becomes domesticated; if, ^{el/} on the other hand, the relationship is not very satisfactory, she seeks companionship outside in order to find relief from her isolation and loneliness. Surprisingly enough, all mothers of large families (four to five children) declared that they enjoyed going out to work, and preferred factory to housework. Perhaps drudgery at home endured for a long time made the change seem enjoyable by contrast. Those who preferred to go out to work often added that they were not 'very fussy' about the home being 'spick and span'. 'I am not houseproud', they would say, or 'The polish is not the most important thing in life', or 'The house is for us, not we for the house', or 'Anyway we're not living in Buckingham Palace'.

"Those with a more introvert frame of mind, it seems, are happy at home, and find enough interest to occupy their minds, while the extroverts need stimulation from outside and wider interests. However, those inclined to brooding, worry, anxiety and fears, or to morbid introspection, are better off at work. 'You have no time to

worry when you come out', they say." (Zweig (1961) p. 173)

In this passage one senses that the writer's assumptions had been challenged. He records straightforwardly the points made by the women, but is taken aback that women with large families should wish to leave them to go out to work. The implication of his discussion of 'domesticity' is that those with a good sexual relationship with their husbands ought to find housework satisfying! In spite of himself, however, listening to what the women said, it seems he began to realise that factory work might be preferable to the 'drudgery' of unrelieved housework. The reasons that the women gave for working, recorded by Zweig, have been confirmed and developed in more recent studies. The point he makes, for example, about the importance of those 'inclined to brood, etc' going out to work, were amply confirmed by Brown and Harris (1978). Their study of women in Camberwell showed that having a job could be the decisive factor in forestalling depression and breakdown in women suffering stresses that had caused these in others.

One of the points made by Zweig about the reasons given by the women he studied for wanting a job was that, 'companionship was again and again referred to and stressed as the great incentive.' (op. cit. p. 173) Other studies of women workers such as Hunt (1968), Lupton (1963) and Martin and Roberts (1984) have found that companionship, or having friendly people to work with, are important to women, though perhaps not as emphatically so as suggested in Zweig's study. Martin and Roberts found that among all women the most important factor in what they looked for in a job was

'Work you like doing'. Among part-time women workers this was rated equally with (a) 'convenient hours' and (b) 'friendly people to work with'. Among full-time women workers 'friendly people to work with' stood alone as the second most important factor. (Martin and Roberts (1984) p. 72). This has to be set in perspective with what the women they surveyed said about their reasons for working. The responses to these questions emphasized the importance of earning as a prime motive. Among all those surveyed 35% said their main reason for working was to earn money for basic essentials. Among semi-skilled factory workers and unskilled women workers 49% and 45% respectively gave this as their main reason for working. (op. cit. p. 70). Although the authors of this survey comment that the factory workers 'stood out' in this respect, it is perhaps surprising that fewer than half should have given this reason. The assumption of many people would be that it would only be financial necessity that would draw them into factory work.

Lupton discusses in his study of the women workers at the Wye Garment Factory, the importance of the 'sociable groupings' to which they belonged, joining together for breaks, etc. "Belonging to them developed some sense of identification with the firm." (Lupton (1963) p. 72) In his view, "the workers' attachment to the company sprang very largely from the emotional attachment to the small group of friends." (op. cit.) Lupton quotes a phrase often used by the women at Wye, "'We come to work for the company' (that is, of other women)" (op. cit.), though

he goes on to say that of course this would not have been their only reason for working.

One of the limitations in exploring issues about women and men's motivations and self-image in relation to work is that although male workers have received more attention than women, the issue of why they work has not been discussed. The answer has been self-evident in a way that it is presumed not to be for women. Presumably all people would prefer to have 'friendly people to work with'. So the point that is being made about women in this connection is that, since it is assumed that there is less compulsion for women to take paid employment than men, then secondary factors about colleagues and working conditions are likely to be of relatively greater significance.

Both Zweig's and Lupton's studies date from the sixties. Since then our society has changed. There has, for example, been a large increase in the number of single parents (Popay et al. (1983)). The assumption that a woman, in Julie's phrase, "has a man to keep her" is no longer so current, although Martin and Roberts warn against stressing this too much since they found that "51% of all women and 71% of all married women ... were living in a traditional nuclear family comprising a wife, husband and their children." (Martin and Roberts (1984) p. 114). In the conclusion to their study they write, "Comparison with the views expressed in the 1965 survey, conducted by Audrey Hunt, showed that women in 1980 were both more likely to emphasize a woman's right to choose and to stress employment rather than staying at home when they had strong views

about what women should do ... It is clear that while women's relationship to paid work is different from men's it has also been changing as economic and social changes have increasingly brought women into the labour market." (op. cit. p. 191).

Studies of male manual workers (Beynon (1973); Willis (1977)), have examined the self-image of men in relation to the specific work they do. Willis (1977) in particular explores the 'macho' image of themselves which is available to such men, the sense that the heavy work they do could not be done by all and sundry. Obviously that self-image is not one available to women. Often the jobs done by women in cleaning and catering are extensions of their domestic roles and hence can be seen as extending their caring and serving role into the public sphere. But these self-images are not available to women factory workers except in so far as the goods produced are of benefit to society and the money they earn is of benefit to their families.

Other studies of male workers (Goldthorpe (1971), Lockwood (1966) have looked beyond the workplace and have examined the influence of their position in society on men's attitudes to the work they do and of how this can contribute to their view of the class structure of society. "For the most part, men visualise the class structure of their society from the vantage points of their own particular milieux, and their perceptions of the larger society will vary according to their experiences of social inequality in the smaller societies in which they live out their daily

lives." (Lockwood (1966) p. 249). If this is true, then the smaller societies in which women live and which form their views of the world are almost invariably families and in particular the relationships between women and men within them. The same is, in a sense, true of men but for them the family has traditionally been represented as a 'haven' (Oakley (1981) p 246) from the harsh realities of the public world of work and politics.

"People are encouraged to identify with the private or public sphere according to their sex. Women are identified with the home, although they are seen to make forays out into the public world of employment. Men are identified with life outside the home, although they are acknowledged to retreat into it." (Dawson (1986) p. 33). The separation in industrial society between the home and the workplace has allowed the myth of the separation between the public and private spheres of living to flourish. The increasing involvement of women in the world of work may help to break down the social schizophrenia which demands that people in the public spheres shall be unemotional, efficient and objective, while in the private sphere they should be tender, sensitive and vulnerable.

The whole subject of the interaction between the family and society raises complex sociological and psychological questions which cannot be examined here. But the interaction does provide a key to some of the images of themselves as workers that women factory workers hold and explains some of their approaches to work. We have seen in this study how the women naturally used their experiences in the family as reference points by which to judge

their experiences at work. Audrey, having a row with a supervisor, thought, "I'm not taking this. I don't take this at home." Jeanette, thinking about her commitment as a shop steward, pointed to her experience as a single parent as an explanation.

But it seems that healing the splits between the public and private and between the human qualities that have been labelled 'male' and 'female' is not going to be an easy process. Those men and women who challenge traditional assumptions about roles are likely to have a difficult passage. Oakley quotes from a man's account of combining looking after his eighteen month old daughter and going to work as an F.E. teacher. He found, "Putting together these two different ways of being in one life was incredibly difficult." (Oakley (1981) pp 248-9). We have heard in this study about the difficulties experienced by Sally who went on the night shift at Jameses and of how she ended up as "one of the lads". The following passage analyses the situation of young women who were challenging assumptions about roles in their work in engineering.

"The study of young women in jobs (in the engineering industry) normally done by men confirmed the importance of social representations. These young women were challenging sex role stereotypes in the workplace. They were negotiating an occupational identity which few women had previously attained. They had a dual task of becoming an acceptable adult woman and an adult worker, where the role requirements were commonly seen as mutually exclusive. In fact, the majority of the women were surprisingly effective in gaining the acceptance of their co-workers. They did

this by conforming to the expectations of their supervisors as to what a woman engineer should be. That is, neither feminine nor masculine, neither aggressive nor submissive. They acted out the demands of their role and were rewarded with acceptance. The girls experiencing problems were those who insisted on modelling themselves upon the social representations of women dominant outside their workplace. Knowing your place and finding your place in the adult world of work entails the reformulation of self-concept in compliance with dominant social representations."

(Breakwell (1984) p. 30). At least these women, by conforming to an image acceptable to their work colleagues, found a way of 'making out' in the male world of engineering. But another group studied at the same time seemed to have been more lost: "One group of young women training to be engineering operators did not seem able to articulate a self-concept, had no notion of their own goals or aspirations across time, and were not interested in how others thought about them. These girls felt powerless to shape their present or their future and refused to reflect upon it. It may be that adulthood held little in store (certainly their backgrounds implied the truth of this) and they were not seeking, through social comparison or differentiation, to establish a unique self-image. At a theoretical level, it is interesting that lack of social comparison was associated with a vacuity of self-concept. But the absence of social comparison strikes at the heart of many identity theories." (op. cit.)

This quotation from a brief report of a research project leaves us tantalized because it raises several

unanswered questions: what lies behind the statement that the girls "felt powerless to shape their present or their future and refused to reflect upon it"? Who was making the judgements about the backgrounds of the girls? There is a suggestion that the researcher was disappointed in the group of girls who failed to conform to the role of feminist pioneers. We know from Griffin (1985 pp 157 ff) that girls have to be very determined if they are going to succeed as craft apprentices in engineering. The girls she met supported one another and were helped by the outstanding determination of one of them who had made up her mind not to be put off and was also quite aware of feminist issues. Perhaps the girls in the study mentioned in these quotations lacked some of these advantages. Those training to be operators may also have lacked the incentives which doing an apprenticeship would have given to the girls in Griffin's study.

The overall point being made in these two quotations about the need for social comparisons is, however, a very important one. Women entering roles previously confined to men have a difficult time finding appropriate role models. The first women who entered the professions often adopted styles which minimised their sexuality. Only later when their position became more secure were the women able to break out of the images which were presumed to be acceptable to their colleagues and their clients. In a different context, we heard earlier in this study how important it was for two women shop stewards to meet a woman Trade Union lecturer who was able to serve as a role model for them.

In this chapter we have explored the self-images available to women factory workers and seen how little encouragement they receive in our society towards finding a self-image affirming them as workers as opposed to working girls, wives and mothers. Yet when we think of the deep involvement in their work which many of the women in this study clearly demonstrated in what they said, it seems there is a mismatch between the available role-images and the reality.

The women in this study communicated both their concern for the specific jobs and tasks they did and also their involvement in the world of the workplace. This was particularly the case with those who were shop stewards and supervisors but it was not confined to them.

Those who were machinists in the clothing industry were conscious of their skills as workers and the fact that there was a constant demand for their services must have reinforced this consciousness. Even so they are not recognised as 'skilled' according to the north eastern traditions of skilled male workers. Those who worked at Jameses were probably less aware of themselves as skilled since the skills of their jobs are 'in house' skills, not recognised at all outside the factory and generally taken for granted within it. Overall the skills of the women in this study are not greatly esteemed by society at large and consciousness of skill is not the overriding factor in their image of themselves as workers.

Yet, although they would, I am sure, identify with the women studied by Lupton for whom the 'sociable groupings' they belonged to at work were of very great importance, I

sense that for many of the women I talked with this would not adequately have explained their commitment to their work.

Studies of orientations to work have tended to concentrate on the face value of jobs and have considered places of employment as just that. Marxist analysis of the position of women in capitalist society and of the effects of the division of labour within it have tended to focus discussion of men and women's experience of work on structural and class issues rather than on issues of personal meaning and value.

The work of Erving Goffman has alerted us to the multifarious ways in which people can make use of institutions and convert their face value into values which serve their personal needs. The experiences of the women in this study give us some indications of the many different ways in which 'going to work' can be important, in this case to women manual workers in the north east of England. More research of a more comprehensive kind would be needed to explore these significances more fully and also to draw out from men the precise ways in which work is important to them.

One of the important dimensions of factory work is that it entails being a member of a community. While this is true for male factory workers as well as women it is perhaps especially important to women who may have fewer opportunities for belonging to groups outside the home. Furthermore it seems to have been a dimension overlooked in discussions of women's orientations to work.

We saw earlier in this chapter that women find it difficult to justify doing things which meet their own needs

even when this consists of having a job. We saw how they made efforts to ensure that their domestic roles were not affected by their role as worker. Working in a factory gives women access to many of the benefits of being a member of a community, as it were ready-made, and therefore enables them to meet a complex of needs at once without their having to justify this to themselves or to leave the home apart from going to work. In the factory you have to spend time with other adults, unencumbered with children. You can use the opportunity to share concerns with them, seek advice or take soundings. You are in touch with what is going on within the life of the factory and in the area in which it is set. You have access to all the contacts which factory life brings: people with know-how and practical skills; sources of cheap goods and services; if you want to have a bet you can do so without going to a betting-shop - something many women would be reluctant to do; if you work in a large factory, like Jameses, you can go to see the Nurse about a health problem you might hesitate to bother the doctor with. These are a few of the advantages of factory life.

Of course there are disadvantages too, apart from the obvious ones of the nature of the work and the conditions under which it is done. The shadow side of 'sociable groupings' is their power to determine attitudes within the workplace. It is easy to acquire a reputation which it is difficult then to lose. We saw the dangers of this phenomenon in the interchange between Nancy and her workmates when she went back to work after a miscarriage which they hadn't heard about. They said to her, "You've never left

a new baby? That's not like you." Her reputation as a good mother was clearly on the line. Another of the women in this study expressed her feeling of being 'apart' from those she worked with because her values and way of life were different from their's. Gaining acceptance from work-mates can sometimes be difficult without the problems which challenging assumptions about traditional sex roles can bring.

Earlier in this chapter I suggested that women use their experiences in the family as the keys to interpreting and making sense of their experiences as workers. It is possible to take this point further. Women's role in the family is typically that of ensuring its survival and cohesion. It is usually women who have a key role in mediating between husband and children and trying to keep relationships good with the more outlying members of the nuclear family and between the generations. They bring this experience with them into the workplace and often take on important roles as builders of community within it. They provide the food for celebrations at work, send birthday cards and visit those on the sick and those who are bereaved. Brenda in this study organised the bus trips on Saturday nights. More research would need to be done to establish precisely the roles taken by men and women in these kind of community-building activities and to discover whether it is true that men find it easier to express caring by offering to undertake practical tasks while women find it naturally easier just to go and be with somebody.

This discussion of the community aspects of the factory relates also to the question of people's reactions to

redundancy. The factory is a closed community. You can only belong by working there. We heard in Chapter 6 how the woman who took redundancy after thirty years as Jameses had a reaction of feeling totally insecure after she left. What has been said in this chapter illuminates her experience and underlines the importance to women of belonging to such a work community. This study has not focussed specifically on redundancy and unemployment. What these mean for women in particular has been examined in Angela Coyle's Redundant Women (1984). This looked at the experience of women in Yorkshire in an area with similar industrial and social traditions to the north east.

What is striking, however, when the material in this study is considered, is that in some senses, it is a celebration of a kind of industrial life that is passing. To use Audrey's phrase it is "a way of life that went" or at least is going. The moves to smaller industrial units, continental shift patterns, short-term contracts and part-time work are all working to break up the traditional north east factory community which Jameses in this study exemplifies. Although at the time of writing it is still open, many similar workplaces on Tyneside have closed. The experience of redundancy and loss of work networks is part, not only of the consciousness of individuals, but of the area as a whole. This raises an issue about what institutions can replace the closed workplaces as focii of community - an issue which needs not only further study, but also social action.

Conclusions of the Study

What then are the particular conclusions that can be drawn from this study?

The first, which this chapter has sought to illuminate, is that paid employment, and in particular factory work, is important to women in a rich diversity of ways and with a greater depth than has often been allowed for in studies of work in our society and even in studies of women and work.

The second is that the period between 1945 and 1980 was in some respects, a golden age as far as employment opportunities for working class women in the north east were concerned. As we have seen, the opportunities up to 1939 were few and after 1980 began to contract and to be largely part-time. But in the period between jobs were easy to come by. You could move if you were unhappy or drop out of employment for a time to look after children or elderly relatives. In the present climate women cling on to their jobs and may well be putting off having children for, unless you come back after your maternity leave, you will find it very difficult to get back into full-time employment in industry. This conclusion was not one which I expected to reach when I set out on this study. Then I was chiefly aware of how little the jobs of the women shop-floor workers I knew made use of their capacities as people. As we have seen, apart from those who worked in clothing, it was only the older generation of women, who grew up in the thirties, who found openings as

supervisors in the expansionary period after the Second World War. Brenda, who belonged to a younger generation, found an opening for her management abilities and leadership skills through her role as a shop steward. Without that there would, realistically, have been no route for her to follow.

This leads to my third and last conclusion. In this country, and particularly in the north east, we are still not taking seriously women's potential contribution as skilled workers. Nearly twenty years ago the Donovan Commission lamented the lack of training opportunities for women and the "conservatism and prejudice among men, both employers and trade unionists, which foster the unwarranted assumption that nothing can be done." (Donovan (1968) para. 354). "Lack of skilled labour has constantly applied a brake to our economic expansion since the war, and yet the capacity of women to do skilled work has been neglected ... Women provide the only substantial new source from which extra labour, and especially skilled labour, can be drawn." (op. cit. para. 356) Although this was written at a time when shortage of labour was an issue and therefore feels to have been addressed to a different world, in other respects what is said here applies today.

The introduction to this study quoted Williamson and Quayle who, writing about the north east of England, pointed out the need for, "the mosaic of work, occupations and culture ... to be built up piece by piece before the full pattern can properly be revealed." (Williamson and Quayle (1983) p. 15) This study has sought to be a piece of that

mosaic in relation to women's experience of Tyneside industry and hence to contribute to the wider subject of women's experience as workers in British society in the mid-twentieth century.

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