RUGBY WORKING WOMEN: CHOICES AND EXPERIENCES 1920-1950.

Thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at the University of Leicester

by

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February 2000

For Sean

and

My father, Peter Robinson

1937-1999

ABSTRACT

Rugby Working Women: Choices and Experiences 1920-1950

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This thesis is a study of working women in the town of Rugby, Warwickshire. It aims to 'tracks' the experiences of young female embarking on their first job and their subsequent lives via the oral testimony of Rugby inhabitants.

Oral evidence has been used, which has provided a unique resource. Over one hundred interviews were conducted with Rugby women which discussed their background, childhood and school days, starting work, employment experiences, finding a husband and their lives after marriage. The oral testimony is used to create a 'cameo' of national experience during the period and poses questions as to how young Rugby girls were affected by national events.

First, the thesis concentrates on the question of 'choice' for girls upon leaving school compared with the opportunities offered in the town, and how a number of factors influenced their decisions when seeking employment for the first time; for example, parental influence, financial considerations and the prospects for future education and training.

Secondly, the future lives of the young girls are explored by focusing on the ramifications of their 'choices' and how important it was for girls to have made the 'correct' decision. For example, different employers are discussed in relation to promotion and the training of a skill, the earning possibilities when comparing factory and clerical work and the possibilities of finding a suitable marriage partner.

Lastly, the female 'powerbase' is discussed in relation to the home and workplace. The thesis suggests that married women found themselves in an ambiguous position of having moral authority and power in the home, whilst being unable to match this in the workplace.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During the process of researching this thesis I received help and encouragement from many people. First, I am extremely grateful to all of my oral history respondents. Without their memories there would be no thesis. It was an enjoyable and enlightening experience to share their thoughts and lives.

Secondly, I would like to thank my family and friends for their constant support. In particular I wish to thank my parents who have given me financial support for the past four years, and have provided the love and motivation to complete my research.

Thirdly, wholehearted thanks must be given to my tutor, Keith Snell. He has instrumental in ensuring the completion of this thesis and I wish to thank him for all his help and advice.

Lastly, thank you to Sean, my husband, for his tolerance and caring, but most of all, for his love and support. I could not have written this thesis without him.

Elizabeth Robinson

February 2000

ABBREVIATIONS

B.T.H.	British Thomson-Houston Company Ltd
D.C.S.	Day Continuation School

INTRODUCTION

The subject of women's history has been successfully researched for a number of years and thankfully it is now gaining the credibility it deserves.[1] Women's lives offer a rich and diverse range of experiences during any period. Such experiences are the subject of this research in relation to the town of Rugby and working women. The aim of this study is to try to capture the 'essence' or substance of everyday experiences relating to working women: their childhood, school days, working life, marriage, child-rearing and family life.

However some historians might ask, 'Why working women?' and 'What makes working women special enough to warrant further research?'. The period under discussion deserves consideration due to its 'individual dynamics'. The twentieth century has been seen as witnessing a great transformation of women's lives, in that Victorian hardships and morals were left behind to allow the female workforce to experience independence for the first time. However, did these changes actually occur or was there a strong sense of continuity with regard to women's work? After all, women traditionally have worked to help the family economy. Pre-industrial work was undertaken within the home often as a support for their spouse. Once work was taken out of the home, women were seen as 'homebuilders' rather than equal 'workers' in the family economy. The 'domestic' economy was the niche for females, whilst the men

[1] For a discussion relating to the development of women's history in higher education, see J. Rendell, 'Uneven development: women's history, feminist history and gender history in Great Britain', in K. Offen, R. Roach Pierson and J. Rendall (eds.), Writing Women's History: International Perspectives (1991; London, 1992 edn.).

went out to work. Women within the workforce are not a twentieth century phenomenon. However the lives of female workers in Rugby highlight the changing nature of industry towards the lighter 'new' industries. Women's work in the town expanded enormously between the wars with the growth of electrical engineering, which used female labour in its production techniques. This is not to say that male workers did not benefit from the development of 'new' industries; they did, but it was the female worker that experienced advancement and the possibility of 'choosing' employment in a variety of occupations. Women had always 'worked', but the period studied intends to highlight the increased prospects and opportunities available for young girls. Such opportunity offered new experiences; experiences which were unique to women.

The initial intention here is to outline my method of collection and use of oral evidence. By using such a historical method, many questions are posed. For example, do the results give us reliable information, and as it is in the form of personal memories how subjective is it? The benefits and handicaps of oral testimony are discussed, particularly in relation to arguments sometimes voiced against it.

Secondly, issues relating to the class structure are tackled in relation to Rugby. Who were the working-class girls in the town during the period and how can they be defined? In addition, terms such as 'girlhood' and 'womanhood' are focused upon. For example, at what age was a 'girl' considered a 'woman' in relation to society's labelling and expectations?

Lastly, a breakdown of the subsequent chapters will be offered as a forerunner of discussions later in the thesis and to highlight a number of the themes tackled.

Oral History Discussed

The evidence for this thesis has been obtained from a variety of primary and secondary sources. However the major source of information has been gathered from the large bank of memories transmitted to me via oral testimony. There might be a few historians who would regard such research as subjective, lacking in substance and unimportant. They would ask, 'How do we know these events or feelings were true of the period?' and 'How can such memories be regarded as being without doubt?' Oral history has often been labelled as seeking a 'cosy view of the past'.[2]

However my intention throughout has been to focus on the lives of ordinary working women. Such people are rarely documented and have been forgotten by many who believe history to be the accurate recall of reigns, dates, prestigious figures and dynasties. Some historians believe that such emphasis provides us with a 'picture' of life at the time. I would argue that they have a one-sided view. They present history as the views and actions of those with power and authority. Such historians overlook the ordinary working person, whether male or female. Oral testimony has a unique value.[3] It is

[2] This view is discredited by Cynthia Hay, 'The pangs of the past', Oral History, 9 (1991), pp. 41-6.
[3] This argument is supported by Johnson. See P. Johnson, 'Art or women's work? News from 'The Knitting Circle', Oral History, 18:2 (1990).

individual thought and expression, rather than the views of jurisdiction and command. Without oral history such 'ordinary' histories, many of them personal and unique, would disappear to the grave. This thesis hopes to reinforce Smith's view, that 'there is no such being as an 'ordinary' person' as she regards all the female life stories she has recorded as remarkable.[4]

Oral testimony gives another dimension to social history. A documentary source can tell the historian a certain fact. For example, via a shop receipt that when and where a certain item was bought or the minutes of a committee meeting can inform us about the decisions taken in that particular month or year. Oral testimony goes one step further and it is this that ensures the success when using this type of evidence. The spoken word can tell us *why* somebody bought an item from a shop and *why* a decision was made at a committee meeting. The new dimension given to the historian via oral history is that it provides reasons for events, beliefs, and attitudes that the written word cannot convey. In the light of this positive argument, I can say that this thesis hopes to have successfully used oral history to explain the behaviour of young women during the period. Whereas before my research started, local people were aware that many women were involved in the various industries in the town, there are now reasons as to *why* those women chose certain industries, *what* attitudes they had towards certain employers and *how* they saw the future for themselves. This is one step further from the written historical source. As Caunce argues,

[4] A. Smith, Women Remember: an Oral History (London, 1989), p. 4.

> What sets oral history apart is the sense of history in the collector, a constant attempt to stand back and see things happening over time and as they will be seen in the future.[5]

The value of oral history is acknowledged within the realms of social and women's history and it is in these fields that I hope to validate it further. Oral history has become a new genre: a style that allows people to recount their experiences in their own words, rather than in the words of those in authority or power. As a consequence, oral testimony has allowed many new subject areas to appear within historiography. As Paul Thompson advocates:

> Oral history ... can be a means for transforming both the content and the purpose of history. It can be used to change the focus of history itself, and open up new areas of inquiry; it can break down barriers between teachers and students, between generations, between educational institutions and the world outside; and in the writing of history - whether in books, or museums, or radio and film – it can give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place.[6]

Such words are impressive, but is such an idealistic history achievable? Thompson's ideas do illustrate my objective when starting my oral interviews.

[5] Stephen Caunce, Oral history, p. 99.
[6] Paul Thompson, The Voice of the Past: Oral History (Oxford, 1988), p.1.

My choice of relying on oral testimony as my main historical source was encouraged by many groups who were interested in the final outcome completing the jigsaw of local history records and preserving local memories. This confirmed my belief that the lives of the ordinary person were of interest to many and yet had not been exploited by historians. Hoskins reinforces this belief, but also poses possible problems.

> Nor must one overlook the reminiscences of old people either printed or verbal, in the reconstruction of the former local society. These reminiscences obviously require checking at every possible point. People's memories, and especially the memories of old people, are notoriously faulty. But such evidence of past is history is not to be dismissed altogether merely because it is difficult to check its complete authenticity.[7]

Hoskins was writing at a time when oral history was just embarking as a historical discipline and he mentions oral testimony as an aside rather than a vital component for the local historian. However forty years on from this comment, the oral tradition is now fully established and more positively regarded within academic circles. Nevertheless Hoskins' point about checking all information received via oral testimony should not be ignored. Efforts were made consistently throughout the period of the oral interviews to ensure that details did correlate. This was mainly achieved due to the sheer number of interviews undertaken which meant that I did not have to rely on one particular

[7] W.G. Hoskins, Local History in England (1959; Essex, 1984 edn.), p. 39.

memory source. Many interviewees communicated corresponding information and other details, such as the location of various factories or employers that could be confirmed by the use of local street directories and old newspaper reports.

Rugby, a relatively small place in the middle of the country, like so many other towns, has proved to be a rich source of information in relation to the lives of working women. An oral historian's dream would be that all villages, towns and cities in Britain were to become a part of a national oral history project.[8] There are many groups whose lives deserve celebrating.[9] However despite the wealth of information which would become available, the organisation of such a task would be unmanageable. If it were possible, individual stories which otherwise would die, would be saved as a record of feelings and events. How can these memories be regarded as unimportant?

Whenever non-specialists discuss oral history, the problems seem to outweigh the positives. In some cases there does seem to be a 'fear' attached to oral history, whereas documentary evidence appears totally innocent. As Roberts states,

[8] This is a view supported by many oral historians. For one such argument see J. Swindells, 'Hanging Up On Mum or Questions of Everyday Life in the Writing of History', Gender and History, 2 (1990), pp. 68-78.
[9] An opinion supported by Bailey and his interest in Black Country female labour. See C. Bailey, 'Black Country working women', Oral History, 18:2 (1990).

> It is perhaps permissible to observe that all history contains bias, there are omissions, distortions and ambiguities in all primary historical sources, whether they be written or oral.[10]

It could be argued that oral historians have a tendency to view the situation through 'rose-coloured glasses'. Therefore I wish to focus on such sceptical comments and try to reaffirm the positive attributes of oral history.

Essentially 'Oral history uses interviews to obtain retrospective data'.[11] It is a communication between two or more people. It has an essentially universal quality in that everyone can contribute in some way. On the one side, we have the person who has something to 'tell' whilst the other has a desire to 'listen'. These verbs are open to interpretation. The oral interviewee can inform or 'tell' certain facts, but do they tell the whole story? All people are affected by the human characteristics of conformity, or to use a colloquial phrase, 'keeping up appearances'. On the other side in an oral interview is the interviewer whose task is to listen and document the information. This too is criticised. The interviewer is listening for certain facts and key points; a hidden agenda is at work. These are the arguments that the sceptics like to keep alive. Oral historians have to answer to the questions of reliability and subjectivity.

The dependability of oral interviews is therefore affected by a number of

[10] Elizabeth Roberts, Women and Families: an Oral History, 1940-1970 (Oxford, 1995), p. 3.
[11] Hay, 'Pangs of the past', p. 41.

factors. In my experience interviewees differ greatly in their willingness to share memories, particularly if these recollections are of a delicate nature. My research was helped enormously because of my concentration on the workplace or occupation. Questions relating to these subjects were always comprehensively answered and in fact interviewees often wanted to yield information which was not strictly relevant to my work. For example, the oral respondents knew that I was concentrating up to 1950 and yet many wanted to tell me about the whole of their working life in the 1960s and beyond. The work situation provides a wealth of information that is easy to convey in an interview scenario.

However, the subject of my research was not chosen to ensure an easy interview process. Rather I was aware from my own interests in the history of the town that working women had been neglected in previous work. Histories of Rugby tend to focus on either the school, the railway or industry. For my research I wanted to establish what life was like for young girls starting work and what was expected of them. Nevertheless my subject did offer a wide variety of experiences to be recounted in the interviews and I was never faced with the problem of the respondents 'having nothing to contribute'.[12]

However my interview schedule also included questions relating to their home life. Many respondents replied to these questions in the same free manner as those about their occupation. Others hesitated and did not offer full

[12] My experience of oral interviews differs greatly from that of P. Jephcott in the 1940s who found it was very difficult to yield information about girl's working lives, as the girls themselves thought it was uninteresting and not important. D. Fowler refers to Jephcott's study in The First Teenagers: The Lifestyle of Young Wage-earners in Interwar Britain (London, 1995).

explanations for family events or occurrences. Despite a desire to follow-up these situations, care had to be taken to ensure that respondents were not placed under any pressure to 'tell' what they regarded as private information. For example, I did not include any specific questions relating to the sexual habits of young working girls. This was not my area of interest and I felt that it could jeopardise the confidence I had to create between the respondents and myself.[13] Nevertheless questions relating to courtship and marriage were an essential section of my work and these were raised in an informal way. This allowed respondents to 'interpret' the questions individually. Some interviewees did mention subjects such as sex and menstruation, but they were a minority and such matters were always accompanied with a whisper and a 'hush'.[14,15]

The essence of 'interpretation' creates large problems when vindicating the use of oral history. If the interviewee translates the questions and the interviewer decodes this information into a form that suits his/her research, can we honestly say that oral history creates a 'true' commentary on any period? The nostalgic memories of many respondents create a no-win situation. Without nostalgia the interest in social and women's history would

[13] The problem of sensitive questions was confronted by an oral history project by the National Union of Public Employees relating to women's health. Despite some delicate questions, they found no real resistance to tell their family history. See National Union of Public Employees (comp.), Women's Voices: an Oral History of Northern Irish Women's Health, 1900-1990 (Dublin, 1982).

[14] For an in-depth study of women's sexuality see Maureen Sutton, We Didn't Know Aught (Stamford, 1992). Sutton writes frankly about the issues of menstruation, sexual intercourse and pregnancy, together with chapters relating to the superstitions and death in Lincolnshire between the 1930s and 1960s.

[15] For an alternative approach to female sexuality, see N. Leap and B. Hunter, The Midwife's Tale (London, 1993) who give a more professional argument from the view of practising midwifes during the twentieth century.

be non-existent, and in itself this yearning obsession to know about the ordinary person creates nostalgia. Total objectivity is impossible to achieve in any oral project. Subjectivity is a fact of life and a problem of many types of historical analysis and exists whenever we undertake a task; there is always a reason and a target in mind.

As an oral historian I do not intend to argue that testimony presents insurmountable problems. Despite its negativity, oral history provides new and unique evidence for historians. In some cases the information can be reinforced by the existence of documentary sources. In my research this was difficult due to the physical lack of secondary evidence. Memories of young women during the period had not been documented and despite many searches, the only source of written records relating to the subject concerned the training of young secretarial workers at the British Thomson-Houston Company Ltd in the town.

Fortunately the information regarding Rugby working women was reinforced by itself, in that the large number of interviews carried out ensured that most facts were supported by more than one respondent. The initial search for oral respondents sought replies from fifteen to twenty respondents. The final figure of 150 interviews far exceeded my expectations. After initial contacts through the local newspapers, 'word of mouth' ensured that many volunteers contacted me and offered information. Testimony was therefore varied and enthusiastically available. Consequently, whereas some respondent's memories had slight differences, most facts regarding places of work or

occupations were vindicated by other testimonies to form an overall 'whole' illustration of working life. For example:

> It was like a jigsaw puzzle. Each one of us had a piece and we could make the whole picture only if everyone gave their piece.[16]

My main line of defence in the face of any criticism relating to the lack of documentary sources, must be the number of oral interviews undertaken. When embarking of my research I felt that I would be lucky and privileged if twenty people agreed to tell me their memories. My intention was to show a 'snapshot' of what working in Rugby was like for women. The response from local women was phenomenal and I did question my ability to sort the vast amount of information being given to me, when the interviews were reaching three or four each day in number. Those interviewed were not selected or chosen in any way. In fact once in the throes of interviewing I found myself feeling somewhat willing and obliged to interview everybody, as they were eager to talk to me. The amount of information gained from some interviews was negligible, but I feel that to have 'chosen' candidates for interview would have interfered with my non-biased approach. It was impossible to assess the potential information source from talking to respondents on the telephone or upon first meeting them at community groups. Consequently all possible interviews were undertaken. The result was pleasing, although there was a predominance of women who had worked at the British Thomson-Houston Company. This was not surprising due to the size of the company within the

[16] National Union of Public Employees, Women's Voices, p. 107.

town. I would have liked to interview additional respondents from some of the smaller industrial concerns, such as the Cigar factory, but overall the selection of women who volunteered was varied. Some women did not strictly volunteer to share their memories but were persuaded to do so by family members or friends.

One of my intentions was to provide a number of 'constants' to ensure that most interviews were carried out in similar situations and would yield comparable results. It was hoped that undertaking such constraints would reduce any criticism, and simultaneously allow interviewees to reveal as much as they wanted. To that end, whilst I was in control of the interview questions, the respondents were in control of the replies.

The conduct of interviews involved many months of organisation. The first 'constant' was that all women interviewed consented voluntarily. Contacts were made through a variety of methods. These ranged from local newspaper articles about my work, letters asking for volunteers in the local press and attending local Women's Institute meetings and bingo clubs. Most local groups welcomed a speaker and this involved telling the members about my research and why I wanted to make contact with local residents. The popularity of 'telling their story' was overwhelming and many were eager to share their memories. This is illustrative of the 'lost' history of the ordinary person. Many older residents in the town had previously not received any interest in their lives, even from their families, and yet given the opportunity to 'talk' were able to provide eloquent accounts of their occupations and

thoughts as young working girls in the town. Smith supports the importance of not 'losing' personal experiences:

> We shove our old folk away to vegetate in 'residential' homes and in the process we deny ourselves the richest source of human history, the first hand history of the human spirit, with the vital sense of continuity that comes with it. Without this intimate sense of continuity that history offered by the textbooks is quite meaningless, even irrelevant.[17]

However it must be remembered that those people who volunteered to be interviewed obviously had something to 'tell' or share. Like any oral historian, I had to accept that those people who did not respond to my request could either have had something too painful to recount, or did not want to relay private information, or believed that their story would not be of interest to me. The sample of oral testimony has to be accepted in this context.

Once the interviews were underway efforts were made to carry out all appointments in a uniform manner. All respondents were interviewed in their own homes. This made sure that the interview was as informal as possible and solved the problem of transport for the respondents. It must be remembered that many residents were opening their homes to a stranger and some showed concern over what was to happen. Writing letters to all respondents before the interview and providing a letter of identification from

[17] Smith, Women Remember, p. 3.

the university allayed most fears. In addition, being a 'Rugby girl' helped my accessibility to many respondents.

Most interviews were carried out individually (see Appendix A). This provided the best arrangement as it produced the least inhibited answers and usually ensured that they were not interrupted. All oral testimonies were recorded using a small and unobtrusive tape recorder. Microphones were not attached to the interviewee, but were placed on the floor. This was a deliberate choice to ensure that the worries of the respondents were not heightened.

A schedule of questions was followed where possible (see Appendix B). Questioning during the interview followed a flexible structure according to the conversation at the time. I did not want to conduct rigid interviews that can produce rather boring and regimented answers. Simple biographical questions were posed at first and this was helpful when completing the transcripts. However most interviews took the form of a general conversation. I did ensure that certain questions were posed, but for the majority of the time respondents were allowed to talk and reminiscence freely. Once the interviewing was completed, and I had to put a deadline on this activity due to good response to my request, the transcription of the interviews was a huge task in itself. Help was sought as it was time consuming process but was a necessary chore to ensure documentation and professional credibility.

The nature of oral history does not easily lend itself to strict questioning and a flexible technique is usually most successful. For example, asking general

questions at first gained the confidence of the respondent. This was followed with open questions that allowed a variety of answers and the possibility of the respondent talking more freely rather than a strict interviewing procedure. This method produced some excellent material. In most cases oral respondents were only too keen to tell me their memories. Interviews ranged in length from thirty minutes to over two hours.

It was a conscious decision before starting the interviews that my role was to listen without comment. This was undertaken where possible, however, in some cases the interview did evolve into a conversation. It was in these circumstances that some of the most vital information was gathered. The interviewees often made inquiries about my own life following questions relating to their background. It could be argued that as a Rugby born interviewer I could have had an instinctive bias to ensure that Rugby was portrayed and presented satisfactorily by my evidence. I did have an added advantage in knowing the places the respondents were referring to, but efforts were made to ensure that all information, positive or negative, was noted.

Working women – an oral historiography

The developments of women's and oral history over the last twenty years have released a number of fascinating studies covering various aspects of women's 'working' lives. These ideas set some precedents for the work detailed in this thesis. If women are the forgotten members of society then oral history has at last given them a 'voice'. Summerfield argues:

> One of the objectives of women's history was to enable women to speak for themselves. Women-centred sources, within which women were subjects rather than objects, would, it was hoped, provide access to the hidden history.[18]

What has been learnt from women 'speaking for themselves'? The success of oral testimony illustrating the lives of women is shown by the work of Elizabeth Roberts.[19] Her work has focused on many life experiences of women in North Lancashire, including schooling, marriage and childbirth. Using oral testimony, Roberts has been able to build a picture of continuities and changes over generations for females since the 1890s. Information relating to family, housework, arrangements in the home, female relationships, child-rearing and leisure are discussed. Such information is unique and illustrates the necessity of oral interviews in social history. Documentary sources could not have yielded similar material. Roberts' research regarding women's work has provided stimulus for this research and is a useful comparison.

Other studies relating to the urban woman include Carl Chinn's work.[20] Similarly to Roberts, Chinn concentrates on the role of the female in urban society and discovers her importance to everyday life and the family unit. Chinn maintains that women of the urban poor were central and indispensable

[18] P. Summerfield, Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives (Manchester, 1998), pp 10-11.
[19] Roberts, A Woman's Place: an oral history of working-class women 1890-1940 (Oxford, 1984) and Women and Families (Oxford, 1995).
[20] C. Chinn, They Worked All their Lives: women of the Urban Poor in England, 1880-1939 (Manchester, 1988).

to their families and that many families were linked primarily because of their poverty. Some comparisons can be drawn from this study in relation to the significance of the mother within the family unit. Other studies are also notable. For example oral testimony can be found within personal reminiscences. Robert Roberts' description of growing up in Salford provides many comparisons with the work of Elizabeth Roberts and Carl Chinn and specifically concerning the role of his mother.[21]

This study intends to focus upon the working lives of women. Previous studies mentioned do refer to working women but are mainly concerned with the whole life experience. However some studies should be noted which do concentrate on the working experiences of women. The major historian in this field is Miriam Glucksmann, who has written a comprehensive account of women's working lives during the inter-war years.[22] Of particular interest for this study is Glucksmann's concentration on the 'new' industries and particularly electrical engineering, which was developing in Rugby in the 1920s and 1930s. Glucksmann highlights the rise of a new era of female labour that was able to contribute to factory tasks because of their 'suitability' to the delicate tasks involved. This change is heralded in contrast to the decline of heavy industry. Using oral testimony, Glucksmann discusses the everyday experiences of women in the factories and concentrates on five major employers during the period studied. As a Marxist, Glucksmann argues that a distinct division of labour was evident in the factories and that particular

[21] R. Roberts, The Classic Slum: Salford life in the first quarter of the century (Manchester, 1971).
[22] M. Glucksmann, Women Assemble: women workers and the new industries in inter-war Britain (London, 1990)

tasks became labelled as suited to 'female labour'. Women's memories are used successfully in conjunction with theories of work.

Other studies have also concentrated on women at work. For example, the oral historian, Angela Hewins has depicted the working life of a young factory girl in her work.[23] Mary Hewins worked at the local brewery in Stratford and her everyday experiences and attitudes are revealed. In addition, Nicky Leap and Billie Hunter have concentrated on the working lives of midwives.[24]

One major study of young girls at work is that of Jacqueline Sarsby.[25] Her research focused upon young women in the pottery industry in Stoke-on-Trent from 1914 until the 1980s. Similar to Roberts' work, Sarsby provides a study over a number of generations working at the same factory and therefore successfully highlights the continuities and changes. Of particular interest is the relationship between mothers and daughters and the practices of daughters following their mothers into the same place of work. The research in Rugby has provided some evidence of this 'networking' to find employment. As Sarsby states:

> ... in writing about the women in the industry this century – through their own words – I have tried to give back to women something of their lost history. In particular, the women potters in the clay end have never

[23] A. Hewins, A Stratford Story (Oxford, 1994).
[24] N. Leamp and B. Hunter, The Midwife's Tale: an oral history from handywoman to professional midwife (London, 1993).
[25] J. Sarsby, Missuses and Mouldrunners: an oral history of women pottery workers at work and at home (Milton Keynes, 1988).

been remembered, never publicly celebrated, never pictured except as those scruffy women in pinnies and curlers, walking about in trashers, cigarettes in their mouths, covered in clay. These women, who also kept the factories – and their families – going, in boom and slump, in every decade this century, do not fit in with the image of femininity which women locally must have if they are not to be considered 'common'.[26]

Sarsby's work successfully shows the changes in working and family lives of women during the period, in terms of the constraints placed on women, attitudes towards them and societal expectations of them.

Other research concerning the changing image of female workers includes an edited volume by Leonore Davidoff and Belinda Westover.[27] Using oral evidence various historians focus on the working lives of female labourers, tailoresses, textile workers, teachers, typists and civil servants. The studies concentrate on the education, daily life and expectations of working class women. Importantly there is a concentration of women's relationship with the work place. Other authors such as, Judy Giles, have centred on the relationship women had with the home.[28] The issue of where a woman 'should' be during the period, either at work or looking after the family at home is a subject which is touched upon by many of the studies mentioned previously and will be focused upon later in this study.

[26] Sarsby, Missuses and Mouldrunners, p. 150.
[27] L. Davidoff and B. Westover (eds.), Our Work, Our Lives, Our Worlds: women's history and women's work (New Jersey, USA, 1986).
[28] J. Giles, Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain, 1900-1950 (London, 1995).

Oral testimony has therefore 'opened' up the possibilities for historians of social and women's history. However there is one distinct feature which needs to be mentioned. This is the locality and the regional differences of the studies involved. For example, Roberts concentrates her work in three specific geographical areas: Barrow, Lancaster and Preston. Whilst on the one hand this has provided a comprehensive account of women's lives in inner city areas and specifically in North Lancashire, it cannot offer explanations for women's lives in dissimilar geographical areas. For example, in contrast to North Lancashire, Rugby is a small market town offering different types of employment. The oral tradition is often confined by the local context. Roberts' work therefore offers irreplaceable evidence for inner-city women, in the same way that Chinn's work does, but it has to be remembered that other geographical areas could offer opposing or different views.

For example, Mary Chamberlain focused on the lives of rural women.[29] Again using oral evidence, Chamberlain was able to look at the intricacies of everyday life. Her work provides a distinctly different account of the lives of women. More recently Maureen Sutton has focused on the lives of women in Lincolnshire and has used oral evidence to extract information about sexuality, superstition and death.[30] Consequently the locality of studies have to be observed and noted. Comparisons can be made, but differences should be expected. This study will concentrate on the lives of working women in a Midlands town. Rugby was not an inner-city area and its industry was a

[29] M. Chamberlain, Fenwomen: a portrait of women in an English village (London, 1975).
[30] M. Sutton, We Didn't Know Aught: a study of sexuality, superstition and death in women's lives in Lincolnshire during the 1930s, '40s and '50s (Stamford, 1992).

product of the development of the 'new' industries that boomed in the 1920s and 1930s. Exactly who Rugby working women were during the period will now be discussed.

Working girls and women – who were they?

Who were these working women, what class did they come from and in what types of employment were they occupied? Essentially this study will focus upon the lives and experiences of women involved in paid work during the period. However clear definitions of 'working women' must be noted.

A wide variety of respondents ensured that evidence was gathered from all areas of paid working life. Simply, of those women interviewed, all undertook work, outside the home for weekly wages. This broad spectrum included employees and employers: some women were running their own small businesses or shops; others worked as teachers, cleaners, factory hands, shop or clerical workers who were answerable to an employer. The types of paid employment varied regionally during the period. This study looks at the paid work available in Rugby, but primarily at those female workers associated with the electrical engineering industries. The major industry in the town was electrical engineering, which included both factory and clerical work. It is therefore possible to consider the differences between previous studies that have concentrated on other types of employment and the experience of working in Rugby. The work opportunities in Rugby offered women the possibility of being involved in the 'new' light industries, which was a distinct

difference from the experience of many heavier trades in the north and elsewhere.

This study concentrates on the female 'workers' in Rugby. However the reader should not assume that, because of this, these women came solely from the 'working-classes'. The issue of class must be tackled.[31] Previous studies have grappled with the concept of class and most refer to work derived from Karl Marx or Max Weber. In Marxian analysis a person's class is seen to be largely determined by his or her place in the mode of production, with the fundamental distinction emerging between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Marx maintained that industrialisation heralded a new era in terms of relations between employers and workers and that this had been caused by a 'revolution' in industrial methods and technologies. Despite the wide uses by historians of Marxian analysis, such a deterministic picture of class relations was not clear in Rugby. Developments in industry in the town created new opportunities for workers and in some cases even allowed them to aspire to become middle-class shop-owners.

McKibbin has argued that at the turn of the twentieth century, 'Britain was unquestionably a working-class nation'.[32] His argument for this statement relies on the fact that 'in 1901 about 85 per cent of the total working population were employed by others, and about 75 per cent as manual workers'.[33] This thesis has used evidence primarily from people who were

[31] The difficulty of defining 'working-class' is stated by Roberts, A Woman's Place, p. 3.
[32] R. McKibbin, The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain 1880-1950 (Oxford, 1991), p. 2.
[33] McKibbin, The Ideologies of Class, p. 2.

employed by others, but not all were manual workers. They were not always poor and they often had surplus income to spend. This is contrary to the description offered by other historians, such as Roberts, of a 'working-class' person.[34] The oral evidence suggests that some of these women were aspiring to be middle-class. For example, one respondent trained as a hairdresser and then sought to start her own business, which flourished. However, it was apparent that many respondents did see themselves as 'working class', largely because others employed them and paid their wages.

However, 'the British working-class has always been heterogeneous'.[35] It has various components, attitudes and beliefs that need to be explored. As discussed, other studies have concentrated on urban or poor women; were Rugby working women different? Who were the Rugby working-class females employed in the town? Did diverse occupations mean that people had different or similar views and opinions? Can all the female workers of Rugby be grouped under the title 'working-class'?

In the years 1920-1950 Rugby achieved relative affluence, due to its electrical engineering development, and it bucked the trend suffered by most heavy industries during the depression. (See Appendix D for statistics). The 1930s and 1940s saw new developments in technology. The electrical industries that were dominant in Rugby enabled many young girls in the town to experience their own 'independence' in secure working conditions.

[34] Roberts, A Woman's Place, p. 3.
[35] M. Savage and A. Miles, The Remaking of the British Working Class 1840-1940 (London, 1994), p. 22.

Consequently, and it is very important to remember this, the concept of a 'working class' in Rugby developed in a very different context to that of the depressed or inner-city areas.

As will be discussed, there were a variety of employers in Rugby offering occupational opportunities. There is little doubt that if the definition of 'working-class' is related closely to the means of production, then, the majority of my oral respondents did originate from the working-classes. However what did belonging to the Rugby 'working-class' mean? A description of daily life would be different in Rugby from, for example, a family in south Wales. Locality played an important part in terms of unemployment and relative prosperity. (See Appendix D). Rugby was a developing light industrial town during the period studied, and although a small area of deprivation existed, the town did not have the same levels of poverty experienced by many other urban inhabitants.

Many of the oral respondents labelled themselves as 'working-class', but their standard of living was relatively easy to establish and perpetuate over the years due to their security of employment. This does not mean that money was not 'tight' in many households, but few respondents recalled sheer poverty during their childhood. Homes were usually small, for example terraced and very often rented rather than purchased. Most respondents attended local state schools, but a small number of working-class girls did go to private secretarial classes or had music lessons. The mothers of the oral respondents rarely worked, and if they did, it did not affect their running of the

households. These were 'respectable' families. The term 'respectable' was seen as vital to many oral respondents and from their memories it would appear that most achieved this. They had little to be ashamed of in terms of wealth and were willing to work hard to make a living.

Consequently the relative prosperity of many 'working-class' inhabitants of Rugby could be regarded as lower-middle class, despite receiving a weekly wage packet. The status of the oral respondents owed much to the intense development within the town and the opportunities made available by the railway and the electrical engineering industry. How does Rugby therefore correlate with other studies during the period?

The major study is that of Rowntree in the 1930s, with his study of York.[36] Rowntree's main findings showed that the poor in York still existed and that 18 per cent of the population were living below a poverty threshold. Herbert Tout's comparable study of Bristol in 1937 found that 19.3 per cent of the population had 'insufficient income'.[37] Rowntree also declared that 52.5 per cent of all children under a year old in York in 1936 were born into poverty. Interestingly he also argued that once these children became wage-earners they were able to make their way out of the poverty they suffered as young children. Other social commentators, such as Bowley and Hogg also studied working class families during the 1920s.[38] Using their data from families in five towns, Reading, Northampton, Warrington, Bolton and Stanley, they argued

[36] B.S. Rowntree, Poverty and Progress: A second social survey of York (London, 1941)
[37] H. Tout, The Standard of Living in Bristol (1938). Quoted in J. Stevenson, British Society 1914-45 (London, 1984), p. 134.
[38] A.L.Bowley and M.H. Hogg, Has Poverty Diminished? (1925).

that adolescents were asserting their right to control their own money instead of pooling their wages into the family finances. This gives credence to Rowntree's belief that young wage earners were able to transcend the poverty level felt by their parents.

Lastly and to some extent most importantly, it is essential to clarify the social class position of my oral respondents, as there is a difference between where they originated and where they found themselves upon marriage. Many interviewees were born in what I have described above as working-class homes. They lived in parts of Rugby which were regarded as 'homes for the workers', but were still seen as clean-living and decent areas. When asked about their childhood many respondents recalled the difficulty their mothers had in 'making their ends meet' and that their fathers worked hard to give them food, heat and clothing. They saw their childhood nostalgically as being 'not that bad' and an enjoyable period of their lives.

However, many women interviewed did not stay in the same area of Rugby, as after finding and marrying a suitable man they were able to move to larger and more up-market homes. This makes definitions of the oral respondents class situation difficult. During the period studied, the women involved were experiencing a life-style change in terms of class as some respondents married out of their working-class areas into middle-class homes. Therefore the oral evidence has a particular bias which should be recognised: it frequently documents essentially middle-class women who were looking back at their working-class lives.

The other focus that needs to be defined is the concept of girlhood and womanhood. When did working-class girls become women? This study followed the lives of working women from either birth or from when they arrived in Rugby. The majority of interviewees were Rugby-born. Evidence was gathered concerning subjects of childhood, schooling and parental advice. For this study interviewees were regarded as 'girls' while in their teens and for those years before marriage. It was notable that many work places referred to their female workforce as 'girls' throughout their lifetime. The label of 'woman' tends to be given once a female has married and has her own home. This is especially the case if she has a family.

The Lives and Experiences of Rugby Working Women

The title of this study encompasses a variety of themes that will be explored in the following chapters.

The first chapter follows a national perspective and is designed as a backdrop to the subsequent chapters relating solely to the evidence gathered from Rugby and offers a commentary on women's work during the period. What were the national perceptions that were associated with women's work and what choices and opportunities did young working-class girls receive nationally? Questions in connection to the world war and economic upheavals are considered. In addition the transformation from 'school girl' to 'adolescent'

is focused upon in relation to national expectations.[39] Lastly, the national image of 'suitable' work for women during the period is examined.

First, there is the concept of a local study. The oral evidence was confined to Rugby and its surrounding villages. In chapter 2 this idea is developed with a discussion relating to the rise and development of the town. Four factors are considered, namely, the school, the market town, the railway and the industrial development of the twentieth century. The aim is to provide a background and understanding of the evolution of Rugby, and for that purpose summaries of company histories are included. This allows discussion relating to the opportunities available for young working-class girls in the town during the period of the study.

Secondly in chapter 3, these opportunities are questioned. 'Choices, lives and experiences' encompass a wide range of events and this thesis intends to concentrate initially on the transition from school to work in relation to adolescent 'choice' of occupation. What 'choice' or opportunities existed within the development of female employment in the town? This chapter offers ideas as to what were the main restrictions upon 'choice' in Rugby. Did working-class girls have a 'choice' upon leaving school, and simultaneously how was this 'choice' affected by the opportunities available in their local area? Consideration is given to a number of factors that affected the 'choices' of girls, such as class perceptions, gendered occupations, parental influence,

[39] As researched by S. Mitchell, The New Girl: Girls' Culture in England 1880-1915 (New York, 1995) and P. Tinkler, Constructing Girlhood: Popular Magazines for Girls Growing up in England, 1920-1950 (London, 1995).

suitability of the work place, training and financial restrictions. The adolescent lives and experiences of Rugby women are compared with the results of earlier studies, such as those of Roberts, Giles and Glucksmann.[40] Within this chapter reference is made to the Rugby Day Continuation School which provided many young girls with additional training on a day release basis. This was a unique scheme in the country as a whole and consideration is given as to its success and in relation to the 'choices' made by girls during the period.

Chapter 4 continues with the theme of 'choice' but focuses on the future ramifications of those choices that were made upon starting work. What could a girl expect from her future life if she started work in a factory and importantly how did that future change if a girl was employed in an office upon leaving school? What new feelings and knowledge did the girls experience upon starting employment? How did wages affect their status and freedom within the community? Ideas relating to training and promotional prospects are considered in relation to where young females found work. Were some companies more accommodating that others? Lastly this chapter considers the question as to whether the 'choice' of occupation affected the eventual choice of a marriage partner. Who were factory or office girls likely to marry and was this influenced by their occupation or employer?

[40] There are many social and feminist historians who have carried out research covering the subject of women at work. Classic studies include E. Roberts, A Woman's Place (Oxford, 1985) and her Woman and Families: an Oral History, 1940-1970 (Oxford, 1995), J. Giles, Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain, 1900-1950 (Basingstoke, 1995) and M. Glucksmann, Women Assemble: Women Workers and the New Industries in Inter-War Britain (London, 1990).

The last chapter concentrates on the themes of power and authority within the lives and experiences of women. This chapter has a dual focus of both the home and work place and questions whether the same level of power was achieved in both areas. It will consider the development from adolescent girl to working woman and its relationship to the level of power and authority achieved both at home and in the work place. The oral evidence included experiences throughout the respondents' lives and this chapter utilises the memories of married life to discuss the power of working adults rather than the working girl. It maintains that a paradox exists between the extent of female authority at work and within the home.

The intention of this thesis is therefore to give an insight via oral testimony into the experiences of Rugby working women during the period. The oral evidence brought to light various scholarly opportunities as regards theme, and the subject of 'choice' and its ramifications, whether relating to work or home life has been focused upon. This study does not try to cover all experiences; that would be impossible. It must be remembered that despite the wealth of information offered by using oral history, there are restrictions relating to the memories of 'ordinary' people. However, the same can be said of any situation, for historians can only work with the material which is available, whether it be primary or secondary, document-based or oral testimony. The following chapters are a small but significant piece of a jigsaw relating to the whole picture of women's history. I hope it offers some explanations and more importantly creates questions for the future.

This thesis aims to discuss women who were 'workers'. This is a very contentious issue in the realms of women's history. Should the historian include work within the home or should studies of female labour be confined to paid employment? The bulk of evidence for this study is from the inter-war period. This was dictated by the ages of the respondents and the oral evidence gathered. The majority of women in this study were young girls in the 1920s, a time of high unemployment but simultaneously new opportunities for women in the world of work.

CHAPTER 1

National images and perceptions of female workers

As discussed this thesis intends to concentrate on the degree of `choice' enjoyed by the working-class girl concerning her working life and how such decisions could alter and create ramifications for her future outlook in terms of work and marriage prospects. From a localised perspective, I will argue that the question of `choice' was relative to the amount of social and parental freedom experienced by female adolescents. Firstly however, this chapter will focus on a much broader national perspective in connection with the changes within the realm of women's work and the subsequent opportunities available for the female work force. How did perceptions and images, created by society or the media concerning the female work force alter during the period and what were the opportunities that were created? And significantly, how did the national picture compare with the everyday experiences of those working-class girls growing up in Rugby and encountering their first tastes of working life?

There can be little doubt that the first half of the twentieth century saw a two-fold transformation. First, there can be no doubt that there were great political and economic upheavals. Events such as the two world wars and the economic depression of the 1930s created unprecedented changes within the type and nature of women's work. Women established more firmly their niches within

British industry. This was not just the case during the world wars, which created a political and economic need for female workers, but also as Britain turned away from heavy industry, women became a true economic asset as they were perceived to possess the ideal `nimble fingers' necessary for the new types of industrial manufacture. This transition meant that the working-class female was faced with a new variety of occupational opportunities, previously unavailable to her. Secondly, such economic upheavals had consequences in terms of national perspectives and beliefs attributed to the suitability of work for women and their place within the domestic sphere. How did economic changes affect the images of working women in society as a whole and in turn the available employment opportunities?

This chapter therefore can be split into two broad lines of inquiry. First, it is essential to consider the transformation and creation of the image of the school girl to the female adolescent. After leaving school, girls were compelled to find their place within the working environment and were embarking on employment which brought a new status for the working-class girl. Historians such as Mitchell have argued that the creation of the term `girl' was a product of this period.[1] What was the effect of this new phase or `rite of passage' on the perceived image of women and their place in the economic working climate?

Secondly, this chapter will examine the national image of what was considered

[1] S. Mitchell, The New Girl: Girls' Culture in England 1880-1915 (New York, 1995).

`suitable' work for women throughout the period. For example, the explosion of the clerical sector and the arrival of the `new' electrical and manufacturing industries provided fresh opportunities for the female worker. In addition, the numbers of domestic servants drastically reduced, despite the accepted proviso that a woman's place was in the home. How did national government policy affect society's perceptions and opinions towards women's role in the work force? Government opinion fluctuated according to economic necessity, most notably during post-war periods when women were encouraged to re-enter the domestic sphere. The experiences of Rugby women can be used to illustrate how `suitable' factory and clerical occupations were for the female labour force, and how, at this local level, the changing national presuppositions affected women's lives.

The New Girl[2]

How was the 'new' girl defined? Mitchell argues that between 1900-1910 the concept of `girlhood' provided young females with a separate stage of existence with their own values and interests. A girl who had left school and had yet to marry was no longer considered to be a child, but had yet to achieve the status of a legitimate `woman', since the term was inextricably bound up with marital status.

[2] S. Mitchell, The New Girl: Girls' Culture in England 1880-1915 (New York, 1995).

> Over the space of a single generation, public ideology about a girl's place, role and occupation had shifted. The change is one of perception, attitude, and expectation; in 1905 it was seen as usual for girls ... to work outside the home; in 1880 it had been seen as unusual.[3]

Mitchell's research, which focuses on the concept of girlhood within both the working and middle classes, contributes a meaningful and innovative perception concerning the economic and social changes for adolescent females. Significantly her argument successfully provides those missing years with the new defined status of `girlhood'. Research by Roberts also touches on this separate stage of a young female's life:

> The period ... between the ages of about fourteen and twenty-five was distinctive for most girls, bridging as it did childhood and independent adulthood. More women worked for wages during this period than at any other time in their lives. It was also a time for enjoying leisure and of course for getting to know men and possibly finding a husband.[4]

Similarly Penny Tinkler's study of popular magazines between 1920 and 1950, sees the creation of the adolescent as an important part of changing expectations towards working girls.[5] Tinkler's ideas are based on the argument

[3] Mitchell, The New Girl, p. 24.
[4] E. Roberts, A Woman's Place (Oxford, 1984), p. 39.
[5] P. Tinkler, Constructing Girlhood: Popular magazines for girls growing up in England 1920-1950 (London, 1995).

that from the late nineteenth century onwards, girls from the age of twelve were placed in a transitory period, whereby they faced the start of paid work and the entrance into heterosexual relationships, marriage and motherhood. These factors were the `socially constructed features of female adolescence'.[6]

Consequently, a new `rite of passage' had been created by a girl's ability to find work and relative economic independence, which as we shall see was often problematical for working-class girls. First, upon leaving school it was usual for girls to feel that they had a degree of financial obligation towards their parents and to help with the family's expenditure. Secondly, after marriage, any economic status that had been achieved by working-class women was condemned by social values and expectations and ultimately replaced by financial dependence upon their husband. The question of a girl's independence is therefore debatable. As Mitchell states:

> Girlhood, in its archetypal form, is bounded on each side by home: by parental home on one side, by marital home on the other. In the space between the two family homes - for however many years that space might last -the new girl has a degree of independence (supervised though it might be by the mistress at work or at school).[7]

Such independence, during `girlhood' heralded new types of behaviour. However

[6] Tinkler, Constructing Girlhood, p. 3.
[7] Mitchell, The New Girl, p. 9.

female adolescents were not conscious of this period of transition or the concept that they were experiencing 'something' different. Perhaps the group most aware of the 'new' experiences were the girls' mothers, who recognised that life in the twentieth century was distinct from that of their own teenage years in the Victorian era.

Nevertheless, fresh behavioural opportunities arose simultaneously with the widening occupational choices for girls. Female adolescents were faced with a significant switch in society's expectations towards them. Not only were they experiencing more freedom concerning their `choice' of work and the variety of employment on offer, but also, in a national perspective, they were enjoying the substantially widened horizons of social freedom.

> The new girl - no longer a child, not yet a (sexual) adult - occupied a provisional free space. Girls' culture suggested new ways of being, new modes of behaviour and new attitudes that were not yet acceptable for adult women. It authorised a change in outlook and supported inner transformations that had promise for transmuting woman's `nature'. ... Girls were consciously aware of their own culture and recognised its discord with adult expectations. They perhaps suspected that they could

> be `new' girls for only a few brief years, before they grew up to be (traditional) women.[8,9]

However, was social freedom a guaranteed outcome of starting work? This thesis will argue that opportunities to exercise new and freer behavioural patterns were controlled by a variety of factors within a girl's life. Social background, schooling, parental control and peer pressure all played roles within a girl's thoughts about her style of living during her adolescent years. As Mitchell argues:

> The idea of the new girl exercised an imaginative and emotional power with fertile potential for nurturing girls' inner selves. Whatever their actual circumstances, girls' culture told adolescents ... that their lives would be different from their mothers' lives and they could mark out a new way of being in the world.[10]

The suggestion that a fresh and distinctive stage of life existed for adolescents is used by David Fowler to reinforce his argument that young adolescents experienced great degrees of freedom and essentially created their own lifestyles

[8] Mitchell, The New Girl, p. 3.
[9] Adolescent girls were faced with two cultures. First, the culture associated with their life after leaving school. However there was also the working-class culture which dictated morality and respectability.
[10] Mitchell, The New Girl, p. 3-4.

during the inter-war period.[11] He maintains that publications were an integral part of the teenage culture that evolved between the wars.[12] Magazines and periodicals encouraged adolescents to seek new recreation and a social life that was previously unheard of in working-class communities, and also promoted new possibilities of consumerism to which the young person could aspire. Fowler argues:

> ... this superior lifestyle only became possible during the inter-war years. It resulted, in part, from the dramatic improvement in young wage-earners' earnings since the pre-First World War period; and, in part, from the emergence of a welfare system covering most manual families which shielded young workers from having to support families in which the chief wage-earner was unemployed.[13]

Significantly, he dismisses previous studies describing a lack of autonomy by adolescents, such as those by Roberts, and argues that young wage-earners had some control over their working and home life. A young person's autonomy

[11] David Fowler, The First Teenagers: The Lifestyle of Young Wage-earners in Inter-war Britain (London, 1995).
[12] Cadogan and Craig comprehensively tackle the influence of publications on the image of women. They quote various instances whereby image of females are promoted according to societal expectations. See M. Cadogan and P. Craig, You're a brick Angela! The Girls' Story 1839-1985 (1976; London, 1986 edn.).
[13] Fowler, The First Teenagers, p. 169.

was a result of employment and the ability to earn wages. For the first time in their short lives, adolescents had a disposable income.

Notably Fowler's research was undertaken in big cities such as Manchester. young wage-earners, of both sexes, spent much of their free time indulging in pursuits which cost money. Cinema visits and dancing were habitual pursuits for boys and girls in their teens and even for those in their early twenties.[14] Those in their teens certainly possessed the disposable income to pursue such activities habitually.[15]

In support of his argument, Fowler cites Rowntree's study in York in 1936, which found that 76.3% of fifteen to twenty-five year olds were above the poverty line and were generally experiencing a higher standard of living than their adolescent predecessors. Consequently, the new `teenagers' were able to experience a new culture, which was in many respects distinct from that of their parents and adult leisure pursuits.

> According to Rowntree: `the promenading of streets has almost ceased ... young people ... for the most part ... are in cinemas, the theatre, the music

[14] J. Bourke, Working-Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960 (London, 1994) maintains that the cinema had links with adolescent promiscuity which justified many middle-class concerns. It was felt that the new era of young people were experiencing too much screen romance, instead of understanding the values of marital stability. See p. 35.
[15] Bourke, Working-class cultures in Britain, p. 169.

hall or dancing ... At weekends and on summer evenings many of them are bicycling in the country ...'[16]

However, such entertainment required a relatively large and increasing amount of spare money. Fowler maintains that young workers constantly sought improved employment in order to sustain their leisure interests. The ability to switch employers was further proof for Fowler, that adolescents achieved a high degree of autonomy during their `teenage' years. However, it would appear that Fowler's research depicts a very progressive view of young people during the period. The adolescents of the 1920s and 1930s may have been the beneficiaries of the increasing economic, social and cultural opportunities of the period, as Fowler advocates. However Fowler's argument that adults had very little influence in the lives of their teenage children and that new wage-earners had total autonomy, does not give credit to studies carried out previously.[17,18,19]

However, in support of Fowler's research, images of young females being able to bask in a phase of social independence were promoted during the period. These images were primarily circulated by various publications, aimed at the female adolescent. The arrival of magazines, specifically written for those girls seeking

[16] Quoted in Fowler, The First Teenagers, p. 107.
[17] For example, E. Roberts' work, A Woman's Place, regarding working-class women which argues that parents continued to have influence over their daughters until they were married.
[18] In addition, Fowler's research cannot be supported by the memories of those women who grew up in Rugby and were proud to have been deferential and conscientious workers for their employers and parents
[19] See Fowler, The First Teenagers, for a full discussion regarding adolescence and deference, p. 42.

work for the first time and leaving the shackles of childhood and schooling behind them, allowed young females to extend their outlook further than the confines of their family and neighbourhood and, to a certain extent, revel in their new working `independence'. Published articles and fiction offered them the potential for change and created new dreams for their future life. These magazines promoted images, which were however set within the limits of society's expectations for female youth. This invariably meant that although girls would work during adolescence they would at a later stage marry and have children.

Despite changing political, economic and social circumstances, the magazine messages were basically three-fold. Firstly, the importance of heterosexual relationships was a constant feature, with a stress that `marriage was the life career and ambition of each girl'.[20] In particular, fiction showed intense hostility towards the spinster and any relationships that were fostered between women, however innocent.

> The prospect of marriage was the keystone of articles and fiction in working girls' magazines throughout the period 1920 to 1950. Marriage, and later motherhood, was presented as the ambition and fulfilment of every `normal' girl. Magazines subsequently had much to say about `affairs of the heart', courtship etiquette and marriage.[21]

[20] Tinkler, Constructing Girlhood, p. 93.
[21] Tinkler, Constructing Girlhood, p. 143.

Second, as the magazines were designed to be read by the `girl who worked', the editors had to accept and promote the work environment for young women, despite their major aim of encouraging marital hopes. However in most cases,

> ... work was peripheralised. Articles and fiction praised and encouraged girls in their work but at the same time they portrayed it as a means to find a husband or develop skills useful to the potential wife and mother'.[22]

Lastly, publications sought to capitalise on a girl's new economic potential. Young females were new consumers, and advertisers thrived by promoting their products using working girls and famous career women. Girls were anxious to exercise their new economic independence, however modest, and were happy to adjust to fulfil themselves in the emerging manner of the modern adolescent consumer.

There can be no doubt that marriage and motherhood, promoted by weekly and monthly publications, were seen as positive images for girls to achieve. However, whilst promoting wedlock, the magazines were simultaneously teaching girls to accept their subordination in society. Paid work was not seen as a career, but `merely as a stop-gap before marriage'.[23] Employment was essentially portrayed as a learning process, whereby young women learnt their subservient `role' within the work place and in the economy as a whole. It is important to remember

[22] Tinkler, Constructing Girlhood, p. 92.
[23] Tinkler, Constructing Girlhood, p. 93.

that work was always depicted as inferior to the unpaid work experienced within the domestic ideal of marriage and the family. Dr Bernhard Bauer, a doctor during the 1920s described the 'girl in maturity' as knowing her destiny.

> Whether she is the idle daughter of wealthy parents or has to work for her living, she now becomes more and more conscious that her real vocation is that of wife and mother. ... It becomes clearer and clearer to the girl that motherhood and marriage are the real vocation of a woman, the lot decreed for her by Nature ... she wants to please only the man who will make her a woman and be the father of her children.[24]

Historians of a later period have agreed with the over-riding image of domesticity fed to adolescent girls. As Tinkler states:

> Approaches towards women's work were inseparable from attitudes regarding the appropriate roles of women, in particular attitudes towards marriage and its responsibilities for women. Patriarchal interests dictated that women remain primarily located in marriage and the home; these interests were neatly encapsulated within prevalent feminine ideals which naturalised heterosexuality and domesticity in women and which presented feminine women as those who anticipated and worked towards marriage and domesticity.[25]

[24] B.A. Bauer, Woman (London, 1927) p . 131.
[25] Tinkler, Constructing Girlhood, p. 92.

During the period there is a constant dichotomy. On the one hand, as Fowler argues, employment opportunities allowed young adolescents a wide variety of work `choices'. Paid work yielded a sense of economic independence, despite it being dependent on the views of individual parents. A concept of `girlhood' emerged, as a new sector of the community found its economic and social place before true adulthood. However, Mitchell states that work was always considered as a `learning experience'.[26] Women's work therefore takes on a subordinate image. As Mitchell argues:

> To think of the worker as a girl is to emphasise lack of maturity, lack of skill, need of supervision, emotional (rather than intellectual) labour.[27]

The `girl' had new economic independence and social freedom; but by labelling female adolescents with a juvenile term - `girls' - allowed an acceptance that females should be inferior within the work place, and subsequently in life, within the home.[28,29] Such beliefs were sanctioned by the manageable images portrayed in girls' magazines and novels, via their continued emphasis on love and devotion.

Love was presented in romance magazines as the most powerful force in

[26] Mitchell, The New Girl, p. 43.
[27] Mitchell, The New Girl, p. 43.
[28] The question of female power within the workplace and the home will be tackled in Chapter 5.
[29] Young male adolescents received a similar treatment by being referred to as 'boys' or 'lads' for many years when starting work. This is discussed fully in Chapter 3.

a woman's life and readers were repeatedly warned against turning their back on it. While it would be wrong to argue that material conditions and patriarchal social relations were no longer able to uphold the institution of marriage, it is clear that ideological sanctions were crucial to the stability of heterosexual, and more specifically marital, relationships. Love was, moreover, the rationalisation of women's acceptance of marriage and her subordination within it.[30]

However the proliferation of romantic novels during the period indicates a desire for many girls to 'educate' themselves to be ready for encounters with the opposite sex. In an analytical study written in 1947, entitled Women, Richard Curle proposed many questions relating to the mind and body of the female sex. He would agree that young girls have an innate lust for romantic love or a conditioning to accept it. He maintains that 'a girl visualises, and visualises spontaneously, falling in love as part of her heritage as a woman'.[31]

The creation of this desire was certainly aided by romantic magazines and fictions during the period. As Bourke argues, 'Books were almost as educative as the cinema'.[32] Libraries catered for this interest and,

[30] Tinkler, Constructing Girlhood, p. 142.
[31] R. Curle, Women: An Analytical Study (London, 1947) p. 9
[32] J. Bourke, Working-Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960 (London, 1994), p. 35.

> Provided their customers precisely with what they asked for, a good light romantic novel which would not make them feel 'uncomfortable', preferably on the theme of 'All That I Want is Somebody to Love Me'. The basic story line should be boy meeting girl, various seemingly insuperable difficulties coming between them and, finally, the revelation of their true and hitherto suppressed feelings.[33,34]

The 'strong and silent' hero was a requisite for a successful story and correlated well with the belief that a woman's place was beside her husband. Women were invariably presented as delicately nurtured and needing someone to lean on. Beauman maintains;

> What remained constant was the vital necessity for the heroine to be well bred. Just as the sheik turned out to be an English aristocrat, so the heroine of a romantic novel had to be one rung up the social ladder. This was not merely for reasons of snobbery; it was part of a pattern of wish-fulfilment, the assumption being that all readers of light novels would prefer to be a little better off, a little better connected than they in fact were.[35]

[33] N. Beauman, A Very Great Profession:The Woman's Novel 1814-39 (London, 1983)p. 178.
[34] One of the most famous writers of the romantic novel of the period was Ethel M. Dell. She established her reputation with her first novel, The Way of an Eagle (1912) which set the pattern followed by many subsequent authors.
[35] Beauman, A Very Great Profession, p. 195.

Young girls were encouraged to seek respectability and to aspire to marry above their own social class. As Beauman states a 'wish-fulfilment' existed in the minds of adolescents to conform to the ultimate concept of marriage and domestic bliss. However, one commentator observed the reading of such novels by young girls in 1927. Dr Bernhard Bauer, a gynaecologist wrote a volume entitled Woman. In a chapter concerning pornography, he refers to the romantic novel.

> Where is the woman of the lower classes who does not give up much of her free time to the reading of appalling 'love-stories'? ... Women are much more given to this stimulation of eroticism by reading than are men.[36]

Bauer's thoughts are distinct from ideas of young girls seeking romantic escapism.

However, romance was a constant feature, even during the First World War. These war years created a dual image for women. On the one hand a woman was being offered liberty and a chance to succeed in the work place, while images of the wife within the home continued with the promise that life should remain as 'business as usual'. As Ouditt maintains:

> Business, in war as in peace, meant finding a husband and maintaining a

[36] B.A. Bauer, Woman, p. 260.

> home, an activity animated and invested with meaning by the seemingly universal ideology of romantic love. Many of the popular songs, posters and postcards of the war reveal that romance was necessary as a life-enhancing counterpoint to the brutalities and degradations of war: if women were to keep the home fire burning, that fire was to be as alive in their hearts as it was in their hearths.[37]

The preoccupation of novels with romantic love and marriage for the working-class girl sustained the accepted ideal of women within the home.[38] The female adolescent was immersed in a new cultural phase, which although offering wider opportunities, consistently reinforced the belief that marriage was the `perfect' outcome after a number of years of working life. Subordination within the home was also advocated and accepted. The questions of subservience or power within marriage and in the work place will be tackled later in this thesis.

Suitable work for women

Chapter 3 will touch upon the differences between occupations, as perceived from a parental point of view, when `choosing' work for their daughters. However, these parental attitudes were partly a product of national opinion that expressed varying ideas concerning the expansion and future of women's work. World

[37] S. Ouditt, Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War (London, 1994) P. 89.

[38] Ouditt argues that romance was used during the First World War to ensure 'continuity and obedience to received doctrines'. See Fighting Forces, Writing Women, pp. 89-129.

events and economic changes had an important part to play in the creation of national beliefs relating to the most appropriate status for women; either worker or homemaker.[39]

One occupation that seemed to fit societal expectations for women was clerical work. Importantly parents considered office employment as being a `suitable' job for their daughters, primarily associated with its image of respectability. Many young females were therefore `destined' to enter the office and they became the `angels' at work, replacing the accepted notion of the `angel in the house' derived from the Victorian era. Whereas, for middle-class Victorians, the ideal woman remained at home in domestic bliss and moral purity, the office seemed to satisfy many parents and social commentators that it was a `suitable' place of work for chaste and innocent females. Not only was the work perceived to be `feminine', but due to the increasing amount of female office workers, girls were more likely to be working alongside other women, rather than having to mix with the opposite sex, which created images of immorality in the minds of many.

[39] I would argue that the image of females has alternated according to the needs of the nation. For example, during the world wars women were seen as strong workers who were providing essential support for the war effort. This image was replaced during the inter-war period with the concept that women should be in the home concentrating on looking after her husband and family and which also ensured that returning soldiers secured work. Propaganda played a large role in the changing of this image to suit the mood of the nation. In addition the problems associated with female workers was linked to the worries of male workers. For example in November 1914 skilled men at Vickers objected to setting up machines for women recruits. The men feared that women would take over their jobs. This dispute was settled by the Crayford Agreement, which allowed women to undertake repetition work only.

The development of the clerical sector therefore provided new and previously unobtainable options and opportunities for women. The increase in female office workers during the period was phenomenal, as between 1861 and 1911, the number of employed female clerks increased by 400%.[40] The female office worker was replacing the male clerk, which has been seen as a `revolution' in the world of work.[41] In the nineteenth century, clerical work was traditionally seen as a distinct male domain, providing middle-class gentlemen with excellent career prospects.[42] Three factors helped to provide women with new clerical opportunities. Firstly, with the growth of commerce and industry, there was a subsequent demand for clerical staff, which could not be filled by men, who were being offered new opportunities themselves within the ever-growing British Empire. Consequently employers sought a new source of labour. Second, at the end of the nineteenth century there was an unequal population balance. Eligible husbands were in short supply, and many middle-class daughters, who could not rely on their father's wealth for the rest of their lives, were facing a life of spinsterhood and poverty. Office work provided a genteel occupation and a respectable income. Third and most significantly, the 1880s saw the introduction of the typewriter. The use of the typewriter evolved to become inextricably linked with dexterity and feminine proficiency. The general transformation from male to

[40] E. Roberts, `Women's Work 1840-1940' in L. Clarkson, (ed.), British Trade Union and Labour History: a Compendium (Atlantic Highlands USA, 1990 The Economic History Society), p. 237.

[41] For more information, see Gregory Anderson's The White-Blouse Revolution (Manchester,1988) which provides a selection of in-depth essays relating to the phenomenal growth of the female clerical sector.

[42] For a description of the rise of the male clerk, the class structure and the nature of capitalist change, see F.D. Klingender, The Condition of Clerical Labour in Britain (London, 1935) and D. Lockwood, The Blackcoated Worker (London, 1969).

female clerical worker was thus nearly complete by the middle of the twentieth century.

The numbers of female office workers continued to rise throughout the twentieth century, and the First and Second World Wars further accelerated the `revolution' and encouraged women to enter the clerical work force, replacing those men who had joined the forces. Women had found work, in which they were comfortable and which provided them with a respectable and `suitable' occupation. The appropriate nature of female office work was confirmed after 1919 when, as numerous women workers were forced to leave their jobs, the clerical sector continued to expand and establish itself.

Table 1 confirms that `the growth of the white-collar labour force is one of the most outstanding characteristics of the economic and social development of the twentieth century'.[43] The expansion of the female office sector gradually reinforced itself, and the woman's place at the typewriter, despite its relative newness, was essentially accepted as `natural' by society.[44]

The acceptance of the female office worker was therefore a product of twentieth century society and its perceptions. Women became the new source of clerical labour, as the feminine qualities of obedience and dexterity were seen as

[43] G.S. Bain, The Growth of White-Collar Unionism (Oxford, 1970) p. 11.
[44] S. McKenna, `The Feminisation of Clerical Work 1870-1914' (Unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Warwick, 1987).

`suitable' for office work. Consequently the office had been transformed and had become `a female ghetto'.[45]

Table 1

Number of clerks[46] employed, male and female, England and Wales, 1901-1961

Year	Males	
1901	461,164	57,736
1911	561,155	124,843
1921	687,121	591,741
1931	696,662	569,850
1951	861,679	1,270,456
1961	994,810	1,780,190

Source: G. Anderson, `The White Blouse Revolution', in G. Anderson, (ed.), The White Blouse Revolution (Manchester,1988), p. 34.

In contrast to the positive images of female office workers during the period, women who found employment in factories attracted varying descriptions, both positive and negative. Portraits of women in the factories often depended on the type of work that was undertaken. Hence the images of such workers must be considered in relation to the following factors. Firstly, the growth and impact of the `new' industries that permitted women to partake in a lighter manufacturing process, rather than the traditional heavy industrial scene of the nineteenth

[45]K. Newsome, `Office automation, women clerical workers and trade unionism', (Unpublished M.A dissertation, University of Warwick, 1990) p. 26.

[46] The term 'clerk' refers to those workers who were employed undertaking essentially mundane or routine tasks. Many male clerks achieved promotion to become managers and thus would not be included in these figures. Managerial positions usually meant being supervisors of a number of female clerks, who were paid at a lower rate than their male counterparts.

century. Secondly, the importance of the two World Wars, which created a need for women in the factories and had great societal repercussions and altered opinions concerning female workers.

Until the First World War, Britain was renowned for her world domination and industry, such as coal mining, shipbuilding and iron and steel manufacture. Britain's trade success was inter-linked with her empire and colonies that provided receptive markets for her goods. Many of the staple manufacturing concerns employed through necessity male workers, as the work was `heavy' and demanding. The only exception was the textile industry, which had traditionally provided employment for a large number of women, especially in the north.

However, by the turn of the century foreign markets could not be taken for granted and industrial trade became more competitive. In addition, Britain could not maintain her industrial dominance, as other European countries advanced their technology. The decline of heavy industry was therefore a significant feature in the first half of the twentieth century and had dramatic effects on the opportunities available to both men, and, more importantly for this study, for women. For example, in the Lancashire textile industry, by 1930 only 54% of the viable looms were in use and the unemployment rate, male and female, was 45% compared to a rate of 17% nationally.[47] As Glucksmann states:

[47] D. Beddoe, Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars, 1918-1939 (London,1989), p. 64.

> Changes in the industrial distribution of women workers during the inter-war years were inextricably linked with the restructuring of the economy and the emergence of new industries.[48]

Glucksmann's research provides a definitive study of female factory workers during the inter-war period. Her major focus is concerned with the `new' industries, which entered the British economic climate, including electrical engineering, the production of the motor car, chemicals, food processing and the production of synthetic fibres. Aldcroft, in his research concerning the interwar economy states:

> The electrical trades and the motor car industry were the two most important symbols of industrial modernisation in the twentieth century. They not only created the base for a new industrial structure but they also freed the economy from its former dependence on coal and steam as sources of power and locomotion.[49]

The `new' products were invariably related to the levels of domestic consumption that had been heralded by industrial advancement in the inter-war years.

[48] M. Glucksmann, Women Assemble (London, 1990) p. 67.
[49] D.H. Aldcroft, The Inter-War Economy: Britain 1919-1939 (1970; London, 1973 edn.), p. 191.

> Five main changes were central to the restructuring of industry: new forms of industrial organisation, new range of products, new processes of production, new type of work force, and a new form of circulation capital.[50]

Ouditt, in her work relating to the working women during the First World War has agreed that although women had a long history of employment in factories[51];

> The move from these traditional industries to engineering was hardly straightforward. The capitalist businessmen did not trust the physical and mental capacities of women and saw them as a bad investment; labouring men feared that their jobs would be undercut or severely devalued by 'dilution' with female labour.[52]

However, women were about to become essential for the growth of the 'new' industries. Whereas the north suffered tremendously from the decline of the traditional trades, particularly in the 1930s, the Midlands and the South reaped the benefits of the consumer businesses, and as Beddoe states, `these industries, more than the old, set the pattern for the future of women's work'.[53] Pinchbeck agreed by stating that the;

[50] Glucksmann, Women Assemble, p. 72.
[51] For example, the cotton, linen, tailoring and hat-making industries.
[52] Ouditt, Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War (London, 1994) p. 72.
[53] Beddoe, Back to Home and Duty, p. 66.

> New light industries and new opportunities in education enabled women to enter many new occupations and to play a prominent part in industry. As the number of domestic servants fell and the sweated industries declined, women workers in the cycle and light electrical industries steadily increased.[54]

The inter-war period, in particular during the 1930s, was essentially a paradox in terms of economic events. On the one hand there was high unemployment, but simultaneously, in the 1930s, it was also a time of growth within the `new' industries.[55] Beddoe argues that `two nations' were created; the unemployed north and newly growing Midlands and South.[56,57]

> Electrical engineering was one of the most important sources of growth in the economy ... especially in the 1930s. For the most part it was a genuinely new industry, manufacturing a wide range of new products (including telephones, electricity meters, radios, irons, cookers, radiant fires, water heaters, magnetos) as well as mass producing for the first time

[54] I. Pinchbeck, Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution 1750-1850 (1930; London, 1969 edn), Preface.
[55] D.H. Aldcroft, The Inter-War Economy. Aldcroft provides a comprehensive view of the economy during the inter-war years. In particular he outlines the differences between the old and new industries. One difference is that unemployment rates in the new industries were below national average and lower than in the staple industries. See p. 178.
[56] Beddoe, Back to Home and Duty, p. 54.
[57] The arrival of the 'new' industries in Coventry, namely the car and electrical engineering industries, are focused upon by L. Grant, 'Women in a car town: Coventry 1920-45' in P. Hudson and W.R Lee (eds.) Women's Work and the Family Economy (Manchester 1990).

other electrical goods that were already in use (batteries, valves, cable, lamps and light bulbs).[58]

The development of the industry was helped by the war effort in both the World Wars and the simultaneous evolution of new ideas resulting in improved products for the consumer market. Catterall has studied this growth and maintains that the development of a public electricity supply gave the greatest impetus.[59] He quotes that between 1929-35 British consumption of electricity rose by 70% against a world increase of only 20%.[60]

The `new' type of factory work offered to females during the first half of the twentieth century was perceived to be `suitable' for women. Light industry did not require brute strength, which had been a vital requisite of the heavy industries. Notably, those women who found work in the factories of the 1920s and 1930s were usually young.[61]

Hence, of interest in this study, as Glucksmann states, is the `new type of work force' which was predominantly female. Such a shift in employment patterns, from male, `heavy' industry to the female `new' industries was facilitated by an advance in the use of machinery, which significantly decreased the need for

[58] Glucksmann, Women Assemble, p. 81-2.
[59] R.E. Catterall, 'Electrical engineering' in N.K. Buxton and D.H. Aldcroft (eds.), British Industry between the Wars: Instability and industrial development 1919-1939 (London, 1979)
[60] Catterall, 'Electrical engineering', p. 243.
[61] Beddoe, Back to Home and Duty, p. 67.

skilled workers. Whereas in the `heavy' industries, the skilled man was vital to the means of production, the `new' industries invariably meant that unskilled workers could be employed, who could watch machinery or undertake monotonous tasks.

The `new' industries and their association with dexterity, but also a lack of skill needed by their employees confirmed to many that it was `suitable' for female workers. Harriet Bradley refers to the assumed feminine nature of factory work in the inter-war period and quotes from the 1929-30 Report on the Distribution of Women in Industry:

> Where work is hot, heavy, dirty or wet, or where skill only to be acquired through long training is needed, the processes are for the most part carried out by men ... Light repetition work requires little training, is undeniably remunerative, and is preferred by women to work which requires a long course of training. On the other hand it is a blind alley unsuitable for men.[62]

Women had found new roles in the economy, but who had defined these positions for the female worker? After all, these industries were `new' and therefore they had no traditional practices to follow in terms of `suitable' employees.[63] A division of labour, where the women undertook the monotonous

[62] H. Bradley, Men's Work, Women's Work (Oxford, 1989) p. 168.
[63] Bradley, Men's Work, Women's Work, p. 159.

tasks, and men invariably took positions of authority as foremen, was created. Inter-war female employment was therefore affected by the largely unquestioned traditions of patriarchy and an acceptance that women were an available, unskilled and cheap source of labour.

Consequently, at the inception and creation of the `new' industries, their necessary work forces, mechanisation and mass production became feminine. As de Groot and Schrover argue, the `new technology may [have been] engendered from the beginning'.[64] This argument is supported by Glucksmann, who maintains that the `new' industries heralded the start of contemporary gender divisions within the capitalist mode of production. However, Bradley disagrees and asserts that the division of labour was not a production of the `new' industries, but a continuation of the accepted social definitions of male and female labour, which can be linked to the existence of family relationships and capitalist development. Prior social definitions had therefore placed the woman in an inferior role, and these extended to the new work places.

Glucksmann has taken the feminine image of the `new' industries further. She implies that women were producers and consumers of the inter-war period and were therefore a vital component to the British economy. Essentially, the image of women remained in the home. To become an ideal wife in the 1920s and 1930s, the purchase of consumer goods and domestic appliances was seen as a

[64] G. de Groot and M. Schrover, (eds) Women Workers and Technological Change in Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (1995), p. 13.

necessary requisite. Ironically, women in the factories assembled such goods. As Glucksmann states:

> A new circuit of production and consumption developed therefore involving women at both ends, and women acquired a centrality to capital as consumers as well as producers.[65]

However, women's `suitability' for factory work was not always seen as positive. Whilst factory work, was heralded as the new opportunity for young women, it was simultaneously depicted as inferior to other types of employment. As we have seen its repetitive nature encouraged the belief that factory work offered opportunities for those girls who were considered to be educationally subordinate. Society and local communities had differing perceptions of girls who sought work in the factories and those who found employment as office workers.

Not only did the type of work affect the girl's image within the community, but was also seen as indicative of the family's respectability. If a girl had to find work in a factory, then it was assumed that either she did not have the intelligence to obtain other work, or that her family was in desperate need of the higher factory wage.

It was this image of factory girls that was foremost in the minds of the general

[65] Glucksmann, Women Assemble, p. 6.

British public and of course it was the impression of many parents. The image pervaded all walks of life and dictated how girls were treated within the community. It is therefore not surprising that factory work was given an inferior place in the employment strata and that many parents pushed their daughters into clerical work as a more `suitable' occupation.

The inferior image of factory work had traditionally been associated with industrial work places being perceived as `dirty', noisy and thus inherently immoral. However, the `new' industries heralded a fresh era and were presented as a `clean' occupational option for a working-class girl. In addition, factory work was promoted during the two World Wars. In fact, the necessities of war created a feeling of national pride for those women who worked in an industrial setting, many producing the armaments essential for warfare. For perhaps the first time, women were openly praised as an economic blessing, vital to the continuance of British industry and the war effort.

In a similar way that the `new' industries offered female workers fresh opportunities, war work, especially during the First World War, had for Angela Woollacott a very liberating and opportunistic effect on the lives of young women. She focused on munitions workers during the Great War and argued that

> ... munitions work figures as an alluring wartime adventure for girls and young women. It offered them a means of escape ... Financial

> independence, mobility around the country, and some disposable income either to save up or to use for immediate pleasure were attributes that had characterised men's work before the war far more than the low-paying jobs available to women of the working class.[66]

However, some social commentators were extremely worried about women entering the factory. `Women's war work ... did not naturally lend itself to the discourse of nurturing and sheltered alterity.[67] Again the questionable morality of factory production permeated social concerns.

> Englishness and womanhood were frequently conflated into an image of blossoming pastoral simplicity, which easily slipped into the ideology of the rural organic myth. The position of industrialised women working in under-ventilated factories to produce armaments, however, was more deeply troubling to the pastoral image of England and ... required greater imaginative efforts on the part of propaganda writers to align a nurturant female identity with a dangerous, mechanised occupation directly connected with the means of destruction.[68]

The manipulation and image of `femininity' therefore, during both World Wars,

[66]A. Woollacott, On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War (California USA, 1994), p. 1.
[67] S. Ouditt, Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War (1994), p. 71.
[68] Ouditt, Fighting Forces, Writing Women, p.48.

was altered in accordance with the necessities of government policy. For example, in 1914, when it was thought the war was going to be over in a few months, women were encouraged to remain at home. There was a feeling that women should not be affected by the masculine concerns of war. However as Ouditt argues the government was faced with a problem;

> ... with a shortage of shells and a shortage of labour, it became necessary to make the employment of women in engineering trades appear attractive, desirable and, at least in the short term, natural.[69,70]

The government was faced with a rapidly rising employment crisis.[71] Women became visible as they took work in shops, offices, banks and after a few months on trams, buses and trains, replacing those men who had enlisted.[72] Early in 1915 it was clear that the war was not going to end quickly as predicted and that with the demand for munitions changes relating to the recruitment of workers were essential.

[69] Ouditt, Fighting Forces, Writing Women, p. 71.
[70] Writers during the First World War struggled to cope with the concept of women working in munitions factories as being natural. Ouditt quotes the thoughts of Caine, writing in 1916 who felt that women who made shells could be connected to the 'unconscious lure of women's weird and murky biological function and by the strange, devotional practices (becoming nuns or witches) to which only women succumb' and therefore 'unnatural'. See p. 79.
[71] D. Thom argues that the state turned young women into women war-workers very successfully via paternalism and portrayed the caring image of women 'looking after' society. See D. Thom, Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War I (London, 1998, p. 160.
[72] Women's unemployment duly dropped to 75,000 in December 1914 and 35,000 in February 1915.

> The government wanted to introduce women into munitions production fast, organising workshops so that women could replace absent men, and 'release' others for the army. The answer lay in altering the way armaments were produced.[73]

From May 1915 the government became involved in the production of munitions which importantly included the recruitment of workers.[74] The 1916 Munitions Act confirmed that 'female labour should be allowed into work from which women had been excluded before the war'[75,76].

However, magazines still encouraged women to remember the importance of the home. A woman's subservience was emphasised and `loyalty to the country was thus equated with loyalty to the patriarchal order'.[77] A woman's help was required during the war, which was depicted in various images, one of the most famous being America's 'Rosie the Riveter'.[78] However, societal expectations towards a woman's assumed ambition of marriage and child rearing continued to remain strong. Thorn agrees and argues that a woman's social role of wife and mother

[73] G. Braybon and P. Summerfield, Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars (London, 1987) p.35.
[74] The dangers for female workers in munitions factories during the First World War were huge in relation to TNT and toxic jaundice. Government involvement ensured in 1917 that new regulations were introduced but still many women suffered ill-health and death. For a detailed account of the use of TNT in munitions see Thorn, Nice Girls and Rude Girls, p. 123.
[75] Braybon and Summerfield, Out of the Cage, p. 37.
[76] The expansion of women's employment allowed the government to introduce conscription for men in January 1916.
[77] Braybon and Summerfield, Out of the Cage, p. 90.
[78] See P. Colman, Rosie the Riveter: Women working on the home front in World War II (New York, 1995).

was 'suspended' during the war years, but not removed because of the necessity of female labour.[79,80]

The ambiguous nature of the perceived image of `womanhood' is illustrated by events in 1918. Women had suffered some stigma during wartime, and many men had shown hostility towards the female worker replacing the traditional breadwinner. Once the war was over it was assumed by many that women should now return to the home.

> The women who only a year or so earlier had been acclaimed as patriots, giving up easy lives at home to work for their Country in her hour of need, were now represented as vampires who deprived men of their rightful jobs.[81]

One of the most important features of inter-war societal expectations was that after 1918 it was assumed that women should either return to their rightful place within the home or family, or alternatively find work as domestic servants. Both `occupations' served to reinforce the subservient nature of the female worker, despite her supposed `liberation' during the war. The change of opinion towards women occurred with great speed:

[79] Thorn, Nice Girls and Rude Girls, p. 74.
[80] Sheridan reiterates the belief that war provided a 'temporary escape' from domesticity. See D. Sheridan, 'Ambivalent memories: women and the 1939-45 war in Britain', Oral History, 18:1 (1990).
[81] R. Graves and A. Hodge, The Long Weekend: a Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1939 (1940; London, 1995 edn.), p. 44.

> No longer were these women `our gallant girls' and `heroines': public opinion shifted rapidly and dubbed them `pin-money girls', `scroungers' and `slackers'. The actual process of dismissals was swift and began well before the war ended. As early as February 1918 some 8,000 women munitions workers had been dismissed.[82]

The alternatives offered to munitions work, as mentioned, were primarily based around the idea of domestic service. Coincidentally, the world of domestic service was suffering its `servant problem', as labelled by the middle-classes, which was basically a shortage of `suitable' servants to fill the many jobs available in middle-class homes. The government therefore thought they had found the answer to their problems. By moving women into the domestic sphere, whether it be in their own homes or within the homes of others as servants, the government believed they could pacify both male workers who feared for their jobs on returning as heroes, and the opinion of many commentators and the general public, who had always doubted the ethical nature of the female working in industry. Immediately after the Armistice the `out-of-work donation' was implemented to provide benefit for those who had lost their jobs due to the end of the war. Women were expected to find work which was `suitable' for them and as `officialdom viewed domestic service as fit work for practically any women who signed on', women were forced into satisfying the image of the dutiful housewife expected by many or losing their benefit completely.[83] Essentially therefore,

[82] Beddoe, Back to Home and Duty, p. 48.
[83] Beddoe, Back to Home and Duty, p. 51.

women were ruled by society's expectations for them to remain at home.

> The single most arresting feature of the inter-war years was the strength of the notion that women's place was in the home.[84]

However, even after the Second World War, there was a feeling and acceptance that women would once again want to return to the hearth after the hostilities. Nonetheless, opinions had changed slightly by 1939. Married women returning to work was considered a necessary and to some extent `normal' occurrence, due to the demands of the war. However, those women with children were still expected to remain at home and not go out to work. Consequently, it is fair to maintain that societal opinions did not change drastically during the period. The increase of working women was essentially restricted to those females who had yet to marry and the domestic ideal of wife and motherhood continued.

Conclusion

In conducting local research of this nature, it is essential to recognise the `external' pressures placed on women during the period. This chapter has therefore tackled the national influences and associated presumptions that affected the working lives of women.

[84] Beddoe, Back to Home and Duty, p. 3.

However, it must be remembered that the term `woman' has various meanings within the world of historical study. When did a girl become a `woman'? Previous studies, which have concentrated on the working lives of females, have tended to use the term for those females employed in paid work, which was usually from the age of fourteen onwards. Nevertheless, I would suggest that the terminology should be altered slightly. Young females, when starting their first employment position, were not yet true `women'.

The recognition of `girlhood' by various studies, as cited previously, is significant for the changing image during the period of the working-class female. First, the expression provides a description for those years between school and marriage. Previously, females could not be identified as either `schoolgirls' or `married women', and were therefore in a state of `limbo' in terms of societal status. Thus `girlhood' gives the working-class female an identity and a relative amount of independence. The term can also be used for those females in their twenties. From the oral evidence it would appear that in many instances female labour was identified as working 'girls' despite their growing maturity.

Secondly, and arising from the initial point, new experiences and occupational opportunities allowed the working-class female to achieve recognition and maturity in relation to her available contribution to industry, commerce and the national economy. Significantly, however, once a female had found employment and had earning potential, she was theoretically at liberty to obtain more respect,

but ironically she was still regarded as an economic appendage of the family and remained under the influence of her parents.

Lastly, the concept of `girlhood' facilitated a new age of leisure and socialising interests for the working-class female. This was encouraged and reinforced by periodicals and publications during the period. Such magazines confirmed a new era for adolescent females both in terms of economic consumption and the opportunities available for working women. Nonetheless, the over-riding consideration and message which was portrayed by these publications was that females were expected to settle for married life, after their teenage working lives. The magazines sanctioned a teenage social life for the first time. During the period the number of local dances and trips to the cinema increased dramatically. However, it is important to remember that one major reason for encouraging and approving such social events was to allow young females to seek an acceptable future husband.

A female's `suitability' has been the second focus of this chapter. Adolescent girls had to `choose' their occupation mindfully to ensure respectability within their community. Such considerations will be discussed in Chapter Three, in relation to Rugby women. However, opinions of local parents and young females must have been affected by national presumptions of women's work. The destination of the female upon leaving school was considered to be within paid employment, but preferably within a `suitable' work place for the `fairer sex'.

The most appropriate destination was regarded as the office, which was perceived to be clean and fitting for the female constitution. The work was light, utilised the presumed dexterity inherent within the female composition, and significantly provided a work place very largely staffed by women. It could be argued that office work provided women with a comfortable niche, which solved numerous problems simultaneously; the office furnished and supplied fresh opportunities for women, and young females sought a new independence and respectability.

In contrast to the positive images towards female office workers, those women who worked in the factories suffered from disapproving and dubious descriptions. On the one hand, the work offered by the `new' industries was seen as `suiting' the female worker, as it was often far cleaner and lighter than heavy industry. However, the `new' industries often meant monotony and boredom for many female workers. This encouraged the perceived image of factory girls as being intellectually inferior to their office worker counterparts. The difficulty for the government during the period was to counter these opinions in line with the economic needs of the country. As discussed, the world wars brought the necessity for females in factories and society as a whole stressed the patriotic needs of the country in justifying such work. However, during the inter-war period, most government agencies tried to encourage women back into the home, once again to stock up the hearths, rather than undertaking paid work. It would seem that factory work could never really conform to being a `suitable'

occupation for women, and fulfil the necessary image of being compatible with the perception of feminine requirements and the female constitution.

Economic changes and world war therefore had a dramatic effect on the sphere of women's work. Importantly however, the political and economic transformations did allow the reformulation of the roles of the young female workers in society. Work after school was accepted as perfectly natural and obligatory in society, as was a subsequent marriage after a number of working years. A concept of `girlhood' was thus created and sustained during the period.

CHAPTER 2

The development of Rugby and occupational opportunities

At the turn of the century, Rugby town faced new developments in terms of industry and commerce. The investment of two major companies in the town created new opportunities for both men and women in terms of employment prospects. In addition the population of the town gradually increased as workers were attracted to the new industries. It was during this period that the town experienced a metamorphosis from market town to industrial centre and thus provided the setting for my research. The geographical location of the `new' industries is vital for this study. Rugby provided an ideal location for development; importantly the female workforce existed.

In the first half of the twentieth century women were experiencing new possibilities in both their working and home lives. Rugby women can be used as a cameo or 'snapshot' of female lives during the period and illustrates changes encountered by women throughout Britain.

This chapter will provide background factual information concerning the rise of the town's development and the companies which became vital to the success of the local economy. There are four notable attributes to Rugby's history that affected the development of the town: the school, the market, and the railway and industrial development. Individual company histories will be offered to illustrate the work that was available for women during the period

and to provide a backdrop to those issues relating to women's occupational choice and freedom discussed in the following chapters. Essentially, therefore, what was Rugby like and what opportunities did it offer the young working class girl?

Rugby School

In 1567, Rugby School was founded by the instructions of the will of Lawrence Sheriff, a local trader. The school was to become and indeed is today, included in the list of the top public schools in the country. Today, as always, Rugby has had to accommodate the school and its boys.[1] Economically, throughout its lifetime the school has provided an additional source of employment for a number of men and women. Domestic service, both in the school and for the schoolmasters in private homes, offered new employment opportunities in the area. In addition, many other families of nobility moved to the area once the school had been established. As Simms states:

> Parents who could not afford boarding fees emigrated to Rugby during the first half of the nineteenth century. A high proportion consisted of clergy; many were widows, and some retired officers. These families remained in Rugby, to impose on the market community with its

[1] The industrial development of the town has been hindered in the past by restrictions placed on 'green' land, especially land owned by the school. In many ways the school has 'stunted' the town's full development and potential.

> class leadership. From the immediate countryside they absorbed a number of domestic workers.[2]

Local traders and shopkeepers specialising in formal wear, polo and rugby football were often dependent on the school and its activities for their livelihood.[3] On the one hand the school provided a stimulus to the local economy, but simultaneously the school protected its boundary and prevented industrial development on the south side of the town. The following of the school increased after 1832, when William Webb Ellis famously 'picked up the ball and ran with it' and thus created the game of 'rugby'.

Market Town

Together with the school, situated in the centre of the town and a local focal point, was the Market Place. The status of 'market town' is common to many industrial centres.

> In the Midlands, even in the large industrial towns, we find markets still being carried on with stalls pitched in a large open space, covering perhaps a couple of acres, exactly in the medieval fashion. The covered stalls with their piles of goods of every description, the traders shouting their wares from every stall under the open sky, all this is

[2] T.H. Simms, The Rise of the Midland Town: Rugby 1800-1900 (Rugby, 1949), p. 3.
[3] Simms states that by 1821, 20% of the town's population was gentry and approximately 50-60% engaged in trades, whilst the numbers involved in agriculture were decreasing.

purely medieval; and around these open markets stand the lordly twentieth century shops.[4]

The tradition of an open market has been a feature since 1255 when the Lord of the Manor created the facility for the sale and exchange of cattle. It is at this point that Rugby's links with agriculture are reinforced and provided a stimulus to the local economy. Throughout the nineteenth century traders and farmers came to Rugby from three counties. Irish drovers brought cattle to the Martinmas Horse Fair every year, when the centre of the town was closed to traffic and as Simms states, 'the accumulated filth in the streets took over a week to remove'.[5] Samuel Lewis wrote an account of Rugby in 1833. He stated that Rugby is:

> A market town and parish ... The town is pleasantly situated upon rising ground, on the south side of the Avon; it consists of one street leading to the market place. The market which is well attended, and abundantly supplied with corn, and provisions of every kind, is on Saturday: thirteen fairs are held annually, but the greater number are only cattle markets'.[6]

The impact of the market on Rugby was to provide an impetus for the development of shops where these traders could spend their money. During

[4] W.G. Hoskins, The Making of the English Landscape (London, 1985), p. 290.
[5] Simms, Rise of a Midland Town, p. 5.
[6] S Lewis, Topographical Dictionary of England (1833) in J Simmons, 'Rugby Junction', 1969, Dugdale Society Occasional Papers, No 19.

the first half of the nineteenth century, new shops were built in the centre of the town and provided the inhabitants of Rugby and market traders with a wide selection of goods. This was developed even further via the use of the railway to bring various luxuries to the town from all over the country and even Europe.

Railway development

The third major development involved the arrival of the railway network in the town and was to completely change the nature of the town. Rugby had survived on its small market and the revenue created by the school, but now was faced with the prospect of increased economic development. Christiansen recognises the importance of the school, but also highlights the crucial geographical position of the town. He states:

> Rugby's fame has rested more on the reputation of its school than on railways, even though they did much to transform it from a busy and important market town in to a large town on a broader base with industrial development prominent. Once the railway age was born, promoters could hardly have missed Rugby, for it lay in too strategic position to be ignored.[7]

[7] R. Christiansen, A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain, Vol VII: The West Midlands (London, 1983), p. 140.

The first railway company to arrive was the London and Birmingham Railway in 1838. Numerous other railways subsequently followed: 1840 Midland Counties, 1847 Trent Valley, 1850 Market Harborough, 1868 Leicester to St Pancras, and 1893 Great Central. Between 1838 and the turn of the century, Rugby had become linked with a wide variety of places in the country and this was a stimulus to industrial development. By 1886 a larger and more efficient station had to be built to cope with the growing traffic.

The importance of the railway to Rugby cannot be underestimated. Originally the planners had felt that the track would be better placed through Dunchurch, located on the south side of the town approximately four miles from the town centre, which had traditionally been home to the coaching inns. However after local protests it was decided to take the railway to Rugby. The result today is that Dunchurch is now a suburb of the town and remains distinctly 'village-like' in character, whilst Rugby has grown into the major industrial town in the area. Simms agrees and states:

> Its only possible rival, Dunchurch, on the London Road, sank into the lethargy of an abandoned road and empty inns when the locomotive replaced the stagecoach.[8]

The importance of the railway has been argued by W.G. Hoskins.[9] He quotes the examples of Stamford and Peterborough:

[8] Simms, Rise of the Midland Town, p.3.
[9] W.G. Hoskins, The Making of the English Landscape (London, 1985).

> In 1846 there was a good chance that the new main line of railway from London to York would pass through Stamford instead of Peterborough, then a place of no consequence. The people of Stamford were passionately anxious that the railway should come their way, for it was plain enough that the great coaching trade, by which they lived, was doomed.[10]

However the significance of the Stamford and Peterborough story relates to Lord Exeter, who as owner of the majority of land in the surrounding area successfully restricted house building and factory development and more importantly prevented the arrival of the railway from entering Stamford. Peterborough was therefore given the railway and became a thriving industrial centre, whereas Stamford declined and its population steadily began to fall. Other historians such as Aston and Bond have agreed with the level of importance placed on railways by Hoskins.[11] In their work concerning Victorian towns they argue that despite the railway system being 'initially destructive' in terms of demolition, 'railways were vastly more effective than canals had been in promoting urban growth'. In addition echoing the sentiments of Hoskin they continue by arguing, 'The arrival of the railway meant rapid expansion; to be bypassed meant stagnation'. It would seem that

[10] Hoskins, Making of the England Landscape, p.288.
[11] M. Aston and J. Bond, The Landscape of Towns (Gloucester, 1987).

Peterborough's massive expansion was paralleled in Rugby, Doncaster, York, Darlington and Carlisle'.[12]

In retrospect Rugby was fortunate to be chosen as a vital link in the railway system. Robin Leteux importantly notes that in 1840 the Midland Counties had originally wanted to build their railway via Market Harborough, which was traditionally a coaching centre, but instead chose Rugby. The result was that Market Harborough stagnated economically and the population of the town remained around 2,300 for thirty years, whilst Rugby began to thrive.[13,14] In addition the Trent Valley line opened in 1847 between Rugby and Stafford was an important trade advantage. 'There was to be no more strategically vital line built in the West Midlands than this route'. The 1840s described by many as the period of 'railway mania' due to the rapid expansion of the transport system created the need for a report in 1845. Its results declared that Rugby, Wolverhampton, Birmingham and Gloucester were regarded as 'busy' traffic centres.[15]

Rugby's population parallels the railway development. For example in 1820 before the railway arrived in the town the population stood at 2,300. Twenty years later with the start of the railway building the population had almost doubled to 4,000. By 1860 the number of inhabitants had almost doubled yet

[12] Aston and Bond, Landscape of Towns, p. 176.
[13] R. Leteux, A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain, Vol IX: the East Midlands (London, 1984), p. 107.
[14] In contrast to Market Harborough, Rugby's population in 1840 was approximately 4,000 and during the following twenty years had increased to 7,818 and by 1890 totalled 12,000 inhabitants.
[15] Christiansen, Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain, p. 134.

again to 7,818. By the turn of the century the population of Rugby totalled 16,950. This increase correlates to the arrival of the two main manufacturing industries which were to dominate the town.

Rugby was not the only place to benefit from the advantages of rail travel. The correlation between economic growth and the arrival of the railway in various studies seems to be conclusive for the whole of the country.[16] The railway system took over and challenged existing transporting services. The system was better, cleaner and was an impetus for new enterprises that needed different convenient ways of transportation. In addition the building of the railway itself had created and sustained employment in many areas. For example in May 1847 at the height of the railway building era, 4% of the male occupied population was involved in the building of tracks, which totalled 256,509 workers.[17,18]

The significance of the arrival of the railway is highlighted by the case in Northampton.[19] The problem was the local geographical area, being somewhat hilly; there was no easy route. In addition there was local opposition from the landed gentry who feared damage to their estates and a subsequent threat to their hunting. In December 1830, the local gentry

[16] For example M.C. Reed (ed.), Railways in the Victorian Economy: Studies in Finance and Economic Growth (Newton Abbot, 1969).
[17] M.C. Reed (ed.), Railways in the Victorian Economy: Studies in Finance and Economic Growth (Newton Abbot, 1969), p. 23.
[18] However by the 1850s when most of the building work had been completed the railway only provided 50,000 jobs nationwide.
[19] See Leteux, Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain, Vol. IX, p. 43, for a more detailed analysis.

argued with the slogan, 'Spoil our shires and ruin our squires' in the belief that canal and road routes already supplied the town sufficiently and that the railway was not necessary. However there was an element within the town who felt that it was essential for their economic development. Notably all opposition for the scheme was halted when the railway company threatened to take the railway twenty-four miles from the town. The opposers had realised the effect of not allowing the railway access to their land.

The appearance of Rugby was altered by the arrival of the railway and provided an impetus for a variety of new housing and industries in the north of the town. What previously had been farmland was transformed during the turn of the century into land of industrial potential. Rugby was considered to be of industrial importance and was compared to Stafford, 'due to heavy electrical industry in both places, where large works stand beside the main line'.[20]

Manufacturing industry

At this point, the impact of the two major manufacturing industries must be discussed. Here is the fourth major factor in the development of Rugby. Chronologically the railway was a necessity before major industry could have arrived in the town. Previously no transport system existed which could have coped with the new levels of trade created by the electrical industry.

[20] Christiansen, Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain, p. 139.

Importantly the land around the railway was available for development and was the target for those industries interested in setting up new economic bases for their companies. The two companies in question are Willans and Robinson, which arrived in 1898 and the British Thomson-Houston Company Ltd (B.T.H.), which came in 1902.[21] These two companies were to provide the basis for employment of the majority of Rugby inhabitants and also stimulate an immigration of outsiders into the town, who were later to consider themselves to be 'Rugbians'.

As discussed, Rugby has four significant developments that characterised the style of the town. From these developments it could be argued that male employment in Rugby was particularly well catered for in terms of heavy industry and railway occupations. However this study will focus on female employment within the town. What must be remembered is that the employment opportunities attracted male newcomers to the area, often with wives or prospective wives following them. What sort of occupation and opportunities could the town offer these women? In addition, with families settling in the town, what would become of the female siblings once they had left school?

However initially bleak the picture may seem, there is evidence to suggest that young working class girls and women did have a variety of possible occupations. At this point it is appropriate to highlight the major opportunities

[21] The 1930s growth of consumer goods is outlined by B. Supple, 'A Framework of British Business History' in B. Supple (ed.), Essays in British Business History (Oxford, 1977), p. 15.

for paid work during the period. These companies and industries will be mentioned in the following chapters in relation to the memories of the oral respondents.

Domestic service

The predominance of the school during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries dictated the growth of the town and simultaneously the expansion of domestic service occupations. Not only did the school itself employ various staff, but also local schoolmasters required domestic help within their own homes. Local people were therefore given work opportunities. In addition, the increase of domestic service opportunities grew with the numbers of people arriving in the town with the aim of sending their children to the school. A 'gentry' had been created and the inhabitants of the surrounding area, which included the local countryside, found themselves with the good fortune of paid domestic employment in the town.[22]

The local papers of the period highlight the availability of domestic service occupations with numerous advertisements. In the local almanacks, during the nineteenth century, Mrs Tait of 1 Albert Street is frequently advertising her 'Register Office for Servants' and claiming proudly that she is 'open daily from Ten til One and from Three til Seven'.

[22] For a detailed account of servant life, see F. Victor Dawes, Not in Front of the Servants: a true portrait of upstairs, downstairs life (London, 1990).

In later years during the first half of the twentieth century there is evidence of at least four Servants Registries in the town. These registries aimed to 'marry' prospective servants with suitable employers and notably were all managed by women themselves.[23] The 1936 Almanack, which provides a wealth of local information, lists three Servants Registries: Miss Attridge at 25A Sheep Street, Miss Smith at 44 Regent Street and Mrs Stagg at 19 Bennett Street.[24] This highlights that 'servant problem' of the 1920s and 1930s, when the middle classes failed to find 'suitable' domestic servants due to the availability of other occupations offering higher remuneration and better conditions. However the memories from the oral respondents highlight that domestic service was still an option for many girls during the first half of the twentieth century, especially if they needed to find lodgings as well as employment.[25]

Traders and shopkeepers

From studying local documents and especially the local directories and Almanacks it is apparent that women did have a vital role in the local economy. Local Almanacks list every household and shop with the person's trade or occupation. As discussed, Rugby became a vital central point for

[23] Such information can be gathered from the local Almanacks that list all inhabitants with their trade. Examples of Servant's Registrys are in 1910 Mrs H T Walton, Registry Office for Servants, 109 Railway Terrace. Interestingly Mrs Walton's husband ran the local funeral directors and they worked from the same office and shared advertisements in the local Almanack!

[24] Rugby Almanack, 1936.

[25] In 1931 there were still 1,332,224 female employed in domestic service in England. Statistics for Rugby show that within the Rugby Urban District there were 938 female servants in 1931 out of a total of 3.363 working females, but this figure had dropped to 268 by 1951.

trade and commerce due to the annual fairs and markets taking place within the main streets of the town. Many shops and services were therefore located within this area and aimed to attract business from those people/traders who had come to the markets. A wide variety of specialist goods were offered and many businesses became successful.

For example, it is possible to locate female dressmakers, who were running small workshops providing work for local women. Such tailoring and expertise was needed in the town because of the rise of the local gentry associated with the school. In 1895, Mrs Eyden is documented as owning a workshop at 2 Little Church Street and in future years is listed as being a dressmaker or costume and mantle maker. Other examples throughout the nineteenth century list women involved in bakeries, confectioners, fishmongers, fruiterers, furriers, milliners, beer retailers, laundresses, coal dealers, stay-makers and haberdashers. One particular woman, a Mrs Ann Pendred of 15 North Street, is worth mentioning as she is listed as a 'Rope, line and twine maker' who also sold fishing tackle and archery equipment! Whilst some of these occupations are not surprising, other such as beer retailers, which usually meant public house managers and coal dealers are more unusual. However the reason for such female trades can be attributed to widowhood.

For example, using the local Almanacks it is possible to trace married couples and establish that some women were 'taking over' businesses upon the death of their husbands. One local businessman, William Elliott is listed as a beer retailer in 1908 at a local public house, The Royal Oak.

Interestingly his wife in 1907 ran a Tobacconist in the same area. However by 1936, the Elliotts are still listed, but now as a mineral water business, bottling water together with Guinness and Bulmer's Cider. Significantly the proprietress is listed as A. Elliott which seems to indicate that William had died and his wife had succeeded him into business. This indicates that some women were capable and successful in business.

Teachers

The numbers of women involved in teaching during the period is also worth noting, especially after the 1870 Education Act.[26] Teaching was considered to be a professional occupation when compared to other types of employment. There is evidence of various girls' schools and small private schools in the town all run by women. The exception being a secretarial school in the 1930s which was managed ironically by a Mr W H Thompson.[27]

Examples of local schools are numerous. One of the most notable was Miss Day's Boarding and Day Establishment for Young Ladies, which was located in Little Church Street. This school was established in 1837 and continued for many years. Again the existence of such institutions is a reflection of local gentry requirements of needing a place to educate their daughters. However

[26] See F. Widdowson, 'Educating teacher: women and elementary teaching in London, 1900-1914', in L. Davidoff and B. Westover, Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words: women's history and women's work (New Jersey, USA, 1986) and F. Hunt (ed.), Lessons for Life: the schooling of girls and women 1850-1950 (Oxford, 1987).

[27] During the 1930s female dominance of secretarial positions was growing and by the 1950s was complete. It is therefore ironic that many girls in the town attended private secretarial schools only to be taught by a man for a female occupation!

not all teachers were employed by private schools. Within the local Almanacks are many entries for female teachers working at local charity schools. Other examples of teaching include those women who offered music tuition within their own home.

Laundry workers

A trade, which appears to have provided numerous women with work in the town, was the laundry business. Many of the oral respondents found work in the local laundries. In 1936, the local directory lists nine separate laundry businesses. Some of these were large concerns, such as the London Laundry, Central Laundry and the Rugby Steam Laundry Company Ltd, which employed numerous women undertaking various tasks. However, some women are listed obviously at their home address, such as Miss Valentine in Oxford Street. It is quite possible that these women 'took laundry in' as a way of making extra income for their family, especially if they had young children and could not commit themselves to full-time employment.

The most successful laundry in Rugby, was the Rugby Steam Laundry Company Ltd, which is listed in the local Almanack from around 1900 until 1936. A number of the oral respondents worked for this company, which was managed by two sisters, the Misses Fenwick. These owners had quite a reputation for strict business practices in the town. Their laundry was situated in Chester Street, and they also owned offices in Henry Street. In 1936 the

laundry moved to Abbey Street and it is probable that at this time it was sold to new owners.

Factory workers

There can be no doubt that the factory setting provided employment for large numbers of women in Rugby and the country as a whole.[28] Such factories ranged in size and the types of manufactured goods were numerous. Despite various factories operating before the turn of the century, after 1902, the companies that provided the majority of factory employment for women were associated with the electrical engineering industry.[29] By 1931, approximately one third of all working women in the town were employed by this industry.[30]

However, to start from the latter part of the nineteenth century, smaller factories did appear in the town and were extremely important for the development of women's work. The first notable factory was the Rugby Corset Factory, which opened in Spring Street in 1881, and was a 'Stitching Station' for the Market Harborough company, W H & R Symington.[31] This company had various satellite factories throughout the area and targeted

[28] Numerous historians and feminists have chosen the subject of female factory workers. One of the most comprehensive which focuses on the 'new ' industries is M. Glucksmann, Women Assemble: women workers and the new industries in inter-war Britain (London, 1990). Other studies have concentrated on women in factories during the war. See research by P. Summerfield, Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives (Manchester, 1998).
[29] These companies were Willans and Robinson arriving in the town in 1898, and the British Thomson-Houston Company Ltd which started manufacture in 1902.
[30] In 1931 Rugby's working female population was 3,363 women. Those employed in the electrical engineering industry totalled 1104.
[31] The history of Symington's is included in a permanent exhibition at the Market Harborough Museum, Leicestershire.

Rugby due to its capacity to provide women workers. In October 1880 a meeting was held at a local hotel to canvas to sell shares for the proposed factory. It was declared the Symingtons,

> ... had been asked to come here, which should be taken into consideration with the terms upon which they offered to come to Rugby. They would employ 500 hand and perhaps 1000 which would certainly be a good thing for the town as it would employ a class of labour for which there is very little employment now.[32]

It must be remembered that the railway had brought many new inhabitants to Rugby and their wives and daughters sought new opportunities for employment. A member of the Provisional Committee for the Corset Factory declared in 1880 that:

> Rugby had just got to that height when unless some industry is introduced the town must go back. As the population increased, the number of persons requiring employment would increase, while even now they were living upon one another.[33]

The report from the local newspaper in 1880 continues to highlight the

[32] Rugby Advertiser, 16 October 1880. Symingtons had received two other offers of suitable towns into which they could expand, from Nuneaton and Northampton, but the company declared that they would prefer to come to Rugby.
[33] Rugby Advertiser, 16 October 1880. It was general concern of locals that Rugby was suffering economically at the start of the 1880s. Local businessmen were looking for new investment at this time.

advantages of Symington's arrival in Rugby. It was even calculated that the wages that the women received would be 'at least 10s per week each, which would be £800 a week or £15,000 a year altogether'. As Rugby was considered to be suffering economically at the time, the proposal of a local factory was given popularity as it was predicted that 'any tradesman of Rugby could see that he would very likely get £100 of this spent in his shop during the year'.[34]

However during the following months, the arrival of such a venture in the town caused many questions to be asked about the role of women in factory employment and the belief that such institutions would herald the arrival of immorality and social problems. Such issues were debated in the local paper. For example in September 1881, the Rugby Advertiser outlined the fears of many locals:

> When the Corset Factory was first projected there were many who declined to lend a helping hand, because they predicted it would bring a lot of needy people to the town, who in times of slack trade would cause additional burdens upon the poor rates. We embraced every opportunity to dispute this fallacy and contended that the labour was already in place waiting for the work to be brought to it and the members of many respectable families were sadly in need of suitable employment. ... We ventured the opinion that there were a thousand

[34] Rugby Advertiser, 16 October 1880.

hands in the district waiting to be employed and already 700 applications have been received by Messrs. Symington from young persons and industrious mothers for employment and probably by the time the factory is in working order the number will exceed 1,000.[35]

The writer continues by declaring that the opponents were wrong and that they 'should acknowledge that the introduction of a factory does not necessarily mean an abnormal increase in population that would require parochial relief in times of distress'.[36] The amount of applications for work at the Corset Factory was indicative of the available female workforce in Rugby and also their desire to work. As stated in the local paper, numerous women approached the Corset Factory, but despite earlier claims of employing up to 1000 factory hands, Symingtons initially employed only 200 women. As stated in the Rugby Advertiser, 'Symington have given as much work as they can out of doors, there will still be a surplus of unemployed but willing labour'.[37]

Despite the disappointment in the numbers employed the arrival of Symingtons was a great transformation of the local economy. This was celebrated in an elaborate opening ceremony for the factory, the report of

[35] Rugby Advertiser, 24 September 1881.
[36] Rugby Advertiser, 24 September 1881.
[37] Rugby Advertiser, 24 September 1881.

which emphasised the excellent working conditions and equipment.

> Daylight and fresh air is obtained through twenty-three iron-framed windows and every care has been taken to ensure perfect ventilation by mean of patent revolving ventilators on the ridge. The floors of both rooms are boarded and their appearance is light, airy and comfortable. Artificial warmth is supplied by a hot water apparatus in the basement, the water pipes passing round each room. Every attention has been paid to the requirements of the Board of Health in the sanitary arrangements, and lavatories, opening from each floor, have been provided for the use of the females. ... About 250 sewing machines ... will be placed on the two tables ... The machinist will be able to start or stop her sewing machine at pleasure by a light pressure of the foot upon a very simple contrivance placed underneath the table.[38]

The Rugby Corset Factory became a vital source of employment for many Rugby women. The company continued throughout the period, and during the Second World War was used for war work and the stitching of parachutes for the war effort. Symingtons continued until the late 1980s and provided over a hundred years of employment for Rugby women.

Evidence of further factories becomes apparent at the turn of the century. Numerous trades appear. For example in 1916, a cigar merchant is listed; a

[38] Rugby Advertiser, 22 October 1881. This article gives a detailed description of the opening of the corset factory together with a summary of the issues involved.

Mr Van de Arend in King Street, Rugby. This appears to be the employer of one oral respondent who worked in a Cigar Factory in the town which was owned by a Mr Van de Arend. The memories of this oral respondent became vital, after no further traces of this factory have been found. It is believed that the factory employed only a small number of women (approximately eight or ten) and closed down in the mid-1920s.

Another small factory employing women was Avis' Box Factory, which is listed in the local directories in 1913 at 161 Railway Terrace and run by the Avis brothers. Expansion obviously look place in 1927, when the company is listed at 161/163 Railway Terrace. The company provided employment for a small number of local women, producing cardboard boxes for a variety of uses. An oral respondent has provided further evidence of the day-to-day events within this company. The factory disappears from the Almanack in 1935 and it is presumed that it closed during that year.

In 1912 a further factory providing work for women was Findlay's Lamp Factory in Lower Hillmorton Road. This factory was involved in the manufacture of metallic filaments for lamps that were suited to the nimble fingers of women. Mr J Findlay remained as Managing Director, even though the company changed its name to the Rugby Lamp Company Ltd in 1917. However this was the forerunner to the Mazda Lamp Factory owned by the B.T.H. By 1920 the lamp factory is no longer listed in Lower Hillmorton Road and Mr Findlay is also not traced. At this time the company was bought by the B.T.H. and moved and developed to their main site.

One of the major employment opportunities for women was the arrival of Lodge Plugs in the town. Owned by Brodie and Alec Lodge, they used the ideas of their father, Oliver Lodge and developed a spark plug that was to be used for motor vehicles and aeroplanes. The two brothers set up in business, initially working from home and in 1904 'Lodge Brothers' was born at their office in Birmingham. After three years of hard work and gradual progression, in 1907 they built a new workshop and offices again in Birmingham

It is at this point in the history of 'Lodge' that the brothers came to Rugby. Their aim was to produce the best possible sparking plug. This led them to contact Bernard Hopps, a fellow inventor. Since 1908, Hopps had owned and run the Mascot Company in part of the premises of Hunter's Lamp Factory in Lower Hillmorton Road, after leaving the B.T.H. His plug manufacturing business moved to Albert Street in 1910 and after his amalgamation with Lodge Brothers in 1913, this remained as the factory. The three men then called themselves the Lodge Sparking Plug Company Ltd. By 1916 the company was able to move from Albert Street into their new premises in St. Peter's Road, which the men had had built. This was the new headquarters for the company, housing both the workshops and the offices.

Lastly the two major employers of Rugby inhabitants must be mentioned. Firstly, Willans and Robinson arrived in 1898 to take advantage of the railway and transport links across the country and the farmland chosen for the site in Newbold Road was known as 'Willans Works'. Willans and Robinson arrived from Thames Ditton where they had outgrown their site and faced with the

high price of land in London, needed a new factory to continue their development. The company, which concentrated on the production of steam engines, felt that a move to Rugby would enable them to exploit local railway craftsmen to create their own workforce. However it was not until 1902 that women were allowed to work for the company as typists. After 1902 the number of women employed increased at Willans and Robinson, but never to the same extent as the British Thomson-Houston Company Ltd.[39] Female labour was used in the offices and on the shop-floor, but clerical apprenticeships were not offered.

Willans and Robinson was followed in 1902 by what was to become the larger concern in the town, the British Thomson-Houston Company Ltd. American in origin, two engineers Elihu Thomson and E J Houston founded the 'Thomson-Houston Electric Company' in 1882. The company expanded to London in 1894 when the 'British Thomson-Houston Limited' purchased the patents of the American company and consequently had the exclusive right for their electrical engineering products in Britain and Ireland. In 1896 the company was renamed 'The British Thomson-Houston Company Limited'. By 1899 the company needed manufacturing premises and subsequently purchased Glebe Farm, near Rugby Station in January 1900. Building work took just over two years and manufacturing of heavy equipment, such as alternators, steam turbines, motors, converters, switchgear and transformers

[39] By 1914, the British electrical engineering industry was dominated by British Westinghouse and British Thomson-Houston and Siemens. For a detailed account of the development of the electrical engineering industry see Catterall, .'Electrical Engineering'.

started on 14 March 1902. At this point in the company's history, Rugby became the headquarters of the company and the majority of London staff moved to the town.

Women workers were a vital source of labour for these two large manufacturing companies. Many tasks within electrical engineering were 'suited' to the female form, in that intricate detail was made easier via nimble fingers. This was especially true in the Mazda lamp department of the B.T.H., where female labour formed the majority of the workforce.

The rise of female office workers in the town was consistent with the growth of the clerical sector across the country.[40] The twentieth century saw a huge rise in the numbers of women entering what was considered to be a male and skilled occupation in the nineteenth century.

From the turn of the century many women were employed as clerical staff in various offices in Rugby. Employers ranged from small offices of solicitors, public services such as the council and shops also offered positions. Nevertheless the growth of the electrical engineering industries accounted for the large increase of female clerical opportunities in the town.[41] The main electrical engineering companies needed female clerical workers to

[40] G. Anderson (ed.), The White-Blouse Revolution: female office workers since 1870 (Manchester, 1988) provides a comprehensive outline of the position of female clerical workers.
[41] Companies such as the British Thomson-Houston Company Ltd, Willans and Robinson and Lodge Plugs.

complement their engineers. Opportunities in clerical labour were therefore created.

The main employer was the British Thomson-Houston Company Ltd who took the brave step of training their own staff and in doing so began to 'professionalise' women's clerical work in the confines of their own company. The clerical apprenticeships offered to girls who usually had attended the grammar school in the town became prized positions and often created an occupational hierarchy with B.T.H. girls at the top. Details concerning these opportunities will be discussed later.

Conclusion

The town of Rugby therefore offers a 'backdrop' for research into the lives of working women. The arrival of the railway and industrial development allowed the growth of an area that had previously been a parochial market centre, concentrated around the public school. It must be remembered that Rugby, as a town, cannot be realistically compared with studies from specifically inner-city areas. Rugby has always been a small town, and continues to have this status today.

During the period studied, opportunities occurred for all working people, but this study will concentrate on the experiences of female labour working in Rugby. As discussed there were various choices for young females, but how did girls make their decisions? This will be the focus of the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

Occupational decisions: was there a freedom to choose employment?

`So, it stopped me then from living a life that I would have chosen to live'

The above comment from Mrs Bridge who was born in Rugby in 1920 illustrates the feeling of many young working-class girls upon leaving school: the limitations of choice and freedom for future life. As discussed and explored in the previous chapter, the future life of working-class girls was initially determined by what opportunities were available within their local area. These factors as we have seen can be regarded as `external', in the sense that they are circumstantial and unchangeable and cannot be affected by the working-class girl herself. Consequently the focus must be placed on those `internal' factors within the realms of working-class thought and influence. What `choices' did working-class girls have in terms of their future life and occupation? How free were they to make these decisions? Were they `stopped' or prevented from a chosen route? Which factors or circumstances influenced their decisions and affected the `choices' which were available or offered? What expectations did they have upon leaving school and how did they see their future? Were working-class girls consciously making decisions, or were they being ultimately `pushed' into certain occupations by their parents or society in general?

AMBITIONS, CHOICES OR OPPORTUNITIES?

From studying the oral evidence, it becomes apparent that the issue of `choice' versus `opportunity' is vital when discussing the future for working-class girls.[1] Job opportunities did exist in Rugby, covering a wide range of possible occupations, but whether or not a girl was allowed to `choose' an occupation depended greatly upon outside influences and circumstances from family, friends and the general perceptions and images of `women's work' in society.[2] For example, Mrs Bridge recalled how the circumstances revolving around her mother's death, in 1933, dictated her future. Her mother had always encouraged her to think about becoming an apprentice hairdresser, but her father did not share the same enthusiasm. Upon the death of her mother at the age of thirteen, Mrs Bridge was forced to work in a factory to earn more money and simultaneously become the `woman' of the household. Like many young girls, Mrs Bridge's future was determined by a sad event, which she was powerless to alter and ultimately led to a complete lack of choice regarding her future employment.

[1] For a further discussion about 'choice' of occupation see J. Bornat, 'Home and work: a new context for trade union history', Oral History, 5:2 (1977).

[2] Other geographical areas did not have the amount of 'choice' as Rugby girls. For example, those girls who went to work at Woolwich Arsenal during the First World War were not faced with any other opportunities and so they 'naturally' went to work at the munition's factory. See D. Thorn, 'Women at the Woolwich Arsenal 1915-1919, Oral History, 6:2 (1978). Also Liddington's research in Lancashire revealed the young working-class girls usually went straight down to the mill upon leaving school. See J. Liddington, 'Working-class women in the North West: II', Oral History, 5:2 (1977).

From the memories of many of the oral respondents, it became evident that most women did not recall a `choice' of future occupation, but regarded employment after school as a natural progression towards independence, whatever the job involved. `Opportunities' seem to have been only associated with those girls who were able to attend the local grammar school and as a result were thought to be seeking a career.[3] Unfortunately this chance of a grammar school education eluded some of the oral respondents, as even after passing the scholarship exam, the financial situation of their families meant that the costs of extra books and equipment could not be met. Mrs Whetstone, born in 1915, remembered enjoying school, but was prevented from continuing her education:

> As you can imagine, my mum and many of the other mums were waiting for us to start work to bring in a little and I remember I passed for the High School, but I couldn't go because my mum couldn't afford the books in those days. You had to pay in those days you see, for the books, ... so I couldn't go.

When asked whether or not they sought a career upon leaving school, most respondents usually replied with surprise, that they never considered this as an option. Those who mentioned that they had wanted to find work, as say a teacher or nurse, were quick to point out that this was impossible as their parents could

[3] M. Evans, A Good School: Life at a Girls' Grammar School in the 1950s (London, 1991) writes about her experiences of entering a grammar school and how it was seen as a better start in life for a future career.

not finance the extra years at school and because of the additional books and materials which were necessary to follow these careers. Any extra expenses needed for this additional study involved in education or training placed obstacles in the choice of future employment. It was not only education expenses that blocked some ambitions. In Mrs Huggett's case, it was the equipment needed to carry out her desired occupation, as she recalled in 1938,

> Well, I wanted to be a nursery, a children's nurse. There were a couple ... she'd got one little boy and was expecting another baby and she wanted a young girl for helping. Well, she came down and said, I think, she said to Mum, `We thought it would be nice if May could wear a uniform'. Well, of course, in them days, there wasn't anybody, not like the gentry and that .. and well I mean I wasn't going to get a lot a week, and I really couldn't afford to [buy a uniform]. So, of course, that's how I started at the Corset Factory.

Consequently, in the instances when young girls sought specific occupations or `careers', it was not unusual for their `choice' to be hindered by one source or another. It could be argued therefore that young working-class girls were socialised into believing that they would never achieve any working success and therefore did not actively seek a `career'. Elizabeth Roberts and Judy Giles have argued just this; that working-class girls had an acceptance or fatalistic belief that people from their class could never achieve any success and thus never had

ambitious plans for their future.[4,5] Giles in particular highlights the poverty within the working-class at the turn of the century, and how living on the `poverty-line' accustomed working-class women to accept and expect nothing less than a struggle for survival.[6] She maintains that the lives of working-class women were essentially a matter of `getting by', and found a `take what you can get' attitude among her respondents, who lived and worked in Birmingham and York in the first half of this century.[7] Mrs Leigh, who was born in Rugby in 1924, reiterated such low expectations. Her aim was to do shop work, but she had to go out to work at fourteen and sought her first place of employment in August 1938. She recalled,

> You didn't expect anything in those days. My sister worked at Lodge Plugs, so automatically I went there to work too. My sister put my name down that's all you used to do in those days. You didn't go looking for a job. If you wanted to work in Woolworths, you had to stop at school until you were sixteen, but if you wanted to work in a factory, well if you wanted to or not, you just did.

Similarly Mrs Cooper's remark is indicative of the feelings of many women during

[4] E. Roberts, A Woman's Place: an Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940 (Oxford,1984) and Women and Families: an Oral History, 1940-1970. (Oxford, 1995).
[5] J. Giles, Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain 1900-1950. (London, 1995).
[6] A similar struggle for survival and sense of fatalism is outlined by Frank in his study of women in the fishing industry. See P. Frank, 'Women's work in the Yorkshire inshore fishing industry', Oral History, 4:1 (1976).
[7] Giles, Women, Identity and Private Life, p.40 and p. 50.

the period: that they were not in a position to expect 'too much' and also the symptoms of inherent fatalism and acceptance concerning her working `life' epitomises the ambiguous state of `limbo' felt by many working-class women.

> They accepted what was there, 'cause they knew you couldn't have anything else.

It must be remembered that the memories of most women of their `working lives' were restricted to the years between school and marriage, usually from fourteen to their mid-twenties. These years were often filled with uncertainties. Young females often feared the future as Mrs Pearson's comment illustrates:

> Four of us started together. I was frightened, apprehensive, well I didn't know, I thought well this isn't what I wanted, but maybe its what's destined for me. I couldn't think much else could I?

Mrs Pearson's remark is recalling her first day at work at the B.T.H. in the typing pool in 1928. Clerical work was to become her `destined' occupation for all of her working life until marriage in 1937.

This fatalistic acceptance of what was essentially under-achievement on the part of working-class girls was not uncommon. Giles argues that the reason why so many working-class girls did not aim for a `career' for themselves was because

they perceived themselves from an early age as being unworthy of ambitions and high expectations. In a similar vein, Roberts has found in her work concerning the towns of Barrow, Lancaster and Preston at the turn of the century that `many girls simply assumed their role'.[8] Such a statement essentially refers to the transfer, via a girl's upbringing, of the domestic image, which was passed from mother to daughter as the ideal and only true occupation for female household members. Domestic expectations were therefore an

> implicit lesson learned by all girls ... that fundamentally, whatever else a woman might do in her life, the ultimate responsibility for the daily care of the home and the family lay with her.[9]

Roberts' oral evidence depicted a class of women, who were significantly aware of their subordinate position in both the working environment and the household, but more importantly who sought to find something to blame. `Many women indicated their awareness of the limited horizons and opportunities of their lives ... they tended to blame the poverty which governed where they lived, the length and nature of their education, and very often the kind of job available to them.'[10] It must be remembered that Roberts' work centred on very industrial and poverty-stricken areas, which affected the respondents' early childhood days. Attaching

[8] Roberts, A Woman's Place, p. 23.
[9] Roberts, A Woman's Place, p.23.
[10] Roberts, A Woman's Place, p. 2.

`blame' to certain influences and circumstances was not found to be a common trait of those memories of Rugby women.

It cannot be disputed that most oral respondents were well aware of their position in the social strata and mostly accepted their situation, but there is no evidence to show that any of the women interviewed `blamed' any aspects of their lives. When asked about their school days, most respondents recalled happy times and that they received an adequate, and often excellent education. Also there was no show of disloyalty towards the town and what it had to offer in relation to employment prospects. Only a couple of all those interviewed actually sought work outside of the town. Most were prepared to accept what was available. This, of course, reinforces the ideas of conformity and acceptance prevalent among the working-classes, and also highlights the socialisation from parent to child about their place in the class structure.

INFLUENCE OF CLASS AND GENDER

The growing years of the working-class girl and their perceptions of life are therefore significant factors for the future employment prospects of young females. Socialisation within the working-classes relied heavily on respectability of acceptance, and conformity to their social situation, and essentially taught following generations who was to be `working-class'. Consequently by the very nature of their class, working-class children accepted their position and it was

extremely rare for them to criticise the basics of working-class life. Via these lessons of acceptance they were also made aware, as Giles maintains, of the `power of money' and their relatively weak position at the base of the social strata.[11] During day-to-day living youngsters were increasingly aware of the `haves' and the `have nots'. This distinction was made prominently by those whose parents could afford to allow their children to attend the local grammar schools and those who could not. Such differentiation reinforced the working-class background of young people and ultimately insured that they did not expect too much from their future lives.

Distinctions were not only made in terms of class status, but also among gender roles and female expectations and behaviour. Attitudes of the family towards daughters differed from thoughts about male children and their possible futures and occupations. Familial beliefs reinforced by ideas from the general media and the school dictated the thoughts of young girls, of how females should behave and what they should expect from working life. Girls had `clear perceptions about which jobs would be appropriate for a daughter, given the family's traditions, status and aspirations'.[12] On a similar theme, Giles maintains that ideas of class and gender were `culturally articulated' from the attitudes of their parents and experiences of their childhood years.[13] In doing so working-class girls `self-defined' themselves and continued a cycle of creating `the ideal working-class

[11] Giles, Women, Identity and Private Life, p. 40.
[12] Roberts, Women and Families, p. 52.
[13] Giles, Women, Identity and Private Life, p. 31.

women', at home and also within the feminine and domestic image.

Such images have always existed, but they became particularly prevalent earlier in the nineteenth century. The Victorian middle class ideal of the `angel in the house' served to confirm that women served no place in the economic work force if they were to be seen as feminine.[14] The middle classes used this image as a symbolic message for the working-classes, which were thought to be in need of moral guidance. In turn, the emphasis was placed on the mother to train her daughters, to be dutiful and devoted to the home. The belief that the woman was the pivot of the ideal family unit was passed to each generation and became an aspiration and ideal to be sought by working-class women. True liberation was seen as being able to stay at home, and not having to find work.[15] It is not surprising therefore to find this attitude among women who grew up in the first half of the century. As discussed, the opinions of their parents, and especially those of their mothers would have affected them. Bourke argues working-class attitudes towards the domestic ideology peaked after the First World War and that women were encouraged to return to the home in an effort to restore the 'family' which the war had torn apart.[16] Not surprisingly therefore, most of the respondents' mothers finished work upon marriage to devote their time to the

[14]The use of phrase `angel in the house' originally derives from a poem by Coventry Patmore, `The Angel in the House' (1854-56) and tells of Patmore's intense love for his wife Emily during their courtship and marriage. It depicts the Victorian idealization of womanhood and reinforces the belief in the female existing within their private sphere within the home. Included in Hellerstein (ed.) Victorian Women (London, 1981) pp. 134-140.
[15] This notion is supported by E. Roberts, 'Women's Strategies, 1890-1940' in J.Lewis (ed.) Labour and Love, p. 232.
[16] J. Bourke, Working-Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960 (London, 1994) p. 128.

home. However, some mothers did work, but this was restricted to those whose husbands were unable to work through ill health or those who were widows. Such self-sufficiency on the part of these women was seen as necessary and therefore acceptable.

Future expectations for the working-class girl could not help but be affected by the image of the `angel'. By the turn of century, such attitudes towards female employment were accepted unconditionally by the working-classes. It would seem that there were `angels' in Rugby, as most respondents did not question the view that it was natural for a woman to be at home after marriage, while the husband went out to work. Mrs Gardner recalled her childhood days in the 1930s,

> I can't remember, apart from anybody whose mum was perhaps a widow, mums going out to work. They didn't just go out to work because they'd got their families at home, they were at home when we got home to school. You knew that Dad went out and earned the money and Mum stayed at home and looked after you. Unless, you'd get the odd lady, perhaps her husband was ill or she was a widow, or she'd got a big family, and the husband didn't have a very good job. She'd perhaps take in washing or got out and do a bit of domestic work ... but other than that I can't recall any women going out to work once they were married.

The expectation of a future domestic life for all female members of the family meant that housewifery training was seen as essential. As the Victorians had expected mothers to train their daughters in the social expectations of the middle classes, so respondents remember that they were required to undertake various household roles, whether cleaning or baby-sitting. Girls were frequently seen as direct helpers to their mothers and learnt housework from an early age, fully expecting to use this training later in life, when they were married themselves. As Mrs Huggett remarked, 'Well, I used to help out on a Sunday morning, you know, and do a bit of the cooking. Because really it was training, really, getting you used to it'.

The training to be an `angel' was experienced by most respondents. However, for Mrs Garrett, who was the eldest girl in the family with five brothers, household chores were a large part of her childhood in the 1920s:

> Monday nights I had to do the ironing, Tuesday night I used to have to do the mending and the darning. Wednesday night I could go out, Thursday night I used to have to clean the bedrooms, Friday I could go out, Saturday and Sunday I used to have to help clean downstairs and the front room, `cause that was shut off you see.

Parental expectations for Mrs Garrett to undertake the household chores nearly prevented her future happiness. She recalled that in 1940, her mother protested

when she wanted to marry at the age of twenty-eight. As the eldest girl, her mother expected her not only to continue to bring in an extra wage, but more importantly to help around the house:

> No, mother didn't want me to get married. I'd got to stop at home ... what hurt me more than anything, the boys could get married, they could have girlfriends, they could go out, they could get married, but not me. I'd gotta stop at home. Bill said to her, he said `Oh Ma, I've got something to tell you ... we gonna get married at Easter', so after he'd gone she turned round to me and said `What do you want to get married for?' I said `For the same reason as you', and she never spoke to me again. `Cause she was in a wheelchair as well, but um, she didn't want me to get married.

Such feelings of resentment between mother and daughter were however rare throughout the oral evidence. Most respondents accepted their place in the house as `mother's helper'. Mrs Hutchinson, born in 1903, is typical of most interviewees in remembering her childhood chores:

> Well yes, my mother had thoughts about that, you know, very good for us, we used to help, do a little bit of cooking, pastry making and dusting. My mother was one of the old-fashioned types, she believed in help. She used to have quite poor health in her younger days. He [father] was very good then, he'd turn round and do the cooking and bath us when we were

> small, but as soon as Mother was well and on her feet that was it, but of course my father had a very hard job in the foundry.

From the memories of the oral respondents, there is a clear pattern of female members of the household continually undertaking domestic labour. In contrast the primary role of husbands and fathers was that of `breadwinner' and they were only expected to carry out domestic tasks when absolutely essential and then only on a temporary basis. If husbands and sons were expected to help regularly around the house, the tasks they were assigned were `masculine', such as the gardening or chopping wood for the fire. Such tasks would ultimately be expected of young men after they were married, when they would fall into the male `breadwinner' role. Boys therefore were also `trained', but in a masculine way. In terms of gender socialisation, while girls were moulding themselves into the female domestic role, for young men,

> the cultural discourses of working-class masculinity allowed them the possibility of defining themselves as breadwinner ... bringing home the first wage packet signified adult status, manhood and freedom ... Adult `womanliness' required many of the attributes of `the child' - dependent, deferential and positioned in the privatised arena of the domestic household.[17]

[17] Giles, Women, Identity and Private Life, pp. 48-49.

Consequently not only did girls become increasingly aware of their own domestic role, but also accepted the role of the male breadwinner as `normal' and acceptable to their future expectations.

Mrs Bridge recalled that, after the death of her mother in 1933, she was aware of her father's differing treatment towards her and her brother. She, at the age of thirteen, was forced to undertake most of the housework, while her brother was not expected to do any household tasks. When asked what her brother was doing during this period, she replied,

> Ah, now, that shows the difference between a girl and a boy. Father was very interested in my brother. Father had a step-brother in the B.T.H. with quite a good job and my brother had quite a good job offered to him and he wouldn't take it Father was upset about this, but my brother wanted to be an electrician, so that's what he became. But .. that was different in those days about boys and girls. He used to say, `Oh, it doesn't matter about the girl, she'll be away and marry and that's the end of that.'

It is ironic that, despite what her father thought, Mrs Bridge did not get married as a young woman and therefore have to leave her father to his own devices. She had to wait until she was in her late-forties before she married, consequently caring for her father until he died,

> It spoiled my life really. I would have got married a lot sooner, but you see there weren't any social services in them days and there was nobody else but me. `You won't send me to the workhouse will you', my father used to say.

Such stories of emotional blackmail from the parent and sacrifice on the part of the daughter were common. Boys were not expected to help out domestically, but were allowed to continue with their ambitions and ultimately leave the family. The belief that the `woman' was the centre of family life reinforced the expectation that girls should devote themselves to their families, especially if their mother had died and were still living at home. Mrs Fletcher's mother died when she was fourteen, in 1925. There were five children in the family, three boys and two girls. Mrs Fletcher recalled that her elder sister therefore had no choice but to became the head of the household:

> He [father] was a train driver, who was considered as a very, very important job and when my mother died, she died rather suddenly, and my elder sister had just started a job to be a nursemaid six months before mother died. Well, of course, when mother died, father wanted a housekeeper because there were three under me and I was only fourteen and a half, so of course she had to come home and keep for us.

The situation was similar for Miss Crouch. Her mother died in 1921 when she

was nine and a year later her grandmother also passed away, leaving her the only female in the home. When asked whether her father helped around the house, she recalled,

> No not really, I mean men didn't in those days, it was beneath them to do that, they'd lose their dignity. I only ever remember him doing it the weekend Mum was taken poorly. I remember him going on his hands and knees and scrubbing the floor, but you see Mum was taken ill on the Saturday and she died on the Monday of double pneumonia. I don't remember him doing anything after that.

This process of socialisation and gendering of household tasks by creating distinct roles for male and female children quashed many ambitions for the young working-class girl. Giles maintains that girls were witnesses of a `visual' or `historical landscape' that ultimately shaped their future lives. For example, in her study Giles found that experiences of working-class poverty were extremely common and thus led to frequent cases of early death for family members.[18] Her respondents who grew up in this environment consequently witnessed these occurrences and in turn accepted them and expected such events to a certain extent in their lifetime. This type of fatalism can be found in attitudes towards all areas of working-class life, including paid work. Mrs Pearson, born in 1914 and when talking of her working life in the early 1930s, made a very poignant

[18]Giles, Women, Identity and Private Life.

comment which illustrates the feeling and circumstances of many of those interviewed, `I had no ambitions or means to reach the top'. This was a common belief by those girls in Rugby, born into working-class families. Most accepted their situation and sought a simple, but respectable occupation.

OCCUPATION CHOICE AND GENDER ROLES

It would appear that young working-class girls were looking for work, which was above reproach and a desire to be considered respectable 'naturally' drew them to those occupations that were an extension of the female domestic role. Even women's factory work involved much lighter tasks, suitable for the female stature and feminine image. The average working-class girl in Rugby chose her future employment from a `predictable range of occupations'[19] such as typists, clerical workers, factory workers, shop assistants, and if the opportunity arose, teachers or nurses.

The predictable nature of the types of employment open to young women reflects the restrictions which were `learnt' from their up-bringing in working-class homes. Most importantly the occupations reveal the importance within society of the `domestic' role for women in general. Even those girls, who found work in the local factories, were not undertaking `heavy' work, but lighter jobs which were considered `suitable' for females, because of their `nimble fingers' and tolerance

[19] Roberts, Women and Families, p. 51.

of monotony.[20,21] In addition, domestic images of women's work were prevalent, as Glucksmann states,

> Women were thought to be naturally good at sewing and many tasks described as having an affinity with sewing. It was true that the coils used in coil winding did look like cotton reels in so much as both had long strands wound round them, but that was about the extent of the similarity.[22]

Comments such as this depict the occurrence of the division of labour in industry between the wars. Glucksmann who is primarily interested in the history of industrial capitalism, highlights two specific points associated with women at work. First, that the sexes have been increasingly segregated and secondly that during this process the position of women has become more subordinate.[23,24] However, Glucksmann's ideas concerning subordination must be tackled. It could be argued that the female role within the workplace had always been

[20] M. Glucksmann, Women Assemble: Women Workers and the New Industries in Inter-war Britain, (London, 1990), p. 216.
[21] The importance of 'nimble fingers' is discussed in relation to the hosiery and lace industries in Nottingham. See S. Taylor, 'The effect of marriage on job possibilities for women, and the ideology of the home: Nottingham 1890-1930', Oral History, 5:2 (1977).
[22] Glucksmann, Women Assemble, p. 216.
[23] J. Bourke, Working-Class Cultures in Britain, agrees that men and women worked in different sectors of the economy and that segregation continued throughout the period. The numbers of female workers increased but they remained within the realms of low status occupations. See p. 124.
[24] L. Grant in her research about Coventry, 'Women in a car town: Coventry 1920-45' in P. Hudson and W.R. Lee, Women's Work and the Family Economy (Manchester, 1990), maintains the during the inter-war years Coventry experienced a clear demarcation between men's and women's work. This was a result of 'the appropriate setting and role of the woman worker'. See p. 223.

inferior to that of men and that the segregation of gender workplace roles did not create, but only exacerbated women's subordination in the workplace. Also did female subordination exist? For example, to refer to pre-industrial working women; often female workers, especially widows played a vital role in the workplace economy. Research by Ivy Pinchbeck stated that women's lives were transformed by the industrial revolution.[25] Work, which had often been a partnership between husband and wife was taken out of the home and placed into factories. This permitted the enshrining, but simultaneous subordination of the 'housewife' who lost her economic independence and remained at home to ensure morality. Questions relating to female power in the workplace will be tackled in subsequent chapters

Do Glucksmann's ideas relate to the situation in Rugby? Essentially were the women segregated in the workplace and consequently subordinate? Most girls in Rugby undertook employment that was regarded as 'suitable' for women by their parents and more importantly their employers. Segregation was the outcome of this belief and assumption. The `choice' of young girls was therefore restricted by this influence. However this segregation does not always lead to the second half of Glucksmann's theory; female subordination. In Rugby, where women were involved in the production of many products associated with the war, it could be argued that female employment played a vital role in the local economy and the

[25]For a complete picture of the changes brought about by the industrial revolution for women, see Ivy Pinchbeck's comprehensive study, Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution 1750-1850 (1931; London, 1969 edn.).

national war effort. Female workers, despite undertaking essentially 'female' skilled occupations, were not subordinate to male employees; instead they were an essential workforce of the period and were often highly regarded in the local area.

One popular place of employment in Rugby for women was Symingtons Corset Factory, where not only were the workers making female under-garments and swimwear, but where virtually all the employees were female.[26] Using Glucksmann's image of dexterous women, showing their skill through sewing, at the Corset Factory, female workers were able to carry out a task that was considered feminine and respectable. Working at the Corset Factory was considered among townspeople as an agreeable place of employment for girls upon leaving school. Although the place of employment was a `factory', the work was considered to be more feminine than that, for example at the B.T.H., Willans and Robinson or Lodge Plugs, which involved the use of machinery. At Symingtons the girls were sat at rows of sewing machines, still undertaking `piece-work' and working long hours, but importantly seen as `respectable' as their employment was an extension of the approved domestic image. Significantly the female network existed among the workers and offered openings for young working-class girls. Mrs Huggett remembered starting at the Corset Factory in 1938 at the age of fourteen:

[26]These women were involved in the production of parachutes during the Second World War.

> Of course, when you first started there it was like training, you didn't get a lot of money at all and you had to be trained. I knew the two women, one was an overseer and one trained me. ... You see we used to do these corsets, the old fashioned grey ones that used to come up here and strap up. And then we had the smaller ones and straps and then you joined them together on the machines. Cause it was all training for, well until you got into it and then you could make your money on the `piece-work' then and you used to have to work really hard.

The `training' on the job at the Corset Factory was seen as a useful `feminine' skill, which could be used in later life and ultimately marriage.

However, did some girls wish to `escape' from this stereotyping and go against their backgrounds to achieve significantly more `choice' over their future occupation and social status? As we have seen, most girls did not expect to achieve a `career', but Giles maintains that this did not mean that they did not want to `escape' from working-class life. As she argues in her study,

> Most of them [respondents] desired above all to escape the circumstances of their childhood and dreamt of a better future for themselves and their children (despite their insistence on the `good old days', all the women interviewed aspired to a better life than that of their mothers). The women discussed here may not have perceived education,

careers or social mobility via marriage as routes to a better life, but that they wished to escape the conditions in which they were positioned as women and as working-class was certain.[27]

From the evidence of the respondents in Rugby, it would appear that a minority sought to `escape' their working-class background. Most women interviewed continued to live and work in the same environment all of their lives and did not seek to change social class or living situation. However, what is important here, is the `escape' route in relation to their choice of work. While it can be said that most respondents hoped for an adequate future, both financially and socially, this did not seem to prey on their minds when choosing an occupation or employer. Such considerations only existed perhaps in the minds of their parents, who naturally wanted an easier and more successful life for their offspring.

PARENTAL INFLUENCE AND COMPANY LOYALTY

As we have seen, the family and in particular parents played a vital role in the socialisation of young girls, as to what they should expect from life. Roberts, in her study of women between 1890 and 1940 argues that `working-class children appear to have followed both the implicit and explicit moral, social and ethical guidance that they received from their parents'.[28] Consequently job `choice' was influenced by the beliefs and attitudes of their parents, coupled with a traditional

[27] Giles, Women, Identity and Private Life, p. 62.
[28] Roberts, A Woman's Place, p. 11.

sense of obligation and duty towards their families.

Most respondents indicated that it was usual, and in most cases expected, to accept the advice and wishes of their parents, despite it having the possibility to restrict their future lives. Elizabeth Roberts has also found evidence of this willingness of working-class girls to accept the advice of their parents. In her most recent study of working-class women between the years 1940 and 1970, she emphasizes and reiterates the importance of working-class respectability and conformity, which lay beneath the decisions of young school leavers: `It was virtually unheard of at any time during this period for an adolescent to act in defiance of his or her parents' wishes, prejudices or ambitions'.[29]

Therefore the `choice' facing a young girl depended upon the beliefs and attitudes of parents, and was not in most cases a `free' selection of the type of employment girls wished to follow. Some respondents remembered having small ambitions about their future working life, but due to the acceptance of their position, it was not unusual to find that girls did not think of any particular job and left it to their parents to suggest a possible employment. Mrs Black recalled that when she started to look for work in 1931, she did not really have an ambition, but that she `just went with the flow'.

[29] Roberts, Women and Families, p. 51.

In many cases, going with the `flow' meant following parents, siblings or relations into the place of their work, as they were able to put their name forward for a job. Such instances of `string-pulling' were common.[30] It particular it would appear that mothers played a vital role in finding suitable employment. Jacqueline Sarsby, in her study of women pottery workers highlights the significance of the `female network'.[31]

> The most usual way for a woman to start work was to leave school at fourteen and for her mother or a female relative to `speak for her' to get her in to a factory.[32]

In doing so, as Sarsby points out, mothers therefore continued to control the lives of their daughters, and offered virtually no choice as to the type of future employment. The ability of a daughter to choose, however, was affected by her socialisation and that following in her mother's footsteps into the pottery factory was considered the most `natural'[33] route to take. In Joanne Webb's study of tobacco workers between the wars she found that again mothers or female relatives played an important part in finding their daughter's employment.[34] In

[30] Roberts, A Woman's Place, p. 45.
[31] J. Sarsby, Missuses and Mouldrunners: an Oral History of Women Pottery Workers at Work and at Home, (Milton Keynes, 1988) p. 58.
[32] Sarsby, Missuses and Mouldrunners, p. 54.
[33] Sarsby, Missuses and Mouldrunners, p. 59.
[34] J. Webb, `Wills of Their Own: women tobacco workers in Bedminster, Bristol 1919-1939', (M.A. dissertation, Centre for the Study of Social History, University of Warwick, 1993).

fact, it was very rare that a young girl found work in the tobacco factory who did not have a relative already in their employment.

The oral testimony from Rugby women reiterates the importance of mothers in finding them employment. However, unlike the findings from other studies, the majority of mothers during the period did not have a formal place of employment. Most mothers in the town remained at home, and if they did work it was only casual domestic work, such as cleaning or washing. Nevertheless a restricted `female network' did exist in relation to friends and family and many respondents remembered their mothers using family connections to seek out employment vacancies.[35] Mrs Grahame recalled the role her mother played in finding work for her at the age of fourteen in 1930,

> Er, when I was fourteen, er, um, that's when I went to the corset factory, when I was fourteen. Well, I went to a sweet shop before then, for three months. Me mother got me that job, she wanted me to go in an office and I didn't want to, so, er, she knew this friend, she wanted somebody to go in this sweet shop. And I was only there three months, 'cause it wasn't what I wanted.

Mrs Grahame then decided to find employment at Symington's Corset Factory. Again the `female network' came into play. This time it was her sister-in-law, who

[35] R. Roberts, The Classic Slum (Manchester, 1971) recalls the importance of young boys being 'spoke for' to ensure an apprenticeship. See p. 157.

already worked at Symington's and therefore she did not have to wait for a vacancy to arise and quickly became a member of the workforce:

> `No, no' she says, `I'll go and ask', `cause she was well in, see, `cause she was one of the over-lookers, see and, um, she said, `I'll ask Mr Grover in the morning'. Just like that, and I says, `Oh alright then'. At tea-time she come and says `You got the job, start Monday'. So I says `Oh, that's nice'.

Other mothers, without connections through family and friends, literally called on prospective employers to ask if there were any job opportunities for their daughters. Mrs Dawson recalled that her mother had asked her what would she like to do after she left school, in 1920,

> I said that I'd like to go to work sort of in a shop, but not a sweet shop. Well anyway she went to ask at Yates', the milliners, to try and get me in there, well she couldn't do, then she went to Meirholts ... and got me there.

Meirholts was a well-known local women hairdressers, and quite different from Mrs Dawson's idea of serving in a shop. When asked if she was happy with her mother's choice, she replied, `I didn't know what I wanted to do really ... it was just one of those things. It was just a bit of luck I suppose'. In fact Mrs Dawson's

mother did choose wisely, as after being trained for eight years, Mrs Dawson decided to set up her own salon, with her mother's backing at their family home and later managed her own hairdressers shop until she retired.

Similarly, Mrs Whetstone remembered her mother's role in finding her work in 1929,

> And then ... the place of employment in those days was the Lamp Factory, or the Corset Factory or typing pool, if you were very lucky to get in there or the Lodge Plugs or the Steam Laundry, there wasn't much more. So I know ... your mother went with you when you had to get a job. I was scared stiff, you were frightened to death because you went straight out of school. So the Corset Factory had no vacancies, so we went to the Lodge Plugs and they did, so I started at the Lodge Plugs on September 3rd 1929 on my fourteenth birthday ... I was only just fourteen, only just eligible to start work.

Mothers therefore not only played a vital role in the socialisation of their daughters and taught them what to expect from their future life, but also were dominant figures when finding their daughters' first job. It would appear that using evidence from the oral respondents that this role undertaken by mothers was totally accepted by young working-class girls. Mrs Simpson recalled that she did not want to leave school but knew that she had to find work. When she left, her

parents agreed that she would find work at the B.T.H. and in 1935 she started work in the Home Appliance factory as a clerical assistant. When asked if her mother had wanted her to work at the B.T.H., she replied,

> Oh, she didn't really mind. I wanted to go and she said it was alright. I mean I hadn't gone to grammar school you see.

Mrs Simpson's comment illustrates the importance of parental approval, in particular that from her mother and in addition it reinforces the argument that working-class girls did not expect to achieve a specific career and instead settled for a job at the B.T.H..

However in some cases parental influence was evident from both parents. Mrs Brown remembered that her parents had wanted her to become an apprentice dressmaker. She left school early to help out on a local farm, while she waited to take up her apprenticeship in Rugby. She recalled that dressmaking was not her choice, but that of her parents.

> My father was very strict, and he said `None of you girls are going in the factory'. We had to do what our parents said; I don't regret it now. My youngest sister did finally go into a factory, but our Dad didn't want her to.

Mrs Brown's father was concerned with her future well-being and felt that dressmaking was a more suitable occupation for a young girl.[36]

Similarly, it would appear from the oral evidence that most fathers did take an interest in their daughter's well-being in connection with available sources of employment. This was particularly true in relation to jobs at the British Thomson-Houston Company Ltd. (B.T.H.). The reason for this connection was largely because most fathers of those interviewed tended to find work at the B.T.H., either in a skilled or semi-skilled capacity. In addition, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the B.T.H. was the largest employer in the town and therefore it was rare to find a family, in which one member did not work for the company. Mrs Fry recalled that it was assumed that she would enter the B.T.H. factory when she left school in 1918,

> I had to go straight to work, on the Monday, I left [school] on the Friday and I went on the Monday and I went to the B.T.H.. .... Oh yes, my father got me in. He worked in the winding. I'd got one sister, the eldest one, I'd got a sister in the factory and the other one in the Lamp Factory and I went in the Lamp Factory.

Similarly Mrs Pearson's father also worked at the B.T.H. and found her a job in

[36] Similar attitudes were shown in Thorn's study about the Woolwich Arsenal, when fathers did not want their daughters working in a munitions factory. See D. Thorn, 'Women workers at the Woolwich Arsenal', Oral History, 6:2 (1978), p.65.

the typing pool in 1928. When asked `Why the B.T.H.?' she replied,

> It was more or less the done thing in Rugby and I suppose other towns would have had set places. It didn't matter who you were, if you needed a job in those days, whatever your capabilities or lack of them, if you went down to the old B.T.H. you'd be sure you'd come back with a job.

This loyalty and respect towards the B.T.H. accounted for a great deal of the choices for employment of working-class girls, whether they found work in the factory or the offices of the establishment. Respondents tended to regard the B.T.H. as a natural progression after school and they expected nothing less because their fathers or brothers were currently employed there, in what was considered a very secure and successful company. There can be no doubt that during this period the B.T.H. was extremely prosperous and thrived on its world-wide reputation. Respondents recalled that working at the B.T.H. meant you received good training and had a `job for life', and it appears that it was this sense of security which influenced parental decisions when finding `suitable' work for their daughters.[37] There was also a degree of rivalry between the B.T.H. and Willans and Robinson, which later became English Electric. From talking to the oral respondents, it would appear that although both companies were involved in similar electrical industries, the B.T.H. was always considered the

[37] J. Lane's work regarding apprenticeships agrees that parents main concern when choosing a career for their off-spring was long-term security. See J. Lane, Apprenticeship in England 1600-1914 (London, 1996), p. 33.

better employer. In comparison with the B.T.H., Willans and Robinson was the smaller of the two companies and therefore could not provide employment for the same volume of Rugby inhabitants as the B.T.H.. This factor seems to have relegated its standing in the town.

Consequently company loyalty has to be considered in relation to the `choice' and influence when working-class girls were seeking work. Joanne Webb, in her study of the Wills tobacco factory at Bedminster, found that families did have preferences towards certain employers. Her research showed the dominance one firm can have on a particular area and how loyalty can affect the employment prospects of subsequent generations. She refers to feelings of envy among Bristolians towards those women who found work at Wills': `employment at Wills' was a great accomplishment and a bonus for the whole family'.[38] Webb, also using oral evidence, highlights the life of one respondent who, despite her father having a respectable middle class occupation, worked in the tobacco factory.

> Quite honestly, I did not want to go into the factory and my father didn't want me to go into the factory and neither did my aunts. But my mother was determined that I should do ... I always felt I shouldn't have been in the factory, which really and truly I shouldn't have been because my

[38] Webb, 'Wills of their own', p. 22.

mother and father were not short, but my mother seemed hell-bent on sending me. She thought it was such a safe job.[39]

Evidence such as this not only reinforces the role played by mothers when finding work for their daughters, but also illustrates the high degree of loyalty and regard some firms could hold in particular towns. In Rugby, the allegiance towards the B.T.H. was passed from parent to child and thus ultimately persuaded young girls that working for the largest company in the town was an achievement.

However Webb's study argued that the popularity of Wills' in Bristol was connected to the high wages and progressive welfare measures which the company offered. In turn Wills' sought only `respectable' working-class employees. Consequently employment at Wills' made clear to others that young girls had achieved a relatively high rank among the workers in the city. It is debatable if the workers at the B.T.H. achieved comparable status to those at Wills'. Despite B.T.H. offering `safe' employment and a wide range of welfare provisions, their wages were not as high as other employers in the town were. The attraction of the B.T.H. was therefore not to acquire a higher wage, but to achieve a level of respectability unheard of at other companies in the town. As mentioned before, the importance of respectability for the working-classes was paramount, and even more so for the morality of young girls. Parents not only

[39] Webb, 'Wills of their own', p. 23.

considered the immediate future, but also the marital outlook. Those girls who worked in a respectable and morally correct establishment would be more likely to make a more `suitable' love match and perhaps increase their status.

However, there were as previously discussed in Chapter 2 other opportunities for work in the town. One of the other sources of employment, which existed between the 1890s and 1930s, was Van den Arend's Cigar Factory. This factory offered work for a small number of women, who worked in a modest building among the terraces of working-class homes in the town. Obviously this place of employment was not as prestigious as the B.T.H., but there are still instances of parents believing that it was the most `suitable' place for their daughters to work and again parents influenced their daughter's `choice' of work. Mrs Dutton recalled how her father had been vital in her finding her first job as a `stripper' at the Cigar Factory, stripping the dried leaves in 1925. He worked at the local garage and knew various townspeople.

> Father got me a job at the Cigar Factory and he met Mr Van den Arend when he took his car in to be serviced you see, and he offered me a job. Actually there was a corset factory and Frost the Printers, he'd got three jobs offered, but we chose the Cigar Factory.

Obviously Mrs Dutton's father had different opinions of the three establishments. Significantly when asked who chose her job, Mrs Dutton adamantly said,

> I didn't. He did. I didn't. He chose my job. Well, I'll tell you, he said the Cigar Factory was alright, but the girls at the Corset Factory, they were a rough lot. And the Frosts the Printers was a little bit out of the way, I think.

Parental attitudes such as these obviously affected the beliefs of young working-class girls, and in turn convinced the girls that they were taking the right opportunity for their working life. Some parents however, did make wrong decisions and persuaded their daughters to change their place of work. Miss Court again came from a working-class background. Her father was a plasterer's labourer and her mother had worked before her marriage at the corset factory. She recalled that in 1928,

> When I was fourteen ... I started at the fittings factory along Lower Hillmorton Road, that's where I started for a while, but my mother didn't like what I was having to do, so she made me leave. So then I got a job at the Lodge [Plugs] and I stayed there until I was sixty.

Such memories portray a young girl totally dependent on her parents for advice and in actual fact for her whole future working life, never ceasing, as she never married. It serves to illustrate the permanence and importance of those decisions made, often by the parents, when a girl was leaving school.

However, parents not only had to make `choices' concerning which employer

would provide `suitable' employment for their daughter. Further choices had to be made. The `choice' of factory or clerical work also existed. By preferring particular companies over others, parents sometimes unintentionally determined what type of work their daughters undertook and ultimately their future. For example, if family tradition dictated that a daughter should work at the Lodge Plugs, then all she could look forward to was a relatively monotonous job in the factory. However, the larger companies of B.T.H. and English Electric offered both types of employment, in the factory and the offices. The `choices' made by parents, on behalf of their daughters, often relied on who they knew within the informal `network' at their place of work.[40] This depended on the type of employment of their father. For instance if a father was employed as a skilled engineer, he was able to have more contacts both in the factory and importantly in the main staff offices. Other unskilled occupations would not have access to the offices, and therefore their daughter's type of employment could be restricted to the factory floor.

In terms of social status, it would be fair to say that during the period, clerical work was considered as a more respectable occupation than working in a factory. Mrs Jennings, who was born in 1906, could not recall if her parents had ambitions for her working life, but stated matter-of-factly,

[40] Evidence of an employment network appears in the work of Owen-Jones with reference to the tinplate industry in Wales. Here girls acquired jobs through family and friends. See S. Owen-Jones, 'Women in the tinplant industry: Llanelli, 1930-1950, Oral History, 15:1 (1987).

> I think most people in Rugby worked at the B.T.H. in those days ... it was a foregone conclusion that when you left school at fourteen that you went into an office or a factory. I didn't want to go into the factory.

Similar comments were made by many of the respondents. For example, Mrs Pearson remarked that `typing was a `safe' trade to have'. Mrs Pearson was obviously referring to her ability to learn a skill which she could market if she changed jobs, but her remark could imply and reinforce what many parents thought during the period: that office work was a secure and sheltered occupation for any young female. Mrs Pearson recalled that when she left school in 1931:

> It was automatically assumed we'd go into secretarial, my sister did, and that was always our aim, was to do that. They didn't want factory work for us, no. Oh no no [factory work] was never dreamed of.

Therefore the oral evidence as a whole shows that as young girls, the women were aware of the status differences between the two types of work.

SUITABLE EMPLOYMENT FOR GIRLS

Distinctions between office work and factory work and their suitability for young working girls invariably involved two equally important factors. First, the question

of the status of the two occupations and whether each had a similar opportunity for climbing the social strata. Secondly the variation in the rate of pay which was on offer according to the location of the job, whether in the factory or office. Such disparities can be seen clearly through those employed by the B.T.H., who engaged girls in various occupations throughout the company, both in the factory and the offices.

Clerical positions, in the town and especially at the B.T.H. were held with the utmost regard by parents. It was often the case that parents felt that office work was essentially a `step-up' from their class background. Significantly a clerical occupation was seen as a ticket to what working-class parents saw as a `better chance in life'. Thus if parents managed to secure a clerical job for their daughter, it was seen initially as a notable achievement and fundamentally as a boost for her future social status. Such was the prestige of a clerical occupation, it is fair to state that some parents were willing to sacrifice the extra money that could have been earned by undertaking a factory job. Extra credibility was given to the status of clerical work by the knowledge that many grammar school girls also sought a white-collar office job. They normally left school at the later age of sixteen, and were usually attracted by the offers made at the B.T.H. for a clerical apprenticeship.[41] Those girls who entered the job market at the age of fourteen, however, started at a lower position and had to rely on the local Day

[41] The existence of female apprenticeships in Rugby and their high regard seems to have been unique. Lane argued that her research showed that those occupations where female apprenticeships predominated were not well regarded. See Lane, Apprenticeship in England, p.38.

Continuation School for their clerical training. However, from the experiences of the oral respondents, once a working-class girl had found employment in the white-collar sector and proved herself, she could progress rapidly, and eventually achieve a similar position to those girls educated at the grammar school.

In contrast factory work was considered socially inferior in terms of status. Such opinions were usually associated with the poorer working conditions found in the local factories. Essentially factory work was traditionally linked to the male image of hard labour and was regarded as `dirty' and immoral work.[42] However, most of the tasks undertaken by women in the factories around Rugby were of a much lighter nature.

Another negative characteristic against factory work was that it did not comfortably `fit' with the feminine domestic image that was regarded as the ultimate goal for many mothers and daughters alike. In addition, many parents feared that girls working in a factory environment would have the opportunity to mix with the opposite sex, to a higher degree than those working in the offices' and thus be confronted on a daily basis with `factory immorality'.[43] Bourke in her

[42] See P. Gurney's, '"Intersex" and "Dirty Girls": Mass observation and working-class sexuality in England in the 1930s' in Journal of the History of Sexuality, 2 (1997), p. 256, for a discussion relating to the immoral image of factory girls and their holidays in Blackpool.
[43] Other occupations were also associated with immorality. For example, R. Thacker, 'Women in the Tramway Industry, 1914-1919' in The Historian, 58, (1998), pp. 22-25 highlights the case of women becoming conductors and drivers on trams. It was felt that women would not be able to cope with running up and down the stairs. Thacker specially mentions Wolverhampton where the authorities were concerned that women would be confronted with bad language, people crushing against their bodies, having to work alongside male drivers and having to walk home late at night. The TUC in 1916 claimed that 'close association with all types of persons does not augur well for the morals of women'.

comprehensive work concerning working-class culture agrees that parents were concerned about the mixing of the sexes and states; 'The implications of the integration of women workers into previously male terrain were wide, including fears of promiscuity'.[44] However she found evidence which blamed factory immorality on the arrival of women in the workplace, rather than the existing male workforce.

> One woman complained in her diary that her husband had found a condom in his toolbox at work. She blamed the lack of 'moral tone' in factories on the influx of women workers: 'Wives of serving soldiers, women with little self control and fewer scruples, act as magnets to silly young men, and to silly older ones too.' Her husband 'saw red' and complained to the management 'saying that if the factory were to become a brothel, let it cease to produce aircraft'.[45]

While in some cases this could have been true, many of the respondents' experiences of factory work were in departments where the majority of employees were female. For example, at the Lodge Plugs, the workforce consisted of virtually all women, as men were only employed to maintain the machines. Nevertheless, some parents still believed that factory life was significantly inferior and did not want their daughters mixing with what were

[44] J. Bourke, Working Class Cultures in Britain, p. 126.
[45] Bourke, Working-Class Cultures in Britain, p. 126.

perceived to be less-educated, ill-bred women.[46]

From talking to the many respondents, it became clear that they did not think that girls working in the factories were socially inferior. Most girls found themselves finding employment in the factories, either because their fathers worked there and therefore knew that the daily environment was not socially unacceptable, or that they did not have the opportunities to follow other occupations or because financial necessity within the family dictated their choice of employment. For example, Mrs Fry, who worked at the B.T.H. Lamp Factory for forty-one years, failed to have any other opportunities than go into the factory. Her father was a labourer at the B.T.H., her mother undertook duties at one of the local laundries and Mrs Fry was one of seven children. She knew that she would be employed in the factory when she reached fourteen, as her parents needed the extra income, especially when her father developed heart problems and had to give up work. Significantly she realized her position and was well aware that her limited education affected her future:

> We didn't like going to work or going to school when it came to that, you see, they didn't always ask the poorer class to go in for scholarships, we never had no scholarship.

[46]Professor Zweig argues an opposite point of view in his research about women's working lives. He maintains that factories provide important citizenship education for girls, including values and standards. For a detailed discussion see F. Zweig, Women's Life and Labour, (London, 1952).

Mrs Fry did not therefore have very high expectations for her future working life. Experiences such as these again show how important occupational decisions were for young working-class girls. The `choice' between factory and clerical work could make quite distinct differences to the future prospects of daughters. (as discussed in the following chapter).

TRAINING FOR THE FUTURE

To ensure successful prospects for the young working-class girl, parents and daughters also had to look at the possibilities and opportunities of `training' involved in some occupations, upon leaving school. Such an issue is not really touched upon in other studies, which have concentrated solely on the opportunities available to young working-class girls, and have not referred to any `training' except to that which girls received `on the job'. However, oral evidence from those growing up in Rugby suggests that there was a distinct ethos within the town which supported the training of young adolescents to ensure that they were fulfilling their potential. Such a suggestion is supported by comments, made by the respondents, concerning their parent's attitudes towards their work and the foundation of the Day Continuation School (referred to locally as the D.C.S.) for fourteen to sixteen year olds in April 1920 at the local technical college.[47] In a book published in 1935, the ideas behind Rugby's Day

[47] For a comprehensive paper with regard the Day Continuation School establishment see D.W. Thom,' The emergence and failure of the Day Continuation School experiment', History of Education 4:1 (1975).

Continuation School are explained and documented.

> The Day Continuation School in the Borough of Rugby is especially interesting in that young people attend by statutory compulsion as was intended by the Education Act of 1918. All other Continuation Schools are in some measure selective, and tend to miss certain layers of young people. The young people missed are often those who have least assistance from other sources to guide them through the difficulties of early adolescence, associated with first experiences of wage earning.[48]

The importance of the D.C.S. in Rugby therefore was that it covered all young people in the area, whether they were employed in a small shop or large factory. Consequently, all parents came into contact with extra post-school education and saw its worth in relation to the future prospects of their children.

The support of people of Rugby can be illustrated by comments from the oral respondents. Mrs Jennings, who found clerical work at the B.T.H. in 1920, recalled her days at the D.C.S. as extremely happy and productive.

> Rugby I think was the first town in England to have a Day Continuation School and ... Rugby was a very good town to further one's education if you so wished. There were ample opportunities in all directions. The Day

[48] R.W. Ferguson and A. Abbott, Day Continuation Schools, (London, 1935) p. 13.

> Continuation School ... one day a week and employers allowed their employees to have time off and you didn't get your money stopped. It was excellent further education, as far as I was concerned. I wanted to further my education and I took the opportunity. When I left there, it was only one day a week for two years, I had learnt all the basics of shorthand and I got up to sixty words a minute and I was top of the class. I thoroughly enjoyed it ... it was a very good grounding.

Most memories of the D.C.S. were very positive and the respondents were keen to point out that they received an additional education, which was beneficial to them. Mrs Bridge recalled that she had not really enjoyed school,

> but I did like going to Day Continuation School. That was like a school that I could have been very happy in, because they didn't treat you as a child. On the day I started they said `Well, you're not a child now, you're a young person' and you know that made you feel grown up, it gave you confidence. I really enjoyed those two years at D.C.S.

The formation of the D.C.S. in the town is an important factor in the lives of young girls during the period. It is also of significance due to its unique nature, being the only such school in the country. The success of the school, which ran until the 1960s, was due mainly to the support it received from local companies, who agreed that young people should continue to receive an education, one day a

week, until the age of sixteen.

> No account of Rugby Day Continuation School would be complete without a warm acknowledgment of the co-operation of industry and trade. The larger firms of world-wide repute like the British Thomson-Houston Company Ltd, the English Electric Company Ltd, Lodge Plugs Ltd, and smaller local firms in the building industry and retail distributive trades - notably the Co-operative Society - and many others, have assisted the Authority in every possible way. [49]

Importantly attendance at the D.C.S. was not a `choice' but a compulsory ruling by the local education authority that all young people, regardless of the type of work they were undertaking, should attend. Distinctions, however, could be made from those children who attended grammar school. They stayed on at school until the age of sixteen or even seventeen and therefore did not attend the D.C.S.. Consequently non-attendance at the D.C.S. was an immediate indication of their grammar school education. However, the local education authority believed that those who left school at fourteen would benefit from extra tuition and that by

> payment of full wages to young people for the day at school, by schemes of rewards and bonuses for good work, by consideration of school records

[49] Ferguson and Abbott, Day Continuation Schools, p. 19.

in cases of promotion, they have given their young people every encouragement to take full advantage of their opportunities.[50]

It is therefore not surprising that the D.C.S. received total support from the majority of parents. There were some cases of parents being taken to court by the local authority as their children were not attending, but these cases were few and far between. Most parents regarded the D.C.S. as an opportunity and were only too happy to know that their offspring's education would continue for an additional couple of years. Due to the `blanket' coverage of the D.C.S., the importance of the `choice' of the future employer was decreased somewhat, as it did not affect the amount of tuition their daughters would receive. However, the young people attending the D.C.S. were split into groups that corresponded to their type of employment. This was particularly significant from young girls' point of view.

Primarily, all girls and boys at the D.C.S. received basic classroom lessons such as English, mathematics, science, Handicrafts, physical training and the arts between 8.30am and 5pm, one day a week. However, some distinctions were made in terms of the education the young people received specific to their occupation. Girls were split into two categories: either `commercial', which gave lessons on business methods, geography, mathematics, typing and shorthand or the `housecraft' group who learnt domestic science and needlework. Similarly the

[50] Ferguson and Abbott, Day Continuation Schools, p. 19.

boys were either in the industrial section, which included lessons in science and drawing or training for those in the distributive trades, which meant lessons concerning commercial arithmetic and book-keeping. Consequently, despite parents knowing that their daughters would continue their education, their `choices' regarding their first job were vital, as it was from this knowledge that girls were placed into either group and this ultimately dictated their future educational standards. There were no educational opportunities for girls to follow the engineering courses the boys were enrolled upon, and the girls were ultimately only allowed a restricted feminine `choice' which essentially encouraged domesticity. The key to the `training' they received acknowledged that female work was `not seen as a lifetime commitment' and that their families and society in general perceived them as having `no life plan which included full-time paid work'.[51] From the evidence, it would appear that the educational establishments, the employers, parents and the girls held such opinions themselves. From the girls' point of view, most oral respondents, when asked how long they expected to work for, replied `until we were married'. Here again is confirmation of the domestic ideal, which girls grew up with and accepted.

The training at the D.C.S. and the B.T.H. seemed extricably bound together in Rugby and again reinforces the importance of the company to the town's population. It is no wonder that parents found in the B.T.H. a `suitable' place of employment for their daughters. This was especially so, in terms of clerical

[51] Roberts, Woman and Families, p. 58.

careers. As we have seen parents saw clerical work as a `step up the ladder' in terms of social class. Clerical work at the B.T.H. also had the added advantage of additional training within the company. Most girls started work within the typing pool and ediphone department, whereby they were strictly trained to carry out their tasks with utmost efficiency. This training was additional to that they received at the D.C.S. and was well known in the town as being the best clerical training in the area. It is therefore not surprising that there was fierce competition for clerical work at the B.T.H., and secondly girls who achieved these positions were considered to be of a higher status than those who worked at other companies and firms. Of particular prestige was a number of clerical apprenticeships which were offered to those girls of special aptitude. Mrs Jennings, who as previously discussed thrived at the D.C.S., was one such successful employee. She continued with her shorthand and typing lessons after her spell at the D.C.S. had finished.

> I followed it on, that was for three years, during which time I took an apprenticeship at the B.T.H., a secretarial apprenticeship. I think it was the first time it had been tried out and how long it continued I don't know. I was one of the people given a chance of a first apprenticeship. We were indentured the same as the boys were, properly indentured and ... we had to do three nights a week evening classes and if you got a first class pass, the next year you got your fees paid, so it was an incentive to work hard.

Her parent's `choice' to find work for her at the B.T.H. was an obvious advantage to her future. She recalled that she would have liked to go to the local grammar school, but her parents couldn't afford to send her. However, her memories illustrate a young working girl that took the opportunities, which were offered and succeeded in having a white-collar `career'.

The number of parents who sent their daughters to private shorthand and typing lessons again illustrates the importance and social standing of clerical training. These lessons were in addition to those received at the B.T.H. and the D.C.S. and reflect the belief that white-collar work was of a higher status and more `career-like' than other types of employment. Importantly, those parents who sent their daughters for extra secretarial lessons, were not extremely affluent. Most girls who attended such lessons were daughters of skilled workers. Their parents obviously felt the money was well spent, to ensure a `career' for their daughters.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

However, for some girls, extra private tuition was not an option, as their `choice' of occupation was dictated by the financial necessities of their families. In those families where the male breadwinner was employed in an unskilled occupation, an extra wage, for example from a factory rather than an office was vital. On the other side of the coin, it was usual for those parents who had skilled occupations to encourage their daughters to find work in the clerical sector. Giles in her study

of women growing up in York and Birmingham found that young girls were placed in a very `burdensome' position. She argues that:

> Working-class girls experienced themselves in relation to working-class men as fathers, to their mothers, to middle class women and to middle class men. All these relationships were experienced as relations of power and authority, dominance and submission, in which young working-class women found themselves relatively powerless, always dependent and often in conflict, sometimes in overt ways but frequently articulated covertly and obliquely.[52]

The nature of this conflict has been related by Wall to adolescence. He maintains that 'The adolescent is surrounded by uncertainty and conflict in almost every department of life'.[53]

In contrast to daughters, sons were able to define themselves as a `breadwinner' from an early age and could subsequently become less of a `burden' to their parents. Naturally therefore, young working-class girls sought to overcome this feeling of inferiority by achieving the highest wage possible from their employment and, coupled with their sense of duty towards their family, tended to accept the advice of their parents concerning occupation `choice' without question.

[52] Giles, Women, Identity and Private Life, p. 50.
[53] W.D. Wall, The Adolescent Child (London, 1948).

Such family loyalty loomed large in the minds of young working-class girls in Rugby, who were aware of the need for them to earn as much money as possible. Miss Sales remembered her dismay when she had to leave school in 1930:

> I cried the day I was going to leave at fourteen, I couldn't go to school in the morning, because I was so upset, I thought, `Oh, I've got to earn my living now'. My mother was very poor really, she needed the money. I only earned what was it, three or four shillings a week, and she gave me one shilling back and that was just sort of, looking after, sitting with an old lady in Newbold, being a companion.

Throughout the oral interviews, this feeling of duty and responsibility towards their parents, to provide an extra source of income looms large. In many instances young girls would perhaps have liked the option to continue at school or to opt for a different occupation. However, family loyalty is a constant feature in working-class networks. As Roberts argued in her study between 1890 and 1940,

> The children learned early to subjugate personal ambitions to those of their parents and to care, on a daily basis, for the need of other members of the family.[54]

[54] Roberts, A Woman's Place, p. 34.

Mrs Read's experience of working started at an early age in order to help her parents financially, who had twelve children, herself being one of the eldest. While still at school in 1914, she found part-time work.

> We all had our jobs to do. When I was thirteen years old, I come up from Pinfold Street right up to Lawford Road, at half past seven every morning to serve at this house where there were seven people ... clean the shoes and get the breakfast ready, when I was thirteen and then I'd go to school. And then I was back at dinnertime and get a bedroom ready, finishing at four o'clock. I got a shilling a week.

Stories such as these highlight the sense of responsibility that young adults had towards their families. It was not unusual to find that individualistic ambitions of young girls were secondary to those of the family and in some instances affected a young girl's `choice' of occupation. Mrs Read had wanted to continue her work in domestic service, once she had left school. She recalled,

> I wanted to go to service and my mother said `No', I'd got to go to the factory for more money, which you did get more money for. And when I was seventeen, after the war, I went to a place on Lawford Road and where there was a gentleman who kept a shop on Regent Street. They had a little boy about eighteen months old and I got on with him very well and they wanted me to stop there you see, they wanted me to go away

> with them to the seaside, everything you know, but my mother wouldn't let me go. I'd got to go back to the factory for more money, that's how I ended up ... and then in the finish I went to live with my sister.

Mrs Read's experience illustrates the sense of family loyalty that controlled her working and everyday life. Her memories also make clear, that she was not able to escape this authority until she moved out of the family home and subsequently married and moved away from the area.

Similarly Mrs Drake desperately wanted to be a nanny. She was one of the eldest children in a family of seven and her parents indicated that they could only afford for one child to undergo an apprenticeship. Consequently she willingly sacrificed her ambitions for her family.

> They couldn't afford it you see, they could only afford for one and that was my brother that went to Parnells to work. He was so keen on woodwork you see, and he was apprentice at Parnells, and because he had that, it couldn't been afforded for any of the others you see, but we all understood, and he did get to be foreman, he was foreman for a number of years.

Mrs Drake's experience illustrates the importance of finding a trade for the male offspring, while seeing the daughter's occupation as temporary before marriage.

Once her hopes of becoming a nanny had been dashed, Mrs Drake found work with Frosts the Printers, on a large printing machine, and later worked at Bluemells, a factory making cycle accessories.

The attraction of factory work for the working-class parent was essentially the wages their daughters would receive. Factory work, which invariably meant `piece-work', received higher wages. As Mrs Hutchinson recalls,

> Well, when I left school [1917], two of my friends went apprentice dressmaking to Miss Marriotts by the Clock Tower, and they had this establishment for girls dressmaking. Well, you didn't get any money, you were just apprentice and that was it you see, to learn the dressmaking. Well, then, stupid like, two more of my school friends about that age started work at the little Findlay's Lamp Factory on the Lower Hillmorton Road, earning money. So as my father was at the war and I felt, well `its pocket money for me'. my mother took me up there and they said `yes' and I started there in the old money, for eight shillings a week and I was very happy there.

As Roberts argues, young people became `wage-earners' upon leaving school, but continued to live within the family, and therefore occupied a position of `semi-independence'.[55] However, the usual route of the wages of the new workers was

[55] Roberts, Women and Families, p. 45.

straight to the mother, providing a vital new source for the family budget. Mrs Thatcher came to Rugby in 1929 to take up a position as housemaid in a private school in the town. She grew up in Wales and attended a grammar school, where she was supposed to stay until she was eighteen. However she decided to take the chance of the housemaid's job in Rugby and recalled her parent's attitudes towards her starting work.

> Well, I don't remember them saying anything ... those days because there wasn't careers for girls. They hadn't thought about it ... I've often thought back to the time when I said I wanted to leave school, they never made a lot of protests about it, I think mainly because they didn't have all that much money and thought it would be better for me or for them. They never said `oh, why don't you do this or that'.

Consequently for those families with financial burdens, and especially for the eldest children of the family, the first job was of great significance. Miss Wearing was the oldest child of a family of five, who lived in one of the poorest areas of the town. She recalled that in 1927, after she had left school at fourteen,

> Well, you see, I had to go to domestic work because there was no room at home, and so that was it, off I went. There was no where else to go. I didn't exactly want to do that ... I wanted to do dressmaking. But you see you didn't get no encouragement and there was no college.

The need for an extra wage often affected the child's ability to continue their education, and many girls went out to work, knowing that they had the talent to achieve their High School Certificate, but that their families' needs came first. For example, Miss Crouch's mother had dreams of her becoming a teacher:

> Well you see I passed my exams ... but in those day you had to pay for a lot of things and my Dad couldn't afford it, so it went by the board.

In contrast some girls were fortunate enough to avoid being pressured into gaining employment. Mrs Spence was fortuitous to obtain a scholarship to the local high school, but only as she pointed out by the third attempt. She did not have any ideas about future employment when she left school aged seventeen, but with her education was encouraged to find clerical work. Mrs Spence's parents did not push her into any direction, but were affluent enough to pay for her to go to secretarial classes and she stayed at home until December 1932 and eventually got a job on the cash desk of a local shop. This is an illustration of how differing attitudes of parents towards daughters' employment depended greatly on the occupation of the major breadwinner. Those girls whose fathers had more highly paid positions were given a great deal more freedom of choice and length of time to find work.

CONCLUSION - CHOICES AND DECISIONS

It would appear therefore that the `choice' of occupation for working-class girls was relative to the position of the family as a whole, in terms of their background, attitudes, beliefs, loyalties and economic status. `Opportunities' do seem to have existed in Rugby. There was a wide variety of employers, but occupationally most girls moved `naturally' into either clerical work, factory work or shop work. What is important to consider is the opportunities that were brought about by the training the local educational authority had to offer. The D.C.S. played a large role in the lives of young adolescents and essentially encouraged them to follow certain routes in their working lives. Such training offered the option of seeking higher paid work, once young girls had been taught a marketable skill. However, most respondents stated that they did not seek alternative work, but accepted their position, as advised by their parents when they were fourteen.

What is not under dispute, is the central role of parents in the impressionable lives of working-class girls. Parental authority had the ability to dictate, and essentially `choose' where a daughter worked and in what occupation, either to ensure respectability or financial assistance for the family. `Choices' made by the young girls themselves tended to be associated with economic factors, as most respondents were aware that they were obliged to provide an extra income for the family, however small. What is apparent is that many young working-class girls were willing to sacrifice their ambitions for the sake of providing support for

their parents. However, as has been discussed this sacrifice was ultimately a product of a working-class childhood, where duty and obligation ruled.

It is therefore essential to consider what `opportunities' these `choices' offered and what effect they had on the future lives of girls. What could a working-class girl expect from her working life in terms of conditions, pay and social standing? Did her `choice' of work affect her prospects for a `suitable' marriage? Such questions will be considered in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

Implication of work-based 'choices'

You got the job you'd chose to do.

With employment 'choices' made, what did the future hold for many women during the period? The focus of this chapter is concerned with the implication of decisions made by Rugby women. Did young girls realise the importance of decisions taken at the age of fourteen and to what extent did these 'choices' affect them for the rest of their lives? Were they aware of and aiming for satisfaction and promotion at work or was employment seen as a fairly temporary measure before marriage? What attitudes did young girls have about their work? The experiences of two particular oral respondents illustrate the importance of decisions made upon leaving school. However it must be remembered that few women interviewed expressed any discontentment about their lives.

Mrs Jennings, like all the women interviewed, articulated a relative understanding of the 'choices' she had taken at the age of fourteen. Her father who worked for the B.T.H. had influenced her 'choice' of employer, but was she aware of the future ramifications of her 'choice'? Born in Rugby in 1906, Mrs Jennings found work in the B.T.H. offices in 1920, and progressed to become one of the few clerical apprentices within the company. Her 'choice' of occupation and employer

allowed her training and promotion, which however limited, was not available within other occupations or companies. Progression was not only limited to working life. Ultimately Mrs Jenning's chosen clerical profession led her to mix with skilled men, one of whom she married. They were able to buy their own home, which together with her favourable marriage substantially increased her social standing.

In contrast, Mrs Byfield 'chose' numerous years of factory work. She recalled that her parents were not really interested in the type of work she undertook, but that it was vital that she brought a wage into the household. Her 'choices' were therefore a result of financial necessity. Born in 1923, she started work at the B.T.H. Lamp Factory in 1937 and later moved to the Lodge Plugs. Mrs Byfield remained in factory work until her marriage to a de-mobbed soldier in 1945, but continued to work the 'twilight' shift at the Lodge, even after having a child, in order to increase their financial position. As a married couple, they could not afford to buy a home and instead rented rooms for a number of years. Mrs Byfield's 'choice' of factory work therefore did not offer her the same opportunities, both in terms of promotion or an economically favourable romantic attachment.

Factors and their implications must be considered. First, the 'choice' of occupation must be considered in relation to the changes that took place during the adolescent years of working-class girls. For example, upon starting work the

girls started earning a wage and this meant experiencing changes in everyday family life and their social standing within the community. Did girls perceive employment decisions as pragmatic and short-term in order to fulfil their financial obligation towards their family or as long-term 'life-options', which could affect the rest of their lives? Secondly, how important was a girl's choice of employer in terms of local status? Thirdly, how did the choice of occupation affect the prospect of training and gaining a skill? Could a girl's employment lead to a 'career', or at the very least any promotion? Lastly, how did the occupational decisions taken by girls affect their social mixing and therefore the possible choice of marriage partner and future social position?[1]

Experiences of work - wage earning, status and freedom

> *We never really discussed, we didn't get that far really, we were, remember there was no wireless to educate, no television, so you only knew what you knew in your own part of the world, didn't you?*

Mrs Cryer's thoughts in 1929 about her future employment and more importantly, 'life' prospects are indicative of many comments gathered when interviewing the men who grew up in Rugby. Most girls in their childhood had an acceptance of

[1] It has been argued that the study of female attitudes towards work and their employers has been difficult due to the lack of evidence. However by using the evidence from the oral respondents I hope to redress this situation. See D. Fowler, The First Teenagers: The Lifestyle of young Wage-earners in Interwar Britain (London, 1995) pp. 63-67 for this argument.

their way of life among their family, which crucially was their 'world'. How did the 'worlds' of working-class girls' change during this transitory period of their lives and how dependent was the outcome on their 'choice' of work?

Essentially finding employment dictated that working-class girls faced a two-fold differing of their 'worlds'. First, they were catapulted into the adult role of 'wage-earner'. Both within their family circles and immediate community they were seen as a working adult rather than a child. Importantly their 'choice' of work dictated their ability to earn. Secondly, there was a change in social status within the family. Bringing home a wage placed the working-class girl in an ambiguous position; on the one hand she was an adult and an economic asset for the family, but simultaneously she was still her parent's child and therefore was obliged to abide by their rules. This ultimately led to lack of social freedom.

The transition from school child to wage earner for the working-class child was traditionally perceived to be a major event. Working-class culture placed a tremendous importance upon the first job and it was essentially seen as a milestone or 'rite of passage' in the life of any working-class child. There was a consensus that children were obliged to find work as soon as possible after finishing school. Sarsby's research, which charts the working lives of female pottery workers, argues that the importance of an extra wage in the family could not be underestimated. 'Children's wages brought a brief period of affluence in a couple's life, some recompense for the years of work and scraping along to raise

a family.'[2] The first day at work signified a change from dependent child to independent adult, which was inextricably linked with the over-night capability to bring earnings into the household.

The significance of becoming a wage earner was particularly so for the male members of households as it was crucial to their acceptance within their family and peers. In some ways, the first week at work and the subsequent wage was symbolic that the 'boy' was now a 'man' and had reached maturity and adulthood.[3] This status however was somewhat ironic, as young male workers were often referred to as 'boys' in the workplace for a number of years after initially starting work.[4] Nevertheless starting employment was an important part of the male ego.[5] But how vital was the earning of a wage for working-class girls?

It would appear from the oral evidence that the importance of earning a wage was invariably linked to the financial necessity of many families. Not only was it a 'rite of passage' for young men, but many women recalled with pride that they

[2] J. Sarsby Missuses and Mouldrunners (Milton Keynes, 1988) p. 37.

[3] R. Roberts, The Classic Slum (Manchester, 1971) recalls his own experiences when youths met in groups to discuss their occupations, including skills and pay. Paid work was obviously very important in terms of status and credibility.

[4] Bourke, Working-Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960 (London, 1994) provides an excellent description of the 'masculinity' of full-time employment for young adolescents. Her research maintains that manual labour carried with it status ideas of masculinity, potency, heroism and the belief that the boy was now a 'man'. See p. 130, which includes quotes from oral respondents maintaining that on their first day of work they were regarded as a 'men-boys'.

[5] L. Grant's research has involved studying the car workers in Coventry during the inter-war period. She maintains that the car factory should not only be viewed as a place of work but also 'as one significant area within which men's consciousness and male identity was shaped'. For a more detailed argument see 'Women in a car town: Coventry 1920-45' in P. Hudson and W.R. Lee, Women's work and the Family Economy (Manchester, 1990), p. 225.

could still remember how much pay was in their first wage packet, and that they now were a fully 'paid-up' member of the family.[6] Mrs Jennings recalled helping out with the family expenses in 1920.

> I think it was the accepted thing in those days, when you left school, you went to work and earned a little bit, you earned very little, but it did at least go towards your keep, but then you're growing up and you wanted more clothes. It was just an accepted thing. My wages were, when I first went to work, my wages were nine shillings a week and I gave my mother eight, I had one shilling for myself.

Similarly Mrs Pearson, who came to Rugby in 1928 at the age of fourteen, was able to recall her exact wage. Her comment also indicates her pride and awareness of her rise in status, and her ability to help the economics of the household. Her father found her work in the B.T.H. offices.

> Nine shillings a week, exactly. I used to give it to my parents and Mum had to give me pocket money, a shilling a week, which was good in those days. I could buy stockings out of it.

[6] P. Jephcott's study Rising Twenty: Notes on some Ordinary Girls published in 1948 found that girls did not automatically talk about their work, but had to be asked specific questions. Jephcott suggests the cause to be the attitude of the girls' only being interested in their work for 'the money it brought in'. See p. 16.

The earning of a wage and the ability to pay 'board and lodgings', primarily to the mother was a common remark from the women interviewed.[7] Usually a daughter's wages were used to assist with the general household expenses. However, in Mrs Grey's case, her mother had a different use for her earnings.

> Well, when I first started work mother bought a piano from Hansons, well I paid five shillings a week out of my wages for the piano. I paid for that, out of my wages. So that piano was mine.

This attitude towards a child's earnings was unusual. Mrs Grey was born in 1911 and was the second eldest of seven children. Her father worked as a motor mechanic, whilst her mother stayed at home. She herself found work throughout her life in factories, firstly at Symington's and then at the B.T.H. Lamp Factory. She therefore had the capacity to earn a decent wage via 'piece-work', but her mother's choice of how to spend the extra money is somewhat surprising.

Similarly Mrs Allen's mother did not use her wages for general family penditure. She found employment as a daily domestic servant and recalled that her mother governed her working life from the first day at work; 'My mother controlled it, I don't remember being given the option, now I look back.' Born in 1914, Mrs Allen

[7] Bornat's research refers to the process of girls giving their wages to their mothers as 'tipping out'. She also argues that this process makes suggestions towards the economic power of women and their control over family finances. See J. Bornat, 'Home and work: a new context for trade union history, Oral History, 5:2 (1977), p. 108.

was one of seven children and her mother regarded service as 'suitable' employment and arranged her first job. Nonetheless, despite this control over the 'choice' of work, her mother encouraged her to save, in order to buy extra items for herself.

> Well my mother, she didn't put it in the housekeeping, she put it in a pot. I was allowed a shilling, and she put it in that pot and then when I'd got a little sum see I could buy a pair of shoes or some stockings or something like that.

What is significant is that Mrs Allen was not a 'live-in' servant and consequently was still living at home. It was therefore surprising that her mother did not use her income for the family as a whole, but kept the money separately, allowing her daughter to save some money, which later would be spent on her.

Such cases were unique. A more usual scenario was that the family in general benefitted from the additional wages and was grateful for the financial help. Mrs Hutchinson found work at Findlay's Lamp Factory in 1917, primarily to aid her family, as her father was ill. She recalled her first wages:

> Well, when I started, I had eight shillings in old money. Well after a little while I was put on piece work and first week I earned fourteen shillings and I went home so proud of this fourteen shillings and said to my mother,

> 'Now I'm earning so much money, can I keep myself?' I was only fourteen. She said 'Yes, if that's what you want to do, ... I'll have seven and you keep the seven'. So that was it and from then on I kept myself.

Mrs Hutchinson's experiences of securing a wage highlight two factors in relation to the experience of earning money for working-class girls. Fundamentally she was able to keep on average half of her wage for her own spending, although she did have to clothe herself. Her mother's attitude shows a relatively liberal outlook by allowing her daughter to be more economically independent than other working-class girls during the period. This was also the case for Mrs Leigh, but only after she had been earning a wage for two years.

> Well, until you were sixteen your mother took your money and gave you two and six back, but when you were sixteen you had your money and gave your mother your board.

Mrs Leigh's memories depict a difference in attitudes towards growing adolescents and their role as a new 'wage-earner'. Mrs Leigh was born in 1924 and found work in 1938 at the Lodge Plugs. Whereas Mrs Hutchinson's mother had regarded her daughter as a capable adult at the age of fourteen, Mrs Leigh had to wait a further two years until her parents saw her as competent enough to manage her income. Financial independence was therefore not a guaranteed outcome of starting work and invariably depended on the discretion of parents.

Secondly Mrs Hutchinson's experience of paid work also emphasises the ability of factory girls to earn higher salaries via 'piece-work', in contrast to other occupations. The 'choice' of occupation upon leaving school therefore had financial implications. From the oral evidence, it would appear that working-class girls were aware of the disparity between factory work and the wages of other occupations. Mrs Hutchinson found work in a factory rather than following her mother's wish to become an apprentice dressmaker, solely because she wished to earn more money. However, despite 'piece-work' extending the possibility of higher wages, some employers could not guarantee job security.

Mrs Grahame experienced unreliable employment when she found work in 1930 at Symington's Corset Factory at the age of fourteen. From listening to Mrs Grahame's memories, it is clear that she was proud of being able to earn some money for her family. However, her 'choice' of work dictated her ability to earn. Her mother wanted her to find work in an office, but typically of many working-class girls interviewed, she did not think herself worthy enough.

> I'm not an office - me sister was, she was more, she went to the High School, you see, so she was er, more intelligent than I was. She says, 'Why don't you work in an office?' I said ' No, I don't want to'. So anyway, she never made a to-do, when I said I wanted to go to the corset factory, she just let me go.

All employees at Symington's Corset Factory were contracted to undertake 'piece-work' and she recalled that she had to work extremely hard to secure a regular wage. However, despite 'piece-work' giving the opportunity to Mrs Grahame and her working colleagues to earn relatively high wages, the availability of work at Symington's often fluctuated and could not always be guaranteed. The women employed by the firm consequently suffered. As Mrs Grahame recalled:

> If you hadn't got enough work on your own job, you're supposed to go home, they used to send you home, you see. You didn't get paid nothing. So, what did I do? I went to somebody else. You see all these different um, er, different jobs they were all er, got somebody over them, er, an elderly person over them, so, when you finished your job, you went up to her she marked your card. So as you got paid so much for that. But, so, what did I do? I didn't go home, I went to another person, I says, 'Have you got any, got a lot of work?' 'Yeah, why?' I says, 'Can I have some?' 'Cause I used to go there and have another job, so I didn't have to go home, you know.

Comments such as these highlight the resourcefulness of some working-class girls and their determination to take home a decent wage to their parents. Mrs Grahame's sister, who found employment as an office worker received a salary rather than being paid for piece-work and therefore was not under the same

amount of pressure, to fulfil her accepted but unwritten 'contract' with their parents to bring an extra wage into the household.

The accepted working-class culture of paying 'board and lodgings' was an indication of adulthood to many girls. As we have seen the amount of money given to parents often depended on a variety of factors, but was essentially linked to the amount a girl could earn and the demands of her parents. Other occupations however did not allow a change of economic status for working-class girls.

For example, those girls who found work in domestic service positions could not feel that they were helping their parents as they rarely sent money home. Their weekly income was dramatically reduced as they received their 'board' as part of their wages. However, some parents benefitted not from an extra wage, but were governed by the fact that they frequently needed more space at home and therefore finding work for their daughter in servitude relinquished them of another mouth to feed. Mrs Morse found work at Rugby School in 1925 as a housemaid, and therefore she could only 'live-in' during term time. She was the eldest of three children and as her 'choice' of work was in service, she did not give her parents any of her wages. However, the problem of returning to live at home arose in the school holidays. This was solved by the school paying her a retainer for her to give to her parents.

> No, I didn't give any money to my parents, only when we had holidays. And they used to pay us so much you see, 'cause what we had in service it was for ourselves. We didn't have to pay for our food or keep or anything and they used to give us so much to give to our parents you see for keeping us.

For Mrs Morse's parents, this arrangement solved the problem of keeping their daughter at home during the holidays, when she ceased to be a ' wage-earner'.

The importance of becoming a 'wage-earner' is also evident from the memories of more affluent respondents. Mrs Mayfield was born in Rugby in 1902. Her father owned a high-class tailors shop in the town, she attended a private school and enjoyed a very comfortable life-style at home, where her parents employed a number of servants. She was not required to work at all, but left school at sixteen. When asked about future employment ambitions, her reply did not mention any paid occupation, but that it was her intention to 'have fun' in the future. Eventually, boredom forced her to help out in her father's shop. However, she did not receive a conventional income and over a number of months had to fight to receive a wage from her father and its corresponding financial independence.

> Five shillings a week ... five shillings a week was a lot in 1918. All I had to do was to buy lovely hair ribbons and sweets, that was all and go to the pictures ... and I could go to all the shops. I could go to Hands Shoe Shop,

> Sheasby's, Adnits, etc and say 'Will you put them down to Dad's account'. And then I whittled and whittled until I got a salary and that was a pound a week and I was in debt ever since.

Mrs Mayfield was fortunate enough to have a very privileged way of life. However, what is significant is that she herself asked to become a 'wage-earner' illustrating the importance of this status to girls. Her father had obviously not seen the need to pay his daughter a regular wage, as she was not expected to work. Mrs Mayfield, however, saw the situation differently and earnestly sought her own financial independence.

There can be no doubt therefore that earning a wage altered the position and role of working-class girls. Nonetheless, any initial change in status to 'wage-earner', despite its significance, was rapidly forgotten after the first few weeks in work. Andrew Phillips has argued from his research about women working in the British clothing industry between 1918 and 1950 that,

> 'An income, however, small, was an important instrument in that wider twentieth century goal of loosening ties of parental authority.[8]

However, the memories of those girls in Rugby do little to reinforce this

[8] A. Phillips 'Women on the Shop Floor: The Colchester Rag Trade 1918-1950' Oral History 22:1 (1994), p. 61.

perception. On the contrary most women recalled that as they still lived within the confines of the family home and their parents still exerted a tremendous influence over them both in terms of discipline and moral guidance. Importantly most women did not show a desire to leave home until they were married. Nonetheless, the relationship between parent and daughter was put under some strain by the transformation of economic status experienced by the working-class girl. 'Both parents and children recognised the value of these earnings, and consequently subtle changes in the status of the young person took place'.[9] Daughters had become working adults, but were still growing and developing during their teenage years. How did this affect the ability to embrace the freedom which working life offered?

Mrs Cryer was born in 1915 as the eldest child in the family. Her working 'world' was restricted to the everyday life of her father's butcher's shop. Her 'choices' were decided for her, primarily because family tradition and loyalty dictated it and which ultimately hampered her future working prospects and her social life. She worked increasingly long hours without question and always for the same pay. Initially Mrs Cryer found work that was independent from the family business. However she recalled that family allegiance forced her to give up her first job that

[9] E. Roberts A Woman's Place. An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940 (Oxford, 1984) p. 40.

was in a local shoe shop:

> We used to have to try and sell hosiery and foot comforts, we used to have to ask everybody. And I used to do it quite well, so when I was going to leave, they had one of the chief people come down from Head Office to see me, and they wanted me to stay on, I was fifteen then. They said if I stayed on, when I was sixteen they would send me away to a school and I could learn all about the feet, and I should have been a chiropodist. I needn't have gone home, but I felt I must, because there was too much going on and we seemed in a muddle, and er, so um, I decided to go home.

Mrs Cryer's loyalty towards her family is typical of so many working-class families during the period. However, her situation highlights the dilemmas that so many of the oral respondents faced. Starting work did not necessarily mean new experiences and independence. As I have discussed, working-class girls were prepared to accept the decisions made for them upon leaving school and were tremendously influenced by the opinions and wishes of parents. In Mrs Cryer's case the needs of her parents and in particular those of her father dictated her actions and she continued to be reliant upon her parents financially. Whereas other girls who found work in the local companies had a relative amount of independence, both work-based and economically, Mrs Cryer, despite being in the lucky position of not having to pay board and lodgings, could not achieve the

same monetary or social autonomy.

The ability of parents to restrict their daughter's freedom was immense. In most cases parents had been instrumental in finding employment for their offspring and such control continued despite their capability of earning a wage. Working-class culture placed tremendous importance on respectability and morality and most parents exerted similar discipline and rules which daughters had experienced whilst at school. The tradition of handing over the weekly wage to working-class mothers was two-fold. As I have shown working-class girls showed an unquestioning willingness to present their wages to their parents each week. However, it should not be forgotten that parents expected nothing less from their offspring and in some cases exerted strict rules concerning the spending of their daughters' new found wealth. The ability to spend surplus wages was consistently under the control of parents. Importantly it was the 'family' economy that dominated, rather then giving young girls their own 'independent' economy. Young wage-earners earned family money rather than money for themselves. Elizabeth Roberts who found in her research of Barrow, Preston and Lancaster, that paying 'board and lodgings' often followed strict patterns supports this.

> In most families, young people were given back a fixed percentage of their wages - a penny in the shilling and a shilling in the pound, being most common.[10]

[10] Roberts, A Woman's Place p. 43.

This was the case for Mrs Hames who was born in 1924 and was one of ten children. She found employment at the age of fourteen in 1938 as a counter assistant in Sketchley's Dye Works in Rugby. When asked about her parent's attitude towards earning a wage, she recalled:

> Right from the very start. I earned seven and sixpence and I was given seven pence spending money one week and eight pence the next; it was a penny in the shilling earned that we were given back as spending money. We had to put sixpence on one side a week, once we got into earning more than a couple of bob. That had to go into savings stamps, we had a saving stamp card and then the rest we could use for collection for our church. So really there wasn't a lot of spending.

Mrs Hames's possible economic independence was therefore curtailed by the wishes of her parents firstly to save money and secondly in this case, to donate any spare money to the family church. The saving of money was often very difficult for working-class girls. As most of the weekly wage was given towards the family household expenditure and despite parents wanting their daughters to attempt to save some money, the girls were usually only able to deposit small amounts. Roberts found that,

> For most ... the financial control exerted by mothers and accepted by their children was so tight, that saving up to be married proved to be a slow

and frustrating procedure.[11]

This was typical of those working-class girls growing up in Rugby. Most recalled that they tried to save for the future, which usually included marriage, but also remembered that doing so was extremely difficult. The most successful saver among the oral respondents was a woman who came to Rugby in 1929 and found work in domestic service at the age of eighteen. Usually servants found themselves with relatively little economic independence, due to their restricted wages and their reliance on their employer for a place to live. However Mrs Fletcher's father had instilled within her the importance to save money from her very first job. She recalled:

> Now then ... well I tell you what. Whatever money we had, father's idea was that you spend a bit, you saved a bit and you had a bit for a rainy day and that rainy day was a godsend to me when I came to Rugby, I can tell you that. I'd always got a little bit of pocket money, whereas the other girls hadn't got it, so it taught you to look after your money.

Mrs Fletcher was originally from Lincolnshire and had found employment in her locality at the age of fourteen in a sweet shop. Unusually for working-class households it was her father who controlled her newly acquired financial status.

[11] Roberts, A Woman's Place p. 43.

> No, father used to, was able to draw it and look after it, we didn't want to be responsible for our monies, we let him do it, you see, and that's it and that's how we used to save. I know if we said 'could we go to the pictures?' of course it was only four pence a time to go. And father would say 'Here you are four pence, but remember you want so much and so much for this thing and the other you know', he told us. But we were never denied anything. You had your own little bit of pocket money, what you earned doing errands for, you could spend that, but you had to spend a bit, save a bit and have a bit for a rainy day.

Mrs Fletcher's upbringing and financial awareness allowed her to have more freedom when she moved to Rugby and consequently she did not find the low wages within servitude restricting. In addition her spending was not particularly curtailed by her 'choice' of occupation. In fact she remembered that when she arrived in Rugby she had a total of nine pounds in the 'Boston and District Savings Bank' and often paid for her and her friends to go around the town.

The ability and opportunity for working-class girls to earn money should have been an indication of the measure of freedom they enjoyed. However, becoming a 'wage-earner' did not automatically grant independence to the young. While they remained at home, parents expected them to abide by their rules, whether it concerned their occupation or their social life. From the oral evidence it would appear that young girls did not tend to spend their money on activities other than

odd trips to the cinema. Family expectations to save were high.

Once a working-class girl had become a 'wage-earner', parents generally expected that their working capacity would continue until marriage. Occupational freedom, in terms of the ability to change jobs, was curtailed by the attitude from parents. It was felt that daughters should not 'rock the boat' by applying for other positions and parents preached a working-class acceptance that they should be 'happy with what they had got'. Consequently, the majority of oral respondents recalled that they continued to work for the same employer throughout their working lifetime, which was invariably until they were married.

Nonetheless, there were some instances of women changing their type of work, but as in the case of Mrs Davies, it was usually to achieve a higher income which could be passed on to their parents. Mrs Davies was born in 1920 and was the youngest of three children. She originally found work at the Lodge Plugs in 1934, and although she stayed for four years, the machinery and the conditions in which she worked constantly frightened her. Consequently she sought an alternative and managed to find employment at the B.T.H. in 1938, as an office worker. She recalled:

> Well I went in the offices first. 'Cause I was there about two years, and er, I was only getting eight shillings a week. I think it was, and then I went in the factory, I got a job in the factory. It was in Control Gear, and er, I

stayed there 'till the end of the war. Twelve shillings a week I think we got.

Mrs Davies's case highlights the importance of earning as much as possible for the family. Realising that office work did not offer the same monetary returns as factory labour, she returned to her original type of employment, despite her fear of machinery. Mrs Davies's story demonstrates that in some instances girls did have a relative amount of occupational freedom. However, her strategy was controlled by the desire to ensure a higher contribution to the household finances and ultimately to gratify her parents, despite 'choosing' work she disliked.

It was often the case that some women sought alternative employment because of their own unhappiness and discontentment. However, changing employer or the type of occupation often meant a strain on the relationship between parents and daughter. Mrs Marsh was born in 1916 and came to Rugby when she was six years old. She recalled that her parents constantly tried to control her working life and for a number of years she was totally cut off from her family. Mrs Marsh started her first job around 1929.

When I left at fourteen, before I left at fourteen, I was sent away from home to some friends that lived at Bedworth. And er, 'cause Mum was hitting very hard times, and they said if I'd go over there, they'd look after me and help her out. It was a public house, and I was up at half past ten at night drying the glasses in the bar. It was a hard time, actually I ran

away. I came back to Rugby and me Dad took me back again. Twice I did that.

Mrs Marsh then continued her domestic service work in Rugby, and was employed by a local reverend in the 1930s, but it was his wife who caused her misery and she described her as a 'nasty woman; she was really awful to me'. On one occasion, Mrs Marsh recalled that she had been to see the doctor as she had an abscess on her back. The doctor said that she should return home for three days to rest, but when she returned to her employer, the reverend's wife locked her in her room to prevent her from going home and told her to continue with her work. Consequently she decided to find alternative employment. This decision was a huge step for Mrs Marsh and she suffered from her parents' displeasure. Her parents felt that she had secured a 'suitable' job with a respectable family and she should continue to be loyal to them. She recollected with some bitterness that she had originally wanted to become an apprentice hairdresser, but that she would have had to pay a 'premium' for her training that blocked any future ambitions. Mrs Marsh's 'choice' of occupation was therefore a decision made by her parents, and was continually reinforced by them over the years to ensure that she continued to be a 'live-in' servant. Eventually, she decided to change her work and went to the B.T.H. for employment for two years before she married.

Mrs Marsh's determination to find alternative work shows substantial courage on

her part. Her experiences are also indicative of the lack of occupational freedom most girls found themselves subjugated to in their early years. Going against parental wishes often took a lot of resolution, as essentially offspring were securing their own interests before those of their culture. Mrs Weaver was born in 1912 and grew up in a small village near Leamington. She came to Rugby in 1928 at the age of sixteen to find work. Like so many of the newcomers to Rugby, Mrs Weaver and her sister found work at the B.T.H. in the factory.

> Well, I didn't have much alternative, I went down to the B.T.H. and I was in the factory, I didn't like it. I wasn't there an awful long time and er, there was an advert for a girl wanted in a local cake shop, bakery, so I went there.

Her parents did not approve of her short 'career' at the B.T.H. They felt that although they knew their daughter was unhappy, working at the B.T.H. ensured a secure economic future for her and significantly working in a shop did not offer the same wages as 'piece-work'.

> Well, yes I suppose they did, they knew I didn't like it, but er, as far as my father was concerned I should have stayed, that's what I was there for. I began to assert myself when I was earning money. He didn't have all his own way. My sister stood up to him you see, he wouldn't allow her to go to a dance, but she stuck out and she went. He used to tell us we would end

> up in the workhouse ... and it used to frighten me. I was more frightened of him than my sister was really.

Similarly, Mrs Byfield greatly offended and upset her father when she only stayed at the B.T.H. Lamp Factory for six months. She had started at the firm in 1937 straight from school.

> The lamp factory, yes. 'Cause my father worked down there, in the lamp factory, so he got me, well he worked there, so it was a good opening for me, sort of thing, and I used to do a bit of etching and voltage, etching the voltage on.

Despite what her father considered to be a secure future for his daughter, Mrs Byfield was not happy working at the lamp factory; 'I just couldn't stick it any longer, cause I was unhappy'. More importantly, on leaving her job at the Lamp Factory, Mrs Byfield had dismissed her father's involvement in her working life and had slighted his ability to find work for her at the age of fourteen. However, she succeeded in 'standing her ground' and found alternative employment at the Lodge Plugs, where she remained for over ten years in full-time employment. Mrs Byfield continued to be employed in a factory, but she recalled that the atmosphere was so much better at the Lodge Plugs; 'well, I knew a lot of the girls that worked there you see'.

Relationships between parents and daughter could also be affected by the lack of social freedom that working-class girls received. The ambiguity of their status within the home: economically an adult, but socially regarded as a child, often created tension within the household. Many girls saw social autonomy as a natural progression of starting work, and yet while they continued to live at home, they were bound to the social and moral rules of their parents.

It would appear from the oral evidence that working-class culture was highly consensual and parents shared a mutual belief towards the importance of the respectability of their offspring. Hendrick has argued that working-class discipline evolved around 'keeping up appearances and respectability, household duties, behaviour at mealtimes and control of play and playmates'.[12] In particular, once a girl had reached her teenage years, 'keeping in with the right crowd' was seen as a sign of morality and class-esteem.

Mrs Allen's experience highlights the importance of appropriate behaviour. This was particularly the case for Mrs Allen as she worked as a domestic servant at Rugby School. She recalled that at her first place of employment, the mistress of the house 'used to stand, you had to go in the front way when you went in at night and she used to stand in the front hall to see that you weren't late'. All the servants had to be home by nine o'clock in the evening, which for Mrs Allen, meant she could not attend any of the local dances to mix with local people.

[12] H. Hendrick, Children, Childhood and English Society 1880-1990 (Cambridge, 1997) p. 22.

However, significantly, what was vital to Mrs Allen for her social and working life, was the achievement of a 'good character'. In the world of domestic service, a 'character' was built up after a number of years of service and ensured future prospects. As she recalled:

> This was another order I had from my mother: 'You stay there until you get a "good character"'. You'd got to stay until they could assess your character you see, and then I moved to another one.

However, Mrs Allen was not only achieving a 'good character' in terms of her working life, but also due to the restrictions placed on her social life, she was confined to mixing only with 'appropriate' friends and acquaintances. Mrs Morse, who was also a domestic servant in the late 1920s, reiterated this.

> When you're in domestic service you only had one day off a week, and every other Sunday and you had to be in at a certain time at night, you see. You couldn't go out without permission. They'd allow you about once a week to go to a dance, you see. You couldn't meet many people really, in that respect.

In contrast, girls occupied in other types of employment had the capacity to achieve a higher degree of social freedom. Normal office and factory hours allowed girls to go out in the evenings. However, any social outings were always

at the discretion of their parents. Outings to the cinema and local dances mostly had parental approval and were often the first chance for semi-free leisure enjoyed by working-class girls. Mrs Leigh, who worked in the factory at Lodge Plugs for the first ten years of her working life, from 1934, enjoyed a hectic social life compared to other respondents. Her father organised various local dances in the villages around Rugby and not surprisingly she attended most events. However, her father was her constant chaperone and thus she did not achieve total freedom. Similarly Mrs Engels, who became an office worker at the B.T.H. in 1936 straight from school, attended whist drives and dances with her parents when she was a teenager.

Being able to attend dances in the evening, however, did not mean Mrs Leigh had social independence. When asked if she was able to live her own life once she had found employment, she recalled:

> Well up to a point, but you had to confirm if you were going out. They wanted to know where you were going, who you were going with and what time you'd be back, not what time will you be back, but what time you will be back at such and such a time and you done it automatic. There was no answering back. If you answered back you got a clip round the ear. I can remember my mother giving me a good slap round my leg with a lot of rhubarb that she'd bought in the shop next door. I given her a bit of cheek, so she'd come behind me and course I always had bare legs and gave

> me a jolly good whacking. The rhubarb all broke up and we had a jolly laugh. I suppose I was about seventeen.

Discipline at home was therefore a constant reminder that girls had yet to achieve social autonomy. Oral respondents recalled that most rules concerned their 'curfew' after an evening out. Even Mrs Leigh's father insisted that she was home at an appropriate hour.

> Oh yes, my father was very strict. If you weren't there at a certain time, he was on the doorstep to see where you were, whom you were with and what you were up to. In my earlier days, up until sixteen it was about nine thirty and then it gradually went to ten o'clock, except once a week when we used to go to the Church House and it was half past eleven finish and you were allowed that.

However, some women recalled that although they had curfews, some parents were not strict in enforcing them. Mrs Pearson found work in the B.T.H. offices in 1928 at the age of fourteen and was one of three sisters. When asked about discipline at home, she recollected:

> It was partially strict, partially do what you like, but most of the 'do what you like', they didn't know about. I was supposed to be in at eleven o'clock, but Mum would say, 'You can be late and I'll leave the back door

> unlocked' you see.

Such a relaxed attitude towards the curfew was rare. Most parents followed the pattern of Mrs Cashmore's parents. Mrs Cashmore was born in 1921, and was restricted by her father's attitude towards the local dances: 'But we didn't go to many dances, ... my father didn't like dancing, he didn't think it was nice at all'. This attitude towards the local dances is somewhat surprising. Most respondents recall attending them some time during their early years of working life, and as Mrs Cashmore remembered, 'there was no drink or anything like that you know'. Mrs Cashmore became an office work at the B.T.H. in 1935 and recalled her curfew.

> Mm ... yes it was, in by half past nine. So if we wanted to go to the pictures, I used to have to ask if I could stay out a bit later. Yes, they were very strict, my parents were, but I think they were over-protective really. Looking at it, I used to think, fancy having to be in at that time, but I think it was being over-protective.

Opinions had not changed in the early 1950s. Mrs Marshall recalled that during her teenage years, she had to live by her mother's rules; 'My mother was

absolutely ... nine o'clock. She was a stickler, making you behave. I mean when I was a child we had the cane.'[13]

Restrictions and curfews were therefore one side of the equation for adolescent working-class girls. While being expected to demonstrate an increased amount of responsibility, both during working hours and when mixing socially, due to their wage-earning status, they were constantly reminded that they remained under the auspices of their parents. Upon entering the work force at the age of fourteen, most girls revelled in their new earning capacity, but yet they still had to 'earn' the regard and respect of becoming adults from their parents.

The oral evidence gave no indications that any girls thought of leaving the family home to set up independent places of accommodation. Such circumstances could have encouraged images of promiscuity and 'loose-living'. Such experiences have been focused upon by Gurney in his work considering the evidence gathered by Mass Observation in the 1930s in Lancashire. As Gurney states,

> Working-class Lancashire women had a reputation for independence that

[13] This is reinforced by Hendrick, Children, Childhood and English Society 1880-1990, p. 22. He maintains that mothers' usually set the 'code of conduct'.

stretched back into the mid-nineteenth century, founded on the opportunities for paid female employment in the textile industry.[14]

This independence was felt in the women's ability to have 'free spirits' and Gurney uses the example of holidays and day-trips to Blackpool to exemplify their freedom.[15] However in Rugby independent living was not an option for the respectable working-class girl, as it did not fall within the morals of her working-class culture or milieu. In addition vacating the parental home was only considered upon marriage.

Importance and effect of the 'choice' of employer

'I think B.T.H. had maybe unadventurous, but very loyal staff, and er, I stayed with them.'

Mrs Fretwell's comment about her 'choice' of employer is indicative of so many other testimonies from Rugby women concerning the effect the decision had on their future lives. Born in 1917 in Rugby, she is referring to her working life that spanned just over ten years from 1932, during which time she worked in the offices at the B.T.H. She herself had found work at the B.T.H. on the advice of

[14] P. Gurney, '"Intersex" and "Dirty Girls": Mass Observation and Working-class sexuality in England in the 1930s, Journal of the History of Sexuality, 8 (1997), p. 272.
[15] Liddington's research has focused on the security of working in the mills in Lancashire. She argues that security increased the girls self-confidence and camaraderie. See J. Liddington, 'Working-class women in the North West: II', Oral History, 5:2 (1977).

her parents who both had been employed by the company, her father as a turner and her mother in the offices before she was married.

> They were very good employers, they really looked after their staff, I think this is what my father felt. You were assured of a job. Don't forget you see I would have started in about 1932, the time of the depression, so if I got a job at all I'd be quite lucky, they weren't taking on people. So yes, it would be my parents who would decide for me, leaving school and we think it's time you got a job and it would be automatic that I went to B.T.H.

Family loyalty towards a particular company, as exemplified by Mrs Fretwell, was common among the working classes. This is especially so in Rugby, which was dominated by the B.T.H. and the majority of testimonies were from women who had found work with the company. Most women, once working at the B.T.H. usually found themselves continuing to be employed by them until they left to get married or have children. The 'choice' of employer was therefore a significant decision. What must be considered is the role of the B.T.H. within the town and the reasons why the company was the 'choice' of so many working-class women. Did B.T.H.'s creation of welfare and altruistic measures affect this 'choice'? In addition, did those women who found employment in other establishments display any loyalty towards their employer or really suffer in terms of status and happiness?

From the testimonies of the oral respondents, there can be no doubt that the B.T.H. was considered to be the prime employer in the town. Other engineering companies, such as Willans and Robinson and Lodge Plugs were relegated to second position, whilst other occupations such as domestic service, laundry workers and those girls who found work at the corset factory were regarded as even lower in status. From the memories of the oral respondents it is clear that the 'choice' of employer had implications for a girl's social standing within the community. As Sarsby found, in her research concerning pottery workers:

> Firms had their individual reputations ... Some people found their niche and stayed on in a firm sometimes for as many as forty years, or very often for ten or twenty; others went from firm to firm trying to get more money, or unable to weather a storm of short time, which they could not afford.[16]

In the case of the Rugby women, most of them remained loyal to their original employer. What must be stressed however, is that the B.T.H. was a very secure employer and no respondents recalled ever being placed on short time whilst working for the company. On the contrary, most women recalled that they were expected to work overtime, often with no extra money, which was usual for office workers, because of the increased workload. This was especially the case during the war.

[16]Sarsby, Missuses and Mouldrunners, p. 63.

Mrs Fretwell, as we have seen, showed tremendous loyalty to the B.T.H., which was her only employer throughout her working life. The reason behind this loyalty was solely connected and due to the treatment her father had received, when he had worked for the company.

> Oh yes, absolutely, we were influenced a lot and, er, my father had a lot of ill health, and he would have to be off sick, he didn't earn very much money I think, they wouldn't get very much money when he was sick. It was important that I got a job wasn't it? But you see, whenever he'd had spell of sickness B.T.H. always took him back again. He wouldn't have been fired because he was having this ill health.

Mrs Fretwell's memories highlight an extraordinary belief that one company would always provide employment for her father. She showed no doubt that her father would consistently be offered work, despite his unreliability due to ill health. Experiences such as these depict the company as being very paternal towards the town's inhabitants. However, more appropriately perhaps, it could be said that the company needed the work of experienced, skilled men and 'quite simply, firms did not wish to lose skilled workers'.[17]

In contrast, in the case of Mrs Fuller, upon leaving school and having to find work, she refused to work for the B.T.H. Her feelings towards the company were

[17]Phillips, 'Women on the Shop Floor' in Oral History p. 60.

influenced by an industrial accident that had occurred involving her father. When Mrs Fuller was twelve, he had been injured at work and later died.

> But you see it was such a shock when I lost my father. I knew that I'd got to go and work and they offered me a job straight away at the B.T.H. and I said, 'No, you killed my father, I'm not going there', and so I got a job at the Lodge Plugs.

However, such reactions to the B.T.H. were infrequent. In most cases, despite recollections being 'clouded' by nostalgia, memories of the B.T.H. were of a caring and sympathetic employer. Some families were totally reliant on the company for all the wages of the family members. As discussed, working-class girls were usually influenced by or found employment by their parents. Generational ties between the company and particular traditional Rugby families were therefore strong. Strathern has researched such links in her study of the village of Elmdon in Essex during the 1960s.[18] The aim of the study was to investigate kinship ties and groups in a local community. She identified two types of village dwellers, 'real Elmdon' and newcomers or outsiders. Her findings can be compared to the situation of those inhabitants who had been born and grew up in Rugby. For example, Strathern categorised 'real Elmdon' people as those who were members of long established families, who had never moved away and

[18] M. Strathern, Kinship at the Core: An anthropology of Elmdon, a village in north-west Essex in the 1960s (Cambridge, 1981).

who traditionally worked in the same occupations and often for the same employers as their forefathers. As she states:

> Sons following fathers not simply in type of employment but often at place of employment suggests an informal system of job inheritance, much as farm tenancies were passed on within a family.[19]

This study has previously focused upon this tradition within Rugby families for sons and daughters to follow fathers or other family members in occupations at the B.T.H. In contrast, in Strathern's study, the outsiders or newcomers could not claim to have such village 'inheritance' and therefore were not regarded as part of the strict community within the village. As Strathern states;

... the notion that everyone is related, which Elmdoners give voice to, effectively cuts villagers off from outsiders. The latter are neither internally linked by kinship among themselves, nor know everyone in the village.[20]

Can the same be stated about Rugby? Many new workers did arrive in the town to look for employment. This has been the case ever since the manufacturing industries had arrived in the town at the turn of the century. From the oral evidence, it would not be fair to suggest that a hierarchy of workers existed; that

[19] Strathern, Kinship at the Core, p. 77.
[20] Strathern, Kinship at the Core, p. 75.

traditional Rugby workers had precedence for employment over newcomers to the town. However, the memories of the oral respondents do illustrate that securing a job at the B.T.H. was certainly easier if the young person had a close relative already working there. A young person could start his or her employment with the knowledge that their family already 'belonged' in a comforting, yet cultural way. This correlates with the work of Cohen who has focused on how communities 'belong' to their locality, reinforced by their individual culture.[21]

It would be fair to state that those families who were generationally from Rugby did 'feel' like, to use Strathern's term, 'real Rugbians' when comparing themselves to other inhabitants. What is without doubt is that the B.T.H. successfully built-up a loyal, reliable work force to ensure their own prosperity. Those workers, who did arrived as newcomers, were quickly integrated in the B.T.H. 'community' and boundaries between traditional Rugbians and outsiders blurred.[22] Essentially employment at the B.T.H. gave common interests allowing a community to develop. As Frankenberg states in his work relating to cultural groupings:

> Community implies having something in common... They work together and also play and pray together. Their common interest in things give

[21] A.P. Cohen (ed.), Belonging: the experience of culture (Manchester, 1982).
[22] L. Grant, 'women in a car town: Coventry, 1920-45' in P. Hudson and W.R. Lee, Women's Work and the Family Economy (Manchester, 1990). She suggests that migrant workers were considered as inferior engineers in comparison to Coventry-born workers and that antagonism existed between the two groups. See p. 228.

them a common interest in each other.[23]

A community did exist in Rugby; there was a mutual dependency of confidence and trust between the B.T.H. and all the town's inhabitants, whether generational or newcomer.[24] 'Paternalism relies heavily on an appeal to personal ties of dependency interpreted in familial terms'.[25] The relatively easy recruitment of working-class girls to the working ranks of the company highlights this two-way relationship. As Phillips, in his study of the clothing industry, maintains:

> This pattern of recruitment helped forge links of mutual obligation between management and staff. Younger sisters or cousins were even taken on when there was no immediate job or any available machine to train them on.[26]

Similarly, as the B.T.H. developed its home appliance factory, young workers were needed for factory work and for the subsidiary development in office work. Parents saw this industrial progress as an opportunity to secure employment for their daughters. The B.T.H. therefore succeeded in finding a relatively cheap and

[23] R. Frankenberg, Communities in Britain: Social Life in Town and Country (Middlesex, 1966) p. 238

[24] The question of community is considered by Cooper. Her work concentrates on the middle classes in a suburb of Manchester and how they were geographically a community and how kinship, marriage and the church also played an important role in providing community links. See A. Cooper, 'Burnage 1880-1905, the making of a middle- class community', Family and Community History, 1 (1998).

[25] J. Lown, Women and Industrialisation: Gender at Work in Nineteenth Century England (London,1990), p.3.

[26] Phillips, 'Women on the Shop Floor' in Oral History, p. 60.

willing work force and simultaneously, daughters were able to continue the family loyalty and dependence, which has existed as a tradition in some families since the arrival of the company in Rugby in 1902.

However, displays of altruistic paternalism have to be seen from both sides. The B.T.H. was a growing world-wide industrial concern and it would be surprising if those measures undertaken to ensure employee loyalty were not expedient to company advancement. Melling advocates this type of industrial welfare. He argues that:

> ...most welfare schemes were devised by employers with a rational concern for efficiency and profitability in the enterprise rather than being the result of spontaneous and altruistic gestures.[27]

By offering 'gestures' companies tried to create deference between employee and employer to ensure the continuation of production and harmony in the workplace. As Fitzgerald maintains companies are 'human' institutions and they had to make decisions to ensure the 'social' context of production was achieved.[28] The needs of the workforce had to be recognised in order to achieve efficiency and productivity. Deference had to be created. Joyce argues that;

[27] J. Melling, 'Employers, workplace culture and workers' politics: British industry and workers' welfare programmes, 1870-1920' in J. Melling and J. Barry (eds.), Culture in History: production, consumption and values in historical perspective (Exeter, 1992), p. 109.
[28] R. Fitzgerald, British Labour Management and Industrial Welfare 846-1939 (Beckenham, 1988), p. 2.

> Deference is therefore the social relationship that converts power relations into moral ones, and ensures the stability of hierarchy threatened by the less efficient potentially unstable, coercive relationship.[29]

Questions relating to deference and the rise of industrial welfare within the B.T.H. are connected to the arrival of A.P. Young to the Rugby works in 1928.[30] His orders were to increase the efficiency of the factory and, in his memoirs he recalled that his 'greatest enemy was widespread complacency' among the work force.[31,32] Young's promotion and encouragement of the Day Continuation School, the introduction of a personnel department in 1932, the creation of a works journal in April 1931 and the reinforcement of co-operative relationships between the work force via sports day and yearly carnivals all achieved the creation of the B.T.H. 'family'. A recreation club had been provided since 1919, but this was expanded by Young. In particular most female employees were members of the B.T.H. Girls Club, which provided recreational activities and

[29] P. Joyce, Work, Society and Politics: the culture of the factory in later Victorian England (Brighton,1980), p. 92.
[30] A more detailed discussion of the work of A.P. Young can be found in E. Robinson, 'A Rugby Company and their Female Clerical Workers: The British Thomson-Houston Company Ltd, 1930-1955', M.A. dissertation, 1993, University of Warwick.
[31] A.P. Young, Across the Years (1971), p. 2.
[32] A similar experience was felt at Courtaulds in 1914, when Harry Johnson became director. He made a long lasting impression on the company, as did A.P. Young at the B.T.H. Courtaulds employees were also 50% female. For additional information concerning the development of Courtaulds see D.C. Coleman, 'Courtaulds and the beginning of rayon', in B. Supple (ed.), Essays in British Business History (Oxford, 1977), pp.88-100.

moral guidance. As Mrs Jennings recalled about the 1920s

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> Yes, in those days there was a Girl's Club. I think we paid a penny a week to be a member and they had a big house in Bilton Road, which was the Club house. And it was a very good club, but they had a real disciplinarian over that, Miss Crapper ... she always got her eye on you ... and every member was allowed to take one visitor on a Saturday night for the dance and of course we used to take our boyfriends. It finished quite early and Miss Crapper was always there watching and anybody who stepped out of line, they were barred.

Such developments in industrial welfare, fits well with Melling's argument that measures were 'usually designed to meet some specific local need of the enterprise'.[33] From the employees' point of view, the company was not only contributing to the prosperity of the town through the provision of employment, but also offering entertainment, educational and sports facilities. For the company, these altruistic developments created a loyal and willing work force.

Importantly, none of the respondents recalled any union activity at the B.T.H. In fact, many could not remember ever being a member of a union, or having any need to rectify any problems whilst at work. Mrs Hutchinson's comment is representative of the attitude of most oral respondents to union membership. She

[33] Melling, 'Employers, workplace culture and worker's politics', p. 118.

originally worked for Findlay's Lamp Factory, which was bought by the B.T.H. after the First World War. Her comments relate to the period after 1918, when she was transferred to the B.T.H. 'Works'.

> I did at the beginning, when I went down the Works [joined a union]. Can't remember much about it. Can't remember what it was called. It was a ... for women workers and the lady who sort of got us to join, she worked at Findlay's, she was older than me. She got us organised there, we didn't need to be really, they were very good to work for and when we went down the Works, she got us organised again. But I think eventually, after she left, it seemed to fade out. I don't remember much about it. We didn't seem to have cause to use it, whatever it was for.

Mrs Hutchinson's recollections suggest therefore that the B.T.H. consistently employed a contented work force. In Roberts' study of Lancashire women between 1890 and 1940, her research led her to question the probability of the acquiescent woman worker. She maintained that if a woman had a disagreement she would move jobs or sort the problem out herself, rather than organising a group protest. However, although other opportunities existed, in Rugby the freedom of women to move jobs was somewhat restricted due the attraction of B.T.H.'s welfare measures and reputation. No other firm in the town offered the same security and out-of-hours benefits in terms of social events. In addition, most women were earning to help their families, and therefore their loyalty to the

B.T.H. could be attributed to their 'desperate need for wages'.[34]

Nonetheless, not all women worked for the B.T.H. upon leaving school. There were other opportunities. It would seem that 'employer-loyalty' was not confined to B.T.H. employees. Most oral respondents demonstrated faithfulness towards their employer, which did not falter or depend on the type of work they were involved in. The faithful philosophy involving working life could be connected to the working-class cultural idea that 'work' created respectability and acceptance from peers and family. However, among those women who worked for other establishments rather than the B.T.H., there did seem to be more movement from job to job. Mrs Fretwell, as we have seen, was very loyal to the B.T.H. and declined to take up an offer of a job paying more money.

> I think mostly they settled for what they'd got if they were happy in the job. If you were unhappy, um, you moved, but I did work. I was working at Home Appliances and somebody said to me, now this was war time, er, 'There are some very good well paid jobs at Ryton', which was the car factory, but it was turned over to making munitions, 'and if I'd like to go for an interview'. So I must have gone with a friend and we went by bus to Ryton factory, er, but you see the whole thing was blacked out, this factory, it was of risk of bombing. It was near Coventry, er, they were making munitions for the war efforts, and I thought I couldn't bear to work

[34] Sarsby, Missuses and Mouldrunners, p. 67.

> there. So even though I was offered a job I turned it down, and it was more money.

However, Mrs Drake was not against looking for alternative employment. She had found work at Frosts the Printers at the age of fifteen in 1925. Although it was quite a friendly place to work, she was constantly watching a printing machine and feeding it with paper. Primarily her loyalty to Frosts was curtailed by the yearning to earn more money.

> Yes ... someone got talking one day and said about the job at Bluemels and I thought, well if its going to be more money.

However, Mrs Drake's 'choice' of alternative employment did not necessarily mean substantially more earnings. Bluemels was a company that manufactured parts for cycles and cars. Although she was earning slightly more money each week, her social standing did not necessarily increase by her move. In addition, any extra money she earned was spent on the train fare to reach Bluemels at Wulston. Travelling by train to work greatly lengthened her working day and affected her ability to enjoy a full social life.

Most respondents recalled that starting work did change their social life, both in the amount of free time they had and with whom they mixed. It is clear that the majority of women tended only to socialise with working colleagues. Any

friendships created while at school tended to dwindle and women recalled that apart from a couple of special confidants from their early years, they had lost touch with most school friends. Strong and loyal ties built up within the work place replaced such friendships. This occurrence is not surprising, as most girls working together found themselves in similar situations in terms of class and status. Within Rugby, there was a distinct pecking order of local companies, which in turn influenced the social life of Rugby girls. Those who worked for the B.T.H. were usually heavily involved in the company's own activities and membership of the B.T.H. Girls Club was restricted to employees only, which created a barrier to some friendships in the town. Women who found work at the Lodge Plugs, also tended to 'keep to themselves' and had concert evenings in the canteen solely for employees. Even the local dances were 'segregated' by parish, as invariably the dances were held in local church halls and depended on where the women lived. The only dance in the town that was available to all was that held in the local Co-op hall, but even then there were regulars who formed a clique.

However, it must be remembered that the smaller firms in Rugby did not have the resources to provide recreational activities for their employees. Importantly, despite personal friendships, other firms could not create the sense of 'family' which the B.T.H. had succeeded in establishing. Companies such as the Rugby Steam Laundry, Aviss' Box Factory and Symington's Corset Factory did still command loyalty, however. Some women remarked that they preferred to work

for a smaller concern as they had direct links with their employer, rather than dealing with superior employees of large monopolies such as the B.T.H. This philosophy is reinforced by the work of Sarsby who maintained that 'people preferred to know their bosses rather than to deal with personnel managers and the distant deities of multinational companies'.[35] Mrs Bushell worked for one of the smaller firms in the town, Aviss' Box Factory during the early 1930s. She recalled that Mr Aviss was a constant face in the factory. This was reinforced by the recollections of Mrs Catchpole who was employed by Aviss' for ten years from 1921 and was her one and only job of her lifetime.

> Alfred Aviss, he went under the name of Alfred Aviss and he had a brother that was there as well ... they were quite different people, we didn't like Alfred much ... we thought he was a sneaker. We used to be there sometimes talking and he'd suddenly appear. There were always little stories that came up from the office and before we knew it he was up them steps ... but the other one Lluellen, Llu he was, he always came up the other staircase from the bottom of the shop. You could always hear him coming, clop, clop, clop, and we'd say, 'Its only Llu', we could hear him coming. And he was quite different; they were as different as chalk and cheese.

Mrs Catchpole therefore had a very different experience of the work place from

[35] Sarsby, Missuses and Mouldrunners, p. 65.

those women who worked within the huge ranks of the B.T.H. and to a lesser extent, Willans and Robinson. Knowing your 'boss' did have advantages and perhaps in the case of Mrs Catchpole, could be said to have created a more secure, close-knit atmosphere. An example of the differences between immediate 'bosses' and those employed by the larger firms can be found in the experiences of Mrs Hutchinson. She worked originally for Findlay's Lamp Factory, which was later to become the B.T.H. after the First World War. She recalled:

> I was very happy there, lovely people to work for. They were Scottish people, a Mr Findlay and his sister-in-law ran this little factory ... I was still there, the war ended and then Findlay, he was elderly, he decided to retire and the B.T.H. ... Mazda Lamps bought him out, but on the understanding that girls that were left there were all given jobs down at the Works - that was the understanding; he was ever such a good man and he didn't want to see us out of work.

Mrs Hutchinson also recollected that changes that took place once her employer was the B.T.H.

> Well more strict, you would say. It was a bigger concern altogether, ladies, men, chemists, it was a big concern, the Lamp Works in those days. Working conditions, well they were all right, except that they were

very strict, no lax, oh no.

Experiencing two differing types of employer was uncommon, however. As stated, most women remained with one employer for most of their full-time working life. This was especially so, if the employer was regarded as superior to others and therefore preferable to work for.

Whereas the B.T.H. had the monopoly in prestige for factory and office work, in terms of shop work there were also particular stores that were singled out in the town to find employment. It was socially accepted that shop work was subordinate to other types of employment, however prestigious shops were seen as dependable employers.

Similar to the hierarchy of industrial concerns in the town, the local shops also had an accepted local 'pecking order'. This was primarily due to the Rugby School, whose boys and masters frequented particular shops and tradesmen, consequently lifting them to a higher regard than other stores. Those women who found work at names such as Lavender and Harrisons, a high-class grocer and Sam Robbins', who owned a department store in the town, were regarded as having secured 'good' employment. Mrs Gardner found work at Lavender and Harrisons in 1939 at the age of fourteen as a shop assistant. She recalled her parents pleasure when she found employment:

> Well, they were pleased I'd got a job, yes. It was a very high class shop ... it was considered 'the' shop in Rugby. Lord this and lady that used to shop there and so on. We used to have quite a lot of Lords and Lady this and that ... sometimes we never saw the, we never knew who they were, their chauffeurs used to come or they'd send in their gardener and his car, or it was delivered.

In addition to the local shops, during the 1920s and 1930s, three large chains, Boots, Woolworths and Marks and Spencers came to the town. From the memories of the oral respondents, it was clear that these stores had their own ranking system. The local branch of Marks and Spencer's was considered to be the superior employer, with Boots coming second, and Woolworths falling into last position.

Mrs Fuller was born in 1914 and originally found work in the factory at the Lodge Plugs. However, her allegiance quickly altered when the Lodge placed them on short time in 1932, when Mrs Fuller was eighteen.

> And then, I know ... when they started opening up Marks and Spencers in Rugby, so we thought, we'd been put off for a fortnight because they'd got no mica, so we thought, we'll go and get a job in Marks if we can. And the Labour Exchange was full and out of all that they set on, my sister and myself were two and a friend who went with us ... we got on. Oh, it was

> lovely working there, after working in a factory; it was a lovely firm to work for. I really enjoyed it.

Her mother was also very pleased that she had found alternative employment with a prestigious employer; 'She was glad when I got into Marks'. Mrs Fuller relished in her new status and was promoted from the counter staff to later become a 'floorwalker' who acted as supervisor to the sales assistants. As she recalled:

> But Marks and Spencers, they were so good. I mean you got perks there, you got so much discount off everything you bought, 20% they gave you, I couldn't believe it, two weeks wages for Christmas and they really looked after you there at Marks. It's a marvellous firm to work for.

Mrs McGrath reiterated these sentiments concerning employment at Marks and Spencers, which was her place of employment from the age of fourteen in 1934. She recalled that the store had their own chiropodist and doctor, that subsidised meals were provided in the canteen and that the wages were 'good' and she commented that 'Yes, I think they were just, they were higher than Woolworths, I do know that'.[36] Comments such as these reinforce the accepted traditional

[36] Croucher has suggested that the introduction of works canteens was a direct result of the use of female labour. He argues that women faced with dual occupations of worker and housewife and found it difficult to do their shopping. Canteens therefore provided a partial solution whereby employees could be fed and thus saving the housewife's time. For a detailed discussion see R. Croucher, Engineers at War 1939-45 (London, 1982), p. 265.

hierarchy of the chain stores in the town. As Mrs McGrath stated when asked if Marks and Spencers were considered superior to the other chains, she said 'Well I thought so, yes, we all thought so'. Similarly Mrs Constable specifically sought shop work in the early 1930s and was lucky enough to find work at Marks and Spencers; 'it was always thought a good place to work. Marks and Spencers and there was Woolworths, but Marks and Spencers always seemed a step higher than Woolworths you see'.

However, one oral respondent, Mrs Leigh remarked that she had always wanted to work in Woolworths and had dreamt of changing jobs at the age of sixteen, which was the age at which the company took on its shop assistants. Mrs Leigh's ideal job did not become a reality as she had to find work upon leaving school and found employment at the Lodge Plugs, and continued to work there until she was married. Despite the negative opinions concerning Woolworths, Mrs Garaghty recalled her extremely happy working years at the store. She started as a shop assistant on the haberdashery counter in 1945 at the age of fourteen. She knew that she definitely wanted to find employment in a shop and applied to Woolworths upon leaving school. However, she mentioned that she did not receive any discount on purchases, but that a bonus was given every Christmas after a few years of service. Mrs Garaghty remained at Woolworths for nineteen years, only finally leaving as her mother was ill and needed her at home. It would appear that Woolworths commanded a very loyal staff, as Mrs Garaghty recalled that most employees remained with the company for a number of years and

many built up twenty or thirty years service. However, despite Mrs Garaghty's loyalty to the company, she did make one particular comment that highlights the hierarchy of shop employment in the town.

> They were a good firm to work for really, on the whole but not as good as Marks and Spencers though; they were exceptional. And at Boots', I think you had to be a little bit better educated, a bit posher to work at Boots'. Really Woolworths had got the name, oh well, anyone worked at Woolworths type of thing, you know. It had got a bit of a bad name in that respect, as it was the poorest shop type of thing. Oh yes, people were a bit, down the nose, if you said you worked at Woolworths, but I didn't care.

The opinion that Boots' provided employment for those girls who had received a preferable education is reinforced by the memories of Mrs Mason who worked at the store for six years from 1947. She had attended a grammar school in Lutterworth and had ambitions to become a librarian. However, Mrs Mason did not find employment on the shop floor at the store, but was employed as a librarian by the company. This was during the time when a number of Boots' shops also included a library for subscribing members and was considered to be more elitist than the local public library. She recalled that 'yes, Boots' was a good company to work for'. Mrs Cashmore had sought work at Boots' in 1935 after leaving school but recalled that she was not a 'suitable' candidate and instead had to settle for the B.T.H. offices.

And of course, a lot of girls went into shop work, but er, if you didn't go to the Rugby High School, they wouldn't employ you at Boots'. 'Cause I did go there for work, but they wouldn't entertain me, 'cause I didn't go to Rugby High School.

From the oral evidence, it has become clear that most women had a tremendous loyalty to whichever firm or establishment they found work. This faithfulness was for most female employees unquestionable, despite the differences in 'perks' and welfare the town's employers offered. The 'choice' of employer did often mean that girls were placed in certain status brackets, but the memories of the oral respondents confirm that the 'choice' of employer did not mean that they suffered socially and certainly did not affect their overall happiness.

Training and education prospects

Well, you see nobody was career minded, not unless they had a good education. The only education I'd had was elementary really. I know we were lucky to have two years after, but we still didn't have anything on paper to say that we were, we'd passed any exams. There were no exams to pass, except those just for the teacher to see if any of it had sunk in.

Mrs Bridge's comment is representative of many of those women interviewed concerning their education and training prospects for their future employment. Most oral respondents only received an elementary education until the age of fourteen, unless they had passed for the grammar school and consequently left school two years later at sixteen years. Mrs Bridge was born in 1920 and her formal education ended in 1934. However, as she herself mentioned, she did receive 'two years after' in terms of education. She was referring to the Day Continuation School (D.C.S.) which was run by the local technical college for those adolescents between the ages of fourteen and sixteen. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, the D.C.S. was unique to Rugby and provided youngsters with an extra phase of education, one day a week, but still allowing them to hold down full-time employment.

Attendance at the D.C.S. was compulsory and, from the oral evidence, it would appear that most women did receive this extra education. Of course there were exceptions, for example if a girl found work outside the borough, even though she lived in the town, she would not be forced to attend. However, it would be fair to say that most youngsters acquired additional skills from their weekly attendance. Importantly, this gave the town's young work force uniformity in terms of education, which did not depend on their 'choice' of work. However, such equality could not be said of the training young girls received whilst they were undertaking their regular employment. Consequently, it is necessary to discover to what degree the 'choice' of employer affected a girl's ability and

prospects for training and education, and any subsequent promotion. As Mrs Bridge recalled, 'nobody was career minded'; so was education and the acquisition of extra qualifications or training of any importance to a young fourteen year old girl?

Compared to other towns, working-class girls in Rugby were considered as privileged in receiving additional education after the official school-leaving age of fourteen. However, to what degree did the schooling at the D.C.S. influence or change the employment opportunities of the girls? After all, required attendance was only one day a week for two years and it is reasonable to ask how valuable were the lessons which were being taught in such a short space of time. This is not to take away the importance of extra education, as Rugby girls were obviously being offered more than other similar working-class girls in the country. Nonetheless the subjects taught were tailored to meet the supposed needs of girls during the period.

Significantly, girls were placed into distinct groups according to their current occupation: either 'commercial' or the 'housecraft' groups which essentially restricted a girl's ability to seek alternative employment after their initial 'choice' at the age of fourteen. For example, those girls who were working in the local factories or shops were usually placed in the 'housecraft' group, which meant they received no tuition in clerical tasks, such as typing and shorthand, unless they undertook evening classes. Thus, these girls were constrained to stay in this

type of employment and could not seek future advancement in clerical work, as they had no suitable skills to offer employers. In contrast, those girls who were able and lucky enough to 'choose' office employment at the age of fourteen received excellent tuition in clerical skills. They were able to ensure the possibility of future advancement at work and use their skills to bargain for higher wages when seeking alternative employment.

Essentially, therefore, the D.C.S. 'streamed' the girls according to their 'choice' of employment which, as I have argued, was not always the desire of the girl, but a matter of financial necessity or loyalty to parental opinions or traditions. Mrs Purnell was born in 1917 and became a clerical apprentice at the B.T.H. in 1931. Her memories regarding the D.C.S. are indicative of the attitudes towards the different 'streams' of classes. She recalled:

> You know the Day Continuation School ... you had your 'A' stream and your 'B' stream on your day. Your 'A' stream people automatically did your secretarial subjects, and the 'B' stream were the ones that went into service. And this depending on your intelligence, that's how it was decided, and the 'B' stream were perfectly happy to go into service.

Of course, the workings of the D.C.S. were not as simplistic as Mrs Purnell's memories suggest. However, she was obviously aware of the differing groups that existed and the status implications of being placed in one stream rather than

another. Girls were placed into the different groups using their type of employment as a guide and therefore some girls missed the opportunity to improve themselves within the world of work.

Despite its short-fallings, as shown in the previous chapter, parents and local industrialists displayed full support of the D.C.S. and the opportunities it offered adolescents in the town. However, those women who attended the classes had different attitudes towards the D.C.S. and their educational prospects. It is not surprising that those girls who gained the most from the D.C.S. awarded the most praise for the institution. Mrs McGrath attended the D.C.S. in the mid-1930s. She had found work at the local Marks and Spencers shop and recalled that she was grateful for the additional education she received.

> Well, yes, actually I would like to have gone to the High School, we had exams as you know, and I just didn't try, because I knew she [her mother] couldn't afford to keep me at school another year. But I went to Day Continuation School then, one a week for two years, Marks and Spencer let me have time off. It was mainly general, um subject, just continuing your education. I also went to evening classes, took shorthand and typing, thought it might be useful. And er, I was pleased, I've still got my last report, because I came top of the college, and so I think now I could have got to the High School.

For Mrs McGrath, the D.C.S. offered her the chance to excel, which she had not been able to achieve at school. Significantly, the D.C.S. offered education within a different and unique environment. Socially, it provided new opportunities to mix with a variety of people. Mrs Thomas recalled that she thoroughly enjoyed her attendance from 1924 to 1926, mainly because of the people she was meeting. Similarly, other women recalled that they had an enjoyable time during those two years. Mrs Huggett was born in 1924 and found work at Symington's Corset Factory in 1938. She was placed in the 'housecraft' group and recalled:

> Oh, yes, I mean, I hadn't passed any exams to go anywhere, although there was a Day Continuation School. Oh, yes I went to that ... we had happy times there, but ... you had to cram everything into one day, what you used to do at school all week.

One respondent, Miss Sales, recollected that she desperately wanted to attend the D.C.S. However her mother had found her work in their village on the outskirts of the town as a companion to an old lady and somehow she 'slipped through the net' of the local education authority and did not attend the extra schooling.

> I lived in a village and unfortunately that was something my mother was against. This is why I had this job in the village. I would have liked to have gone ... Looking back now it would have been a good thing, but I missed

out on it.

Despite Miss Sales' desire to attend the D.C.S., some women recollected that they had very ambivalent attitudes towards the scheme. A frequent remark was that the women looked forward to attending the D.C.S., not because of the education they would receive, but because it offered a day off from their normal activity of going to work. Mrs Morse found work at Rugby School as a domestic servant in 1925.

> Well, some subjects I liked, but it was case of having to go, whether you liked it or not. You see wherever you worked they let you off that day, and they paid you because it was compulsory to do so. That's the first job that I had, and where I went he was a master at Lawrence Sheriff school, so they quite liked the idea you see.

In contrast, however, Mrs Grahame recollected that she disliked her time at the D.C.S. Firstly, she was placed in the 'commercial' side, despite the fact that she had found employment at Symington's Corset Factory. How she came to be included in the typing and shorthand lessons is unknown, as it went against the usual policy of the D.C.S. She recalled, 'No didn't like it, didn't want to do it and I resented it, just didn't want to do it, so of course consequently I was no good at it'. Secondly, she resented attending one day a week, because she lost money from her weekly wages. At the Corset Factory, she was undertaking 'piece-work'

and therefore a full day out of the factory meant less money to take home to her mother.

The nature of the education offered through the D.C.S. scheme consequently allowed some girls to succeed rather than others. The effect of the D.C.S. upon a girl's employment future was essentially dependent on whether a girl was placed in the appropriate 'stream' for the employment 'choice' of her future. Essentially the D.C.S. created a two-tier system, with those girls receiving 'housecraft' lessons being aware that they were acquiring a subordinate education when compared to their counterparts on the 'commercial' side.[37] Uniformity for fourteen to sixteen year olds might have been achieved in terms of usual school subjects and the D.C.S., but in terms of possible future promotion at work, girls found themselves firmly rooted in one of two camps: clerical or factory work.

In contrast to the D.C.S., training at work in Rugby tended to be haphazard and usually depended on the employer in question and his trade. It is difficult to discuss the training of young women in the town, without reference to the role of the B.T.H. I have already discussed the company's involvement with the D.C.S. and evening classes, and there can be no doubt that a large number of women succeeded in achieving high levels of skills, especially within the clerical sector,

[37] A contrasting argument offered by Bourke. In her work that concentrates on the late nineteenth century, she maintains that girls were eager to participate in domestic education and that parents saw it was a vital part of 'growing up'. See J. Bourke, 'Housewifery in working-class England 1860-1914' in P. Sharpe (ed.), Women's Work: the English Experience 1650-1914 (London, 1998), p. 342.

by securing a job with the B.T.H. at the age of fourteen. Mrs Jennings is one example. She started with the company in 1920, straight after leaving her elementary school and after two years was successfully placed on the clerical apprenticeship scheme, reserved for those girls with most promise and aptitude.[38] She recalled that she thoroughly enjoyed the extra tuition she received, initially at the D.C.S. and evening classes and secondly within the apprenticeship scheme she was involved in at work.

> You got a rise once a year if you made the grade and that rise was a shilling a week. So your nine shillings went up to ten and when you were fully qualified and working for, say, a head of department, the maximum was approximately two pounds and ten shillings a week and you were lucky if you got up to that. Those were the conditions, but we had a very good grounding. And the B.T.H. in those days were considered by everybody all over the world to be a very good grounding and if you had been an apprentice, ... been apprenticed at the B.T.H. you could get a job anywhere in the world. It had a very good name ... I wouldn't have got such a good training anywhere else.

However, despite Mrs Jennings' gratitude towards the company for her clerical

[38] The existence of female clerical apprenticeships does not correlate with the argument offered by Tait, who suggests that employers are 'chary' of training girls due to their primary interest in the home. This attitude is distinct from that of male apprentices who are seen as worth investing in. See M. Tait, The Education of Women for Citizenship: some practical suggestions (Paris, 1954), p. 53.

training, she later found alternative work in the office at the local council, which was a position that offered higher wages. She maintained that it was only her qualifications gained by working for the B.T.H., however, which allowed her to find higher paid work elsewhere.

Consequently, it would seem that those girls, who found employment in the 'white collar' sector within the town, were more likely to receive a 'universal' training, which could be exploited to find other employment. Whereas starting work in the B.T.H. offices provided girls with a general office instruction, which could be offered to other employers, those girls in the factory were only taught relatively monotonous tasks which could only be used within the company and therefore restricted their chances of finding alternative employment. The B.T.H. consequently provides an example of a company who offered a two-tier training opportunity, which ultimately depended on a girl's occupational 'choice' and where she was placed at the age of fourteen.

As I have explained the B.T.H. had no shortage of willing employees and was never really faced with a scarcity of prospective staff or workers. This was connected to the traditional altruistic nature of the company towards the town's inhabitants, but was also influenced by the instruction offered by the company, which was a prime consideration for parents when seeking work for their daughters. A young work force allowed the B.T.H. to pay relatively low wages and, as Becker cites in his work, Human Capital, usually the cost of general

training is borne by the trainee as they could have found better wages elsewhere.[39] Becker maintains that any trainee eventually collects a 'return of their investment' when they receive higher wages after their training period, and in that way the company is investing in 'human capital'.[40] Those women who found work in the offices at the B.T.H reinforce such theories. As young girls, they were aware that working in the factory offered higher wages due to the 'piece-work' nature of the employment. Clerical work, which offered a higher degree of training, offered lower wages but, significantly, offered a skill which they could use within other companies and perhaps later in life. Significantly, female clerical workers could command relatively high salaries once they were fully trained, and eventually could surpass those wages earned by factory workers.

The difference in training offered by the B.T.H. was essentially connected to the area of the company a girl found work. Chapman, in his study, The Economics of Training, has taken Becker's work further and has separated training into two distinctive types. This is a useful analogy to describe the workings of the B.T.H.[41] First, he maintains that there is 'general training' which provides the trainee with skills which increase the productivity of the company, but which can also be easily utilitised by other companies. This ultimately, therefore, facilitates job change on the part of the worker. It is this type of universal training that was

[39] G.S. Becker, Human Capital (London, 1975).
[40] Becker, Human Capital, p. 23.
[41] P.G. Chapman, The Economic of Training (Hemel Hempstead, 1993).

provided by the B.T.H. for those girls who were employed in the offices and especially those who were taken on under the clerical apprenticeship scheme.

Alternatively, Chapman argues there is 'specific training' which involves the learning of tasks which are unique to each individual firm and which cannot be used as a bargaining tool if the employee was seeking different employment. Working within the B.T.H. factory, regardless of the department, provided girls with a very 'specific training', as they were involved in mundane and repetitious tasks, which were essentially unskilled, and which could not be carried via employees to other employers. Beddoe, when researching female employment between the wars, found an increasing number of women were finding work in the electrical industry, of which the B.T.H. was a large component.[42]

> The female labour force in the new industries was very young. Using the example of electrical engineering ... of some 50,000 women employed in 1931, 35,500 were under 24; of these 11,500 were under 17. Contemporary observers were quick to point out the non-progressive nature of these jobs. They could in no way be regarded as training for better jobs.[43]

Factory girls working in the B.T.H., were not only restrained by their 'specific

[42] D. Beddoe, Back to Home and Duty (London, 1989).
[43] Beddoe, Back to Home and Duty, p. 67.

training', but were often restricted in their 'choice' of employment as they were 'following in the footsteps' of previous generations of their family and had a degree of loyalty towards the firm. This essentially prevented them from seeking alternative employment. As Becker states:

> The willingness of workers or firms to pay for specific training should, therefore, closely depend on the likelihood of labour turnover'.[44]

As discussed, workers who started work at the B.T.H. usually remained as constant employees for a number of years, usually until marriage for women and often until retirement for men. 'Specific training' for women for the manufacture of B.T.H. products was therefore a good investment for the company, as it was assumed that when a girl started at fourteen, it was probable that she would remain with the firm for the following five to ten years. Importantly, 'employees with specific training have less incentive to quit, and firms have less incentive to fire them, than employees with no training or general training'.[45]

However, women would not have considered the theories advocated by Becker and Chapman, despite their relevance in this discussion, when starting work during the period. Circumstances experienced and 'choices' made by Rugby women tended to be connected to the everyday situations and lives of their

[44] Becker, Human Capital, p. 29.
[45] Becker, Human Capital, p. 32.

families. Chapman maintains that:

> Individuals will undertake training decisions at several stages of the occupational life cycle, especially before entering the labour market, within employment and through occupational choice decisions.[46]

Chapman's importance of training in connection with the 'choice' of employment is debatable when looking at the oral evidence. As discussed, decisions regarding employment were often related to family ties and expectations, a sense of loyalty towards particular firms and essentially the ability of a girl to earn in particular occupations. In addition, it was often seen as more important for a male child to learn a skill and become 'trained', than a daughter. Invariably, 'women were expected to be ready to accept jobs with little or no career prospects, since marriage, accompanied by withdrawal from paid work, was assumed to be their universal destiny'.[47]

The assumption that female education, training and employment were of lesser importance was reinforced convincingly by the memories of the oral respondents. In Mrs Fretwell's case her parents decided that only one child could have a grammar school education, due to family finances. The money was subsequently spent on her brother, who was seen as being a more deserving cause, as he

[46] Chapman, Economics of Training, p. 125.
[47] G. de Groot and M. Schrover (eds.) Women Workers and Technological Change in Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, (1995) p. 5.

needed a superior education for his future 'career'. The use of the term 'career' was hardly ever used in relation to female children. Mrs Byfield had ambitions to become a nurse, when she left school at fourteen in 1937, but recalled that she did not have the chance, 'No, not in those days, parents couldn't afford to send you to places to have the training, not those days'. Instead, Mrs Byfield began working as a factory girl, which she remained for the whole of her working life.

Factory work was often the easiest of options for working-class girls. First they could earn a decent wage, which was often higher than their 'training' clerical counterparts. Secondly, the girls needed no previous experience to start work and only required a general elementary education. Thirdly, within the town, there were a number of opportunities for a variety of factory work, ranging from electrical engineering to cigar making. However, after securing their first employment position they were usually 'trapped' by their 'specific' training, which was simultaneously regarded as 'women's work'.

As argued by de Groot and Schrover, traditionally women and technology were not linked.[48] Essentially, the Victorian feminine image of the female at work was associated with genteel occupations that were extensions of the woman's world in the home. However, 'technological change facilitates the re-gendering of work'.[49] Thus during the period, more and more women were involved in factory

[48] de Groot and Schrover (eds.), Women Workers and Technological Change, p. 1.
[49] de Groot and Schrover (eds.), Women Workers and Technological Change, p. 1

work, working with machines which had become lighter and more easily managed by the female build. Significantly, however, those tasks attracting women workers were invariably extensions of household chores, which had been taught and socialised into the minds of girls from an early age.

> The masculine image of technology is reserved for certain types of technology. Sewing and knitting, requiring knowledge, training and sometimes the use of machines, do not have a technological 'ring'.[50]

Such opportunities in Rugby were offered by Symington's Corset Factory, which was usually considered a 'good' place of employment, if a girl had shown a tendency towards sewing and housecraft. 'The ability to do this work, however, was seen as 'natural'. The 'skill' was seen as hereditary, passed on from mother to daughter, as it seemed impossible to acquire it in the training period that was customary for this work'.[51] Such presumptions were made for those girls who found work at Symington's. Mrs Grahame started at the factory in 1930 at the age of fourteen. She had been open to suggestions concerning her future employment and it was her brother's girlfriend who recommended Symington's. She recalled:

> I wanted something different ... me brother's girlfriend said, er, 'Why don't

[50] de Groot and Schrover (eds.), Women Workers and Technological Change, p. 1.
[51] de Groot and Schrover (eds.), Women Workers and Technological Change, p. 6.

> you come and work where I am?' So I said, 'Oh I don't mind, I've always liked machining', even when I was at school, I er, I machined, er, er the science aprons. In them days we had aprons to go in the science room, you know, and of course, one day she said, 'Can anybody use a machine?'. So I put me hand up straight away, 'cause I had use me mum's machine.

Mrs Grahame's sewing skills were a result of her mother's 'training' within the home and were seen as suitable to be utilitised for her future employment. The suitability of Symington's for many girls was related to its domestic image. Harriet Bradley has argued similar points in her work concerning the hosiery industry.[52] She maintains that women within the textile industries were employed to undertake tasks that required 'nimble fingers' and close concentration. Such attributes were firstly assumed to be part of a woman's character and, secondly easily associated with the domestic image of women in the home.

> The sewing machine, and its successors, such as the overlocking and linking machines, were seen from the start as female machines. ... Sewing had long-standing domestic associations and these were extended to the sewing machine and variations on it.[53]

[52] H. Bradley, 'Frames of Reference: Skill, gender and new technology in the hosiery industry' in de Groot and Schrover, Women Workers and Technological Change, p. 17.
[53] Bradley, 'Frames of Reference', p. 24-5.

Such 'skills', which were seen as inherent within the female constitution, allowed the image of the 'angel' to continue. Victorian philanthropists had insisted that the woman's place was in the home; a pure haven where 'angels' could shine. Those women who found work in the textile industry or, in the case of Rugby, at Symington's were thus an extension of this image. Although they ceased to be at home solely looking after the household and family, they were undertaking tasks closely associated with the home and its relevant tasks. Notably, the work at Symington's was not unhygienic or dirty, and provided girls with a 'suitable' place of employment.

Although it was often assumed that girls seeking work within the textile industry would not need formal 'training', Symington's did provide instruction for the first few weeks of employment. However, the 'training' was 'specific' to the firm and, as no other opportunities of this type were available within the town, girls were increasingly likely to remain in the company's employment for a number of years. 'Natural' aptitude for the work was presumed, but Mrs Cooper recalled her first few weeks at Symington's after she started work there in 1931 at the age of fourteen. When asked how she came to find work at Symington's, she replied:

> Well, I um, friends of mine from the village, er, they worked at Symington's and they said it's very good once you get used to doing a certain job. You see they were making corsets and bras what have you. They said it's quite good once you get to know how to do it. You got a certain training.

Mrs Cooper's friends were obviously referring to ability to earn more wages, via piecework, once you had mastered the techniques required for the job. After a few days of watching and learning, girls were usually allowed to mark-up the cloth and a couple of weeks later were given their own machine. As Mrs Huggett recalled, some girls were pleased to receive a 'training'. She worked at Symington's from 1938 and as a school leaver was fairly daunted on her first day.

> Well, they called for me. It was all strange and that, but everyone was very good and I soon got into the ways. Well, it would be like a training you see cause you'd got to learn so much. And then they'd leave you on you're own and it was up to you then.

This type of 'specific' and limited 'training' could not be compared to that received by, for example, clerical trainees at the B.T.H. and those women involved in occupations needing only 'specific' training were restricted in any promotion they sought. Some women did continue at Symington's to become overseers or supervisors, but those women who had worked for the company for a considerably long time usually held these positions.

'Specific' training for girls in Rugby was experienced by most that found work in the local factories. Those girls employed by the larger firms, the B.T.H., Willans and Robinson and the Lodge Plugs, however, did find it easier to move jobs across the companies. Despite most tasks being distinctive and individual to the

firms concerned, the manufacturing nature of employment extended some leeway when seeking alternative employment. However, all 'training' periods were short and erratically organised. Mrs Byfield remembered her first days at the B.T.H. Lamp Factory in 1937. This was her first experience of work and she recalled:

> You just had to pick it up as you went along in those days. I mean you had no training as such, you perhaps watched a girl for half an hour, and then you just carried on.

Mrs Hutchinson experienced the same type of 'training' when the Lamp Factory had been owned by the Findlay's before the end of the First World War. She started with the company in 1917 straight from school.

> The lady in charge, at Findlay's ... she would come along, there would be someone in charge and say we've got a new girl starting, will you show her what to do and how to do it. They gave you a day or two to learn.

Mrs Davies who worked at the B.T.H. assembling motor starters reinforced such experiences. Whilst she recollected that the girls were shown the task they had to complete, 'usually there was a girl doing that job anyway, she'd more or less kept her eye on us'. The use of fellow employees to 'train' new starters was usual in most factory scenarios. The companies therefore offered no formal factory

training for their employees, but relied on the expertise of existing workers to ensure continuity of production. Significantly, Rugby establishments did not invest any money in the training of their factory personnel. The D.C.S. provided a very general education and in no way catered for the training of the factory worker. However, due to the 'specific' nature of the employment, most girls were cornered and, to a certain extent, trapped within this type of work for all of their working lives. In addition, the firms knew that there would always be a constant supply of new prospective factory girls. The constant cycle from childhood to work and lastly to marriage ensured that new school leavers seeking the piecework rates always replaced those girls who left work to get married by factory work.

Factory girls also complained of monotony. Their 'on the job' training did not allow for promotion or career and often girls found themselves 'stuck' in a rut. Such monotony is confirmed by the memories of Rugby women. They recalled that the community interpretation of factory girls was usually that they were intellectually inferior to those who found work elsewhere. Invariably due to the repetitious nature of factory work, it was considered to be of lower status and requiring less intellect than office work. Mrs Jessop remembered that her mother had found work before marriage in a factory, and had not wanted her to follow this example.

Well, of course, she didn't want me to go in the factory. She did,

> Bluemels, for a while, but that was all that was open to her, because she had no education at all. But no, she didn't want me, and I didn't want to, I suppose because of her attitude I didn't want to, you see.

The `new' industries invariably offered work on a `piece-work' basis. This usually involved the repetition of the same monotonous task for hours per day. Mrs Byfield recalled her first job in 1937, at the age of fourteen:

> I went to the B.T.H. first, um, I used to dip the, you know the fairy lights on Christmas trees, I used to dip those in different coloured dyes.

Not surprisingly, she left the B.T.H. Lamp Factory within six months to find work at the Lodge Plugs, which was still in a factory, but she found it slightly less monotonous than colouring bulbs for hours a day. However Mrs Morse, who went to work at the Lodge Plugs during the war in the early 1940s, recalled that watching machines was very tedious:

> I think there was about six machines ... well first of all I went in what they called `inspection'. We just used to have to; it was rather boring. You just put this plug and inspected it to see if it was all right. Well I very often used to fall asleep doing it you know.

Similarly, Mrs Leigh recalled her work in the 1940s at the Lodge Plugs, which

involved

> `putting the screw tops on plugs. One hundred and forty four on a big tray, and you just sat with these all day, one in each hand screwing them on, for a farthing a gross'.

Mrs Bridge only stayed at the Lodge Plugs during the mid 1930s, for fifteen months because the work was so monotonous. She gave in her notice and instead found work as an usherette at one of the local cinemas and found the happiness and contentment she had been looking for: `I enjoyed the cinema, I felt ... it was fun and fun had been lacking a lot in my life up till then'. However some women worked at the Lodge Plugs virtually all of their working life, despite the boredom of the work. Miss Court was born in Rugby in 1914, and was only a matter of minutes away from the Lodge all of her life. She found work at the Lodge in 1929 in the porcelain department.

> Well, I went into the porcelain department where we were transferring pot tops; they were to go on the plugs. We used to have to put a transfer; we had a peg and put the pot tops on and put the transfer on and then we used to have to go to wash the fine paper off and we used to put them out to dry.

Miss Court was later placed on night shift in a different department that involved

the use of machinery. She recalled:

> And when we worked nights, the Works Manager, Mr Herbert used to come round while we were on these machines doing our work and we had a book, a novel. We used to read while we were working and he used to come along. He never said anything and he used to pick it up to see how it ended. We just fed the machine and then you could read while it was grinding and finishing.

Memories of tedious tasks and boredom in the Rugby factories serve to epitomise a wider picture of women's work in the inter-war period.

A two-tier system existed within Rugby and girls were quickly placed into one of the two categories, a placement that is worth closer examination. Mrs Leigh recalled distinctions between factory and office workers throughout her working life. She worked at both the Lodge Plugs and the B.T.H. and was aware of her job in the local factories as being of lower status.

> You were always inferior to the office staff, always, but we used to say if there wasn't us workers there'd be no office staff. 'Course they were always able to work and wear their best clothes, you know, and it was always a bit, `toffee-nose', we used to say. More so at the Lodge Plugs, because it was a smaller place, you seen the office girls. But when you

were out, socially, if they worked in the office, `Oh, she works in the offices', you know, but eventually you got to be on the same level, especially if you were squabbling over boyfriends or something.

Mrs Jessop compared her work, images and status to that of her cousin:

> I was earning four pound fifty a week and my cousin worked at Lodge Plugs and she was earning six pounds a week and she said `You are silly, I could get you a job easily', but it was factory work. That's a bit snobbish I know. I just didn't want factory work. I did go into the works offices, after I was married, but in the office at the G.E.C.

Similarly, Mrs Fretwell, who started work at the B.T.H. in 1932 as an office girl, recalled that factory work was never an option for her:

> No, and do you know, it's awfully sad there were two strata of society at the B.T.H., you were either office or you were works. Works started at seven-thirty, and they sort of clocked in, and the office you didn't start 'till about nine o'clock, you just walked past the porter or whoever was on duty. Yes there was this business between works and staff I'm afraid.

Nevertheless, machinery still meant working with grease and oil, as Rugby women recalled. Mrs Morse described the dirty work she undertook at the Lodge

during the Second World War:

> We had to wear an overall, because there was a lot of grease, oil, you see, these plugs had to be done in oil so they didn't burn. And you used to get sodden in oil, shoes and stockings and overalls. They used to wash the things there; we didn't have to take those home. But you used to have to change your shoes every time you come out 'cause they used to be soaked in oil.

Noise was also a factor when factory work was considered. The amount of noise obviously depended on the part of the factory the girls worked in. Mrs Leigh recalled

> `the grind and the noise, ... it was so noisy, you had the machines going, you had to learn to lip read to talk to each other. We had to grind metal one week every month in front of a grindstone with your fingers all wrapped up, twiddling these bits of metal where they had been soldered together. Nobody liked it. Anyone who had got any money would pay you to change weeks, but you couldn't get away with that, the foreman wouldn't let you.

Mr Simpson's recollections of factory girls was formed in the 1940s and 1950s after entering the B.T.H. as a graduate apprentice and later becoming a

supervisor of some of the female factory workers in the light machine shop.

> My recollections of the girls in the factory, they were all very nice, but my God they were tough girls and it was the men who were frightened, oh absolutely. Especially at Christmas time when they had their `fuddle', they would get drunk, they would smuggle the drink in; it was quite forbidden ... it was the men who were frightened. Only at Christmas ... well they were predatory, they would set on any man nearby ... and I would be expected to look after these women and unbutton tops of their blouses and wheel them out as they passed out. It wasn't all hard labour; there was good fun.[54]

The 'fun' whether in the factory or the offices was relatively shortlived. In Rugby, most women found work between school and marriage, generally in their teenage years. The B.T.H., Willans and Robinson and the Lodge Plugs therefore provided new opportunities for those girls in the town.[55] Most women interviewed agreed with the belief that their rightful place was at home, running the household and caring for their children. Not surprisingly therefore, the majority

[54] Similar experiences were found in a Mass Observation Study of factory girls in 1937. See P. Gurney, '"Intersex" and "Dirty Girls": Mass Observation and Working-Class Sexuality in England in the 1930s', Journal of the History of Sexuality, 8 (1997), pp. 256-290.
[55] By 1914, the British electrical engineering industry was dominated by British Westinghouse and British Thomson-Houston and Siemens. For a detailed account of the development of the electrical engineering industry see Catterall, .'Electrical Engineering'.

left work upon marriage as it was considered `the right thing to do'.[56] In the B.T.H. offices they were offering a high standard of office instruction, despite the knowledge that most girls would probably only work until they were aged mid to late twenties when, as we shall see, marriage and childbearing became priorities. However, there was always a constant stream of girls seeking clerical careers to fill the majority of vacancies. In addition, most women interviewed recalled that they could have always returned to work after having a family because of their previous training. The B.T.H. gained, therefore, as there was a pool of workers who had been trained to their own specifications within the town, possibly seeking work later in life.

Consequently, working-class girls received a variety of 'training' and work experiences which was usually dependent on their 'choice' of employment and invariably associated with work regarded as suitable for females. Nonetheless, girls in Rugby did have the advantage of the D.C.S., which offered additional education, despite its debatable relevance to their future working lives. Some girls did benefit from the extra tuition and used it to make a difference to their employment prospects. However, from the memories of the oral respondents, it would appear that most working-class girls did not see 'training' and education as vital criteria when seeking work. Most never thought of any future promotion, but

[56] This is in contrast with other studies by Roberts that found that most women expected to continue to work after marriage. See Women and Families.

looked forward to the day when they could leave work, get married and have children.

Importance of choosing a marriage partner

> *Automatically you had your boyfriends and you got married and lived happy ever after.*

This fatalistic acceptance of marriage was prominent in all the memories of the oral respondents and is indicative of their expectations for their future social position. Some, of course, remained single all their lives, but recalled that they had always hoped, perhaps even assumed, that they would one day find the right man and settle down. As Mrs Williams recollected, marriage after a few years of work was regarded as 'automatic' and essentially secured a girl's future for the rest of her life. Consequently, it would seem that despite working-class girls wielding some 'choice' over their future employment, marriage and child-bearing was considered to be a social necessity to ensure future prosperity and credibility. However, girls usually did have a 'choice' concerning their marriage partner.[57] Using the oral evidence, it would appear that decisions taken when starting work concerning occupation and future employers could affect the possible 'choice' of marriage partner. Various employers offered different

[57] Weinberger's study of policemen found that police officers were highly desirable marriage partners because their security and reasonable wage. See B. Weinberger, 'A policewife's lot is not a happy one: police wives in the 1930s and 1940s', OralHistory, 21:2 (1993).

possibilities to meet suitable partners. For example, those girls working in the offices at the B.T.H. were often mixing socially with the graduate apprentices employed by the company, whereas girls working in the smaller factories in the town would not have the same opportunities to meet them. It is therefore necessary to focus on the degree of a girl's desire and opportunity to find a 'suitable' partner and how this aim affected her future.

Andrew Phillips, in his research concerning women in the rag trade between 1918 and 1950, highlighted the importance of finding a suitable marriage partner. He found that 'women had failed in life if they did not secure a husband'.[58] In addition, he was aware from his oral evidence that beneath the tales of courtship there was the desire of 'making a 'good match' with a man in a secure, well-paid job'.[59] The ability for a girl to 'marry well' was considered to be of fundamental importance and was seen as an integral part of a girl's success in life. After all, as we have seen, few girls sought a working 'career', and an appropriate marriage was considered to be a suitable recompense for not accomplishing promotion or recognition at work.

Marriage as a 'career' is the focus of Cicely Hamilton's ideas originally published in 1909.[60] She argued that middle-class women saw marriage not as a romantic ideal, but as an economic necessity for the female future. Marriage, Hamilton

[58] Phillips, 'Women on the shop floor', p. 60.
[59] Phillips, Women on the shop floor; p. 61.
[60] Cicely Hamilton, Marriage as a Trade, (1909; London, 1981 edn.).

argued was essentially a 'trade' which provided women with a source of work, 'in which woman earns her bread and the economic conditions under which she enters the family and propagates the race'.[61] Hamilton suggested that for women, 'love may or may not play a part, but she must 'trap' a man at all costs for her livelihood depends on it'.[62] Notably, she regarded the socialisation of girls as a 'training' for marriage. This reinforces the finding of respondents in Rugby, who had little interest in their work-place 'training' and education, as they assumed that marriage would be their eventual destiny. For Hamilton, marriage was essentially 'work' for women, and girls were encouraged to seek a suitable partner from an early age. Whereas a male's ambitions aspired to successful employment, daughters were persuaded that only marriage could fulfil their life's expectations. As Jane Lewis states:

> Hamilton argues that girls are trained to make themselves pleasing to men because marriage is the primary way for women to earn their living.[63]

Hamilton's view of marriage is inextricably linked to the suffrage struggle at the time of writing. Does this correlate with the women interviewed in Rugby? It is important to remember that Hamilton was referring to middle-class women, whereas the Rugby oral respondents were members of the working-classes. However, assumptions about marriage do seem to have been similar for both

[61] Hamilton, Marriage as a Trade, p. 17.
[62] J. Lewis, 'Introduction' to C. Hamilton, Marriage as a Trade.
[63] Lewis, 'Introduction', p. 1.

social groupings.

One of the features of Hamilton's ideas was the 'destiny' of marriage for women. Most women in Rugby had expectations of marriage and assumed that their future would be within wedlock. When asked about her hopes for marriage, Mrs Pearson, who married in 1937 at the age of twenty-three, recalled:

> Yes, I suppose I did really, it was the sort of thing, in those days, a girl did. She got married usually, unless she wanted to follow some specific career or perhaps had a disappointment and couldn't take to somebody else, 'cause they were like that you know in those days or was not lucky in meeting the right one. But the idea was that you did look forward to that.

Assumptions such as these had been a constant theme for a number of decades, despite the shortage of 'suitable' partners due to the First World War. 'Young women reaching adulthood in the 1920s found themselves in a social world still committed to marriage as the sole focus of a woman's fulfilment at a time when the actual supply of men to marry was seriously depleted'.[64] Finding a suitable marriage partner was therefore a 'job' in itself and in turn, as Hamilton describes; this took the romance out of marriage, which was replaced by the economic necessity of a partnership. As Giles states:

[64] J. Giles, Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain (London, 1995), p. 33.

> the anti-heroic mood of post First World War Britain (and latterly the fear of another world war) produced a social and moral climate that disavowed romance, sentimentality and displays of excessive emotion in favour of 'common-sense', prudence and reserve, particularly for working-class women for whom an 'imprudent' choice of marriage partner could seriously jeopardise their future lives.[65]

Hamilton maintained that for women the 'housekeeping trade is the only one open to us so we enter the housekeeping trade in order to live. This is not always quite the same as entering the housekeeping trade in order to love'.[66] However, the memories from Rugby women do not totally confirm this non-romantic theory, but they do reinforce those findings by Sarsby, in her work concerning women pottery workers. She found that,

> Undoubtedly many of these marriages were love-matches, although some girls seem to have been unenthusiastic about their boyfriends at the outset. They appear to have grown to like them gradually, rather than to have experienced the coup de foudre.[67]

This ambivalent attitude towards marriage was not surprising. Most working-class girls had been conditioned and socialised into believing that marriage was

[65] Giles, Women, Identity and Private Life', p. 33.
[66] Hamilton, Marriage as a Trade, p. 27.
[67] Sarsby, Misuses and Mouldrunners, p. 80.

inevitable, natural, and essentially pragmatic for all females. Mrs Leigh who recalled that she just 'moseyed' along into courtship and eventual marriage in 1949 demonstrated such a perspective.

> We grew up together, but we didn't know each other well until I was about fifteen, and he asked me to go to the pictures one night. Well, we went on being friends and he went in the army when I was sixteen and I wrote to him and then after a year he went abroad and he didn't write to anybody for two years and three months, not his mother or anybody. I used to go dancing a lot and I had other boyfriends and then all of a sudden I had a letter to say if you're still my girlfriend, please write to me! So I wrote to him and I don't think he ever proposed; we just went on from there.

Tales of passionate, intense or rapid relationships were rare. Working-class girls tended to accept that a few years of courtship were socially necessary before marriage. Usually, couples met one another during their teenage years and after a few dates quickly established themselves as a 'couple'. Once this status had been achieved, it tended to herald an acceptance that they would one day marry. None of the women interviewed mentioned that they dated a large number of men before finding their eventual partner. This may have been due to a reluctance to share such information, but it would seem that most women met their husband-to-be relatively early in their lifetime and quickly settled for them being the 'right' partner. Mrs Huggett married at the age of twenty-seven in 1951

and did not have to look far for her husband:

> Well, he was next door. He was a widower. Yes it was like the man next door. He was older than I was, but it just turned out like that. Yes we had a nice happy life.

Such an acceptance of a future married life runs through most of the interviews of the Rugby women. Most recall their teenage years attending various dances and social events in the town. It was through this social mixing that most partnerships were established and future lives decided. 'Dances were an important meeting-place for young men and women - an assumption made by the dancers themselves, their parents, church officials, masters of ceremonies, and dance promoters alike'.[68]

However, different dances offered differing opportunities of meeting a suitable partner. First, there were the church dances, which attracted a wide range of youngsters from a variety of occupations. Such socials were usually confined to certain parishes and involved those teenagers who had already spent many years growing up together in the same district of the town. Secondly there was the local weekly dance at the Co-op Hall, which attracted young men and women from all over the town. Attending a dance at that venue offered opportunities to meet a diverse range of people. Thirdly, and most importantly, within Rugby were

[68] Roberts, A Woman's Place, p. 71.

the dances and socials held at two clubs: the Girl's Welcome Club and the B.T.H. Girls Club.

Mrs Thomas met her husband whilst attending the Girl's Welcome Club, which was run by the local parish church. She recalled that the club offered a very comfortable, religious atmosphere whereby the girls were all confirmed and took part in local activities and fund-raising. In addition they organised small dances at the weekends, whereby the girls could invite 'suitable' guests. Mrs Thomas recalled:

> I went to the Girl's Welcome Club; that's where I met my husband. We'd got a new girl in the office on filing, she and I went to the Girl's Welcome Club and I saw this fella. I sort of fancied him a bit you know, but she never let on it was her brother.

Those men invited to the club were usually connected to existing members and, above all, Christian members of the community. The dances were always chaperoned by the matron and ensured that male/female relationships were appropriate. Compared to other local dances, those at the Girl's Welcome Club were more select and subdued.

A similar atmosphere was created at the B.T.H. Girl's Club, which as the name suggested was run by the B.T.H. to ensure the welfare of their young female

work force. Membership was restricted to employees only and created a barrier between friendships with people employed by other companies. The importance of the B.T.H. Girl's Club, which was also known as 'The Firs', is undeniable. Most girls attended the club at some time during their working career and it provided a moral and social background to their social mixing with the opposite sex. The weekly dances provided opportunities for the girls to meet the graduate apprentices who were constantly being employed by the company and were invited to social events as 'suitable' dance partners. In some ways, the B.T.H. could be seen as encouraging such partnerships between their employees. After all, if both husband and wife worked for the company, then an even greater degree of loyalty would be created not only in their lifetime, but also within the next generation when they had a family. Significantly, girls working for other companies did not have this opportunity to meet such 'suitable' marriage partners, who were ultimately being trained for the highest paid jobs within the company.

Mrs Purnell was born in 1917 and joined the B.T.H. as a clerical apprentice in 1931. She, of course, had access to the Girl's Club and eventually married one of the graduate apprentices. Later in life, Mrs Purnell taught secretarial skills at a local school and she recollected what she told her young pupils:

> Oh yes, it was, I used to say to the girls at school, when they used to say 'Oh, no we don't want to go into a big firm', when it came up to the time for

> leaving. I said, 'Well, wait a minute, you can have a lot of fun, I met my husband there'. Of course, the B.T.H. apprentices were a lot, there was great excitement with all those, it was very much one-upmanship if you were invited out by one of those apprentices. One of the girls who came from a very poor family, she married a Lord ... and everybody was tickled pink at this, and his mother trained her as to how she should behave. There was another one; she was a beauty, who married Dr. Gable, who was a Nobel Peace Prize-winner, so there were some very good marriages made. It was a lovely place to work.

Although such cases were highly unusual, Mrs Purnell's memories serve to highlight the general accepted principle that the graduates employed by the company were regarded as the most 'suitable' of all B.T.H. employees for marriage. As Mrs Long recalled, she was fortunate to meet her husband and marry him in 1938, 'He was down at the A.E.I., he um, the inspector on the job, test inspector on the cookers when they were made up, very clever man, I was lucky in a way.'

Comments such as these emphasise the significance of a prospective husband's occupation, which could dictate future prosperity for the couple. For example, those girls who were 'lucky' enough to marry graduates often found themselves moving in different social circles from their childhood. One particular part of Rugby, known as 'Happy Valley' was an area where the working-classes lived in

terraced housing. Evidence from the oral respondents show that quite a number of girls moved from this area, into semi-detached housing in a significantly non-working class district of the town, upon marriage to a 'suitable' man.

Most women showed an awareness of the importance of their boyfriend's and eventual husband's occupation for their future. Mrs Morse was born in 1911 and married at the age of thirty-one in 1942. When asked how she met her husband, she recalled,

> At a dance, down Cambridge Street, at St. John's Hall, we were down there, and he hadn't got a very big job, so I've often wondered how we managed. He was a slinger.

Mrs Morse's comments relating to her husband's type of employment were impromptu and reflect her realisation about her future financial prospects. Similarly Mrs Cashmore, who married in 1941 at the age of twenty, stated that her husband worked for the Portland Cement Company and that it was 'Not very good pay, but um, a very secure job'. It would appear that most women were not too concerned about their future as long as their husband had a reliable source of employment.

However, one husband did worry about his ability to keep his future wife as affluently as her parents had. Mrs Cryer's parents owned a butcher's shop in the

town and she experienced a relatively comfortable life-style before her marriage. She recalled:

> I remember I was courting then, and my husband was apprenticed to be a pattern maker and he used to say, 'You want to go and find somebody else'. Money wise, as we grew up, we didn't lack for money; we didn't have all the comforts that some people did either. And he always thought he wouldn't be able to keep me as I was kept. He thought that when he finished his apprenticeship he would be out of a job, because work was bad. He always used to say, 'Find somebody else'. But anyway I stuck to him, but he never was out of work, I've got to say. We did survive.

It cannot be denied therefore, that future prospects were of consideration when girls were seeking their marriage partner. However, from the memories of the oral respondents it appears that most marriages were essentially 'love-matches' rather than calculated partnerships to ensure economic prosperity. However, some girls were more 'lucky' than others in finding husbands who were able to provide significantly more security and a better standard of living and general life opportunities.

Often the 'choice' of husband and their occupation, affected the chances of a woman being expected or needing to work after marriage. Mrs Jennings continued to work after her marriage due to the war in the early 1940s. However,

she recalled that she did not need to work.

> As soon as he [her husband] was de-mobbed from the army, the first thing he said was 'You've done your share of work now, you give your notice in, and enjoy things and enjoy life', which I did. I never worked after that.

Mrs Jennings' husband had a relatively well paid job after the war at the B.T.H. and therefore in 1945 she finished her working 'career'. However, not all women could finish work in this way. Mrs Allen married in 1940 at the age of twenty-five. She met her husband while she was working on the Isle of Wight as a domestic servant.

> He was in a home for asthmatics ... so when I came home, when war broke out, of course he was in a non-essential job; he was going to have to move. But he was an asthmatic, so, my friend who lived in Rugby, she said 'Well bring him up here, I'll get my husband to get him a job at English Electric' and he did. When he left the Isle of Wight he got thirty-two and sixpence a week, and the first week he was in English Electric his wage was six pound one shilling, and he thought he was a millionaire.

Her married life was never easy due to her husband's medical problems and she frequently sought part-time work in order to bring extra money into the household:

> And every year round about Christmas my husband's asthma got worse and then he got pneumonia and pleurisy and he was off work for some time. I had to get a job charring, and although I only got one and six an hour it made all that difference to living.

The degree of necessity for Rugby women to find work thus depended on the ability of their husband to provide an adequate wage. As we have seen, working-class girls saw marriage as their 'destiny' and therefore the 'choice' of marriage partner essentially dictated their future. However, all respondents stated that they had been extremely happy in their marriage, even if they had suffered hardships at times. Most importantly, most respondents expected and wanted marriage to be their future, whatever their social and financial situation. As Mrs Cryer recalled:

> Yes, I wanted to get married, yes. That was my ideal, because that's the way we girls looked at our lives then.

Conclusion

By using the oral evidence, it is possible to identify four factors which affected and altered a working-class girl's future after her initial 'choice' of occupation: her new economic status, her choice of employer, her prospects for education and training and her choice of marriage partner. The 'choice' of work upon leaving

school had definite ramifications for the future, but it is debatable as to whether Rugby women were aware of the implications created by such decisions.

Primarily what is apparent from the oral evidence is an over-riding acceptance of a female social cycle: school-work-marriage-childbearing. Upon leaving school, adolescent girls felt that they would 'follow in their mother's footsteps' and conform to the domestic ideology promoted by the Victorians and continued into the twentieth century. Most women expressed a desire to marry and have children and overwhelmingly regarded work as a temporary, if somewhat necessary measure. Some type of paid work was seen as essential in order to fulfil their obligations towards their parents and help the family finances. This was instilled into the girls from an early age, together with the acceptance that it would only be until they could find a 'suitable' marriage partner, who would then provide them with their future or 'destiny'.

The importance of paid work between the years of school and marriage was three-fold. First, it offered the girls a chance to earn their own money. This simultaneously altered the economic status of the girl within the home, but as I have shown, did not necessarily increase their social freedom. Secondly, starting work in their chosen occupation dictated their ability to achieve promotion. This depended both on the type of work involved, which could provide 'specific' or 'general' training and whether or not a girl had chosen an employer who supported extra training and education for their employees. However, it must

be remembered that all adolescents attended the D.C.S. Thirdly, their working years were combined with adolescent years of social mixing and could affect their ability to meet an eligible partner.

The importance of those working years between childhood and marriage were vital to the future of most working-class girls. However, their experiences at work differ greatly and often did not live up to the expectations. Such questions about their 'role' in the work place, the perceptions of women's work and day-to-day experiences will be tackled in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

The female 'powerbase' at work and at home

The previous chapters have focused on a series of factors that influenced the lives of working women during the period. I discussed the degree of 'choice' for female adolescents upon starting work and how such decisions could affect their future working and social status. Such factors are what I term 'internal', as they are particular to each girl and her individual and local surroundings. In contrast, Chapter 4 concentrated on a much broader outlook and discussed the national perception and attitudes towards working women. For the female teenager, these 'outside' influences would be considered as 'external' as she was unable to control such national patterns of thought and behaviour. Consequently, if all these factors were taken as a whole, it would appear that young women had no way of asserting any authority concerning their future working life.

Whereas the previous chapters concentrated on the female adolescent, this chapter examines the level of 'power' and relationships achieved by women at work and in the marital home.[1] Consequently the term 'women' refers to those females who had left the parental home and who were now married with their own households, rather than single adult females who left home. As a result

[1] As discussed by E. Roberts, 'Working-class women in the North West', Oral History, 5:2 (1977). She suggests the working-class wives were not subservient to their husbands, but were their partners.

these women were no longer under the constraints set by parents and were now working adults. But to what degree did women achieve 'power' within the dual spheres of work and home life? This chapter therefore discusses the extent to which females were in the possession of power and how this authority altered according to their work, either within the home or in employment. How did women in the work place - whether the factory, office or shop – relate to the notions of patriarchy and paternalism? For example, women had traditionally been perceived to be the weaker sex and under the direct authority of either their father or husband but during the wars, were providing invaluable economic support within industry and commerce. Such economic behaviour was in direct contrast to the Victorian perception that a woman was the vital pivot and moral stalwart of family life and should remain at home to secure the future of her husband and family.

I will argue that there appears to be a paradox concerning what I term the female 'powerbase' during the period. This refers to the position of female authority in work and home situations and women's corresponding ability to exercise control over their lives. As has been suggested,

> patriarchal ideologies embodied the assumption that women should be 'inferior' and 'subordinate' to men, while family ideologies stressed, among other things, that women were morally 'superior'.[2]

[2]J. Purvis, Hard Lessons: the Lives and Education of Working-Class Women in Nineteenth Century England (Cambridge,1989), p. 56.

Two debates are discussed. Firstly, the issue of female subordination and power at work is examined. The following questions are asked. Did women exercise any authority within the work place or achieve promotion? Did females possess a hidden code of influence and leverage when dealing with their superiors in order to achieve their aims or did female workers display a natural deference towards their superiors or employers, suggesting the continuation of patriarchy outside the home? The second discussion concentrates on the 'power' experienced by women within the home. Who was the decision-maker in the home? Who had control of the financial situation of the household? And in terms of morality, whose word was law? I would suggest that women faced an ambiguous and unequal status: on the one hand they were considered to be the guardian of the family, whilst at work they could never acquire the same regard or authority as male colleagues.

Questions of patriarchy and paternalism

> *Gender inequality cannot be understood without the concept of patriarchy ... the notion of changing forms of patriarchy is indispensable to the understanding of historically varying forms of gender inequality.*[3]

It is impossible to focus on the female experience of subordination at work without reference to 'patriarchy' and 'paternalism'. Definitions are essential if we

[3] S. Walby, Patriarchy at Work (Cambridge, 1986), p. 243.

are to understand the implications of the terms.

'Patriarchy' firstly relates to a description of a class relationship and secondly is used as an explanation of the direct, and also socially accepted, authority of fathers and husbands over wives and children. Walby maintains that she defines 'patriarchy as a system of interrelated social structures through which men exploit women'.[4] I would argue that throughout the period, male domination and female subordination in the work place were seen as 'correct' and 'natural' and confirmed the unequal gender relations which had existed since the work place had moved from the home into the factory.[5] Walby's work concerning the relationship between men and women in the work place offers a new view. She maintains that the position of women at work is not determined by their position within the family, but by the labour market structures that confine females to a subservient capacity in the household. For example, in the case of engineering, Walby cites the protective nature and prejudices of the unions against women workers because of their lack of skill. Thus women were seen as a threat to the male engineering niche. Essentially, therefore, the barrier against women in the engineering unions allowed male patriarchy to strengthen and simultaneously forced women into a weaker position and back to the home. Female workers in engineering were only possible in the 'new' industries which without precedents or unionization, could allow women to undertake 'suitable' tasks. In contrast, Sally Alexander has argued a more traditional point of view in her work

[4] Walby, Patriarchy at Work, p. 51.
[5] The only exceptions to this perception were in those factories which involved the 'natural' skills of the female sex, such as corset-making, dressmaking and laundry work. In these instances females often gained positions of authority.

concerning women in nineteenth-century London:

> Women's vulnerability as wage-workers stemmed from their child-bearing capacity. Upon which the 'natural' foundation of the sexual division of labour within the family was based. Because in its early organization, capitalism seized the household or the family as the economic and often the productive unit, the sexual division of labour was utilized and sustained as production was transferred from the family to the market place.[6]

When family production had been concentrated within the home, husbands and wives worked alongside one another in an effort to ensure family survival. 'The labour needs of the household defined the work roles of men, women, and children. Their work, in turn, fed the family'.[7] After the Industrial Revolution, the increasingly separated 'work place' took on a new role and became the pivot of the lives of working people. Employers with strict working practices and hours of work controlled the daily working lives of men and women for the first time. Patriarchy therefore had a dual effect, and such attitudes supervised the toil of the working class. Their employers, who were usually male, were controlling men and women. Importantly for female workers, their superiors on the shop floors were also traditionally male. Significantly, both sexes were dependent on earning a living, which in turn created and sustained a mutual sense of 'need' between the employee and employers.

[6] S. Alexander, Women's Work in Nineteenth Century London: a Study of the Years 1820-50 (London, 1983), p. 27.
[7] L.A. Tilly and J.W Scott, Women, Work, and Family (1987; London, 1989 edn.), p. 12.

Such dependency links patriarchy with 'paternalism'. Both imply a class relationship, but a paternal relationship between employee and employer is more benevolent than a straight-forward authoritarian association. However, any instances of altruistic compassion were customarily laced with the expedient needs of companies, who sought to supply their employees with work, but simultaneously to regulate their behaviour to ensure a continuous source of production. Ties of dependency between employee and employer can be seen as an extension of rural cultural relationships. Judy Lown has argued that industrialization encouraged a 'gentlemanly ethic' and stimulated employers to 'compete with the landed aristocracy as legitimate superordinates in the local social hierarchy.'[8] Employers therefore took on a 'fatherly' role, similar to that of feudal lord, which emphasized the alliance of 'kin' and reliance. Such concepts describe the employment situation in Rugby. The role of the B.T.H. and its influence in the town has already been touched upon. Most families were connected to the company via employment and the company offered a variety of welfare measures to ensure the productivity of their workforce. Significantly, a mutual tie of dependency existed and the company almost built a type of 'familial' feeling between colleagues, which was absent in other firms in the town. There can be no doubt that the B.T.H. successfully created a feeling of benevolence and existed as a 'surrogate' father, and to many Rugby people offered guarantees which ensured the employment of men and women. Nevertheless,

[8] J. Lown, 'Not so much a factory, more a form of patriarchy: gender and class during industrialization', in G.Gamarnikow, D. Morgan, J. Purvis and D. Taylorson (eds.), Gender, Class and Work (London, 1985 edn.), p. 34.

behind this affectionate image was the patriarchal necessity of controlling the work force to protect the future of the company.

Such perceptions of paternalism successfully accommodated the continuous domestic ideology explored in the previous chapter.[9] As Lewis has argued, 'paternalism ... at best, characterized domestic relationships between men and women'.[10] Both domesticity and paternalism stressed the need for women to be at home with children, whilst men re-established themselves as 'breadwinners'. The female contribution to the working economy was marginalized and subservient in comparison with that of the male employee. This ensured the continuation of traditional authority relationships both at work and within the home. Significantly, both patriarchy and paternalism worked against women as they 'derived their status from their relationship to men'.[11] This was the case, despite the various roles they undertook in their daily lives. It has been argued that women failed to identify themselves in one particular role and therefore never created their own 'work identity' or profession in contrast to the male breadwinner.[12] It must be remembered that most women only had a relatively short working life, which was often seen as temporary and subservient to that of the natural role of wife and mother. Female subordination was a guaranteed outcome of women's association and connection with the home and family. Any

[9] For a different approach to the inequality of women and societal expectations, see John Benson's study of consumerism, The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain, 1880-1980, (Harlow, 1994). He suggests a link between consumption and 'patriarchal-cum-capitalist' control, which served to subordinate women and force them back in to the home. For example, after the Second World War, electrical devices were advertised as 'labour-saving' devices, but in turn facilitated the reinforcement of the image of the 'housewife'.
[10] J. Lewis, Women in England, 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change (Hemel Hempstead, 1984), p. 222.
[11] Lown, 'Not so much a factory, more a form of patriarchy', p. 32.
[12] Lown, Not so much a factory, more a form of patriarchy', p. 32.

label or identification for females was that of 'wife' or 'mother', rather than 'worker'.

'Power' in the work place

> *It has long been accepted that the sexual division of labour at work reinforces and complements gender inequality created elsewhere (family, education and other social institutions).*[13]

What were the experiences of Rugby women within the work place? Did they achieve recognition for their work and in turn receive promotion or positions of authority, or did female employees suffer from an inferior position in the work place? The evidence from the oral testimony tends to be comparable with other studies, in that female authority was confined to those firms who only employed a female work force. Notably such companies produced goods, or were associated with 'suitable' trades for the fairer sex and the home, for example, the corset factory, local laundries and the B.T.H. typing pool. Such female ghettos therefore allowed women workers to gain promotion. Jill Norris' research concerning the Macclesfield silk industry agrees:

> Photographic evidence suggests that while men might supervise other men, mixed groups or groups otherwise composed entirely of women,

[13] M. Glucksmann, Women Assemble: Women Workers and the New Industries in Inter-war Britain (London, 1990), p. 197.

women were only to be found in charge of all-women groups.[14]

It has been suggested that placing female workers in supervisory roles was a product of male management to maintain gender divisions.[15] Essentially the female supervisor with control over other women sanctioned sexual segregation and reinforced gendered family relations. Most importantly, female supervisors encouraged what was considered to be a 'natural' deference to the male employer.[16] Thus men continued to be seen as the instinctive 'breadwinners', while women were employed in tasks seen as an extension of the home. Any promotion gained by women workers was therefore still regarded as secondary to that of male employees and this encouraged the continuation of male power in the work place. However, as Croucher argues, 'women supervisors ... could offer a solution to the problems which male foremen often experienced with women workers'.[17]

In Rugby, female employers tended to employ mostly women. For example, Rugby Steam Laundry was strictly managed by the Fenwick sisters, employing female supervisors to oversee the work of women laundry workers. The only male workers employed by the company were those who drove delivery vans

[14] J. Norris, 'Well fitted for females: women in the Macclesfield silk industry' in J.A. Jowitt and A.J. McIvor (eds.), Employers and Labour in the English Textile Industries, 1850-1939 (London, 1988), p. 195.
[15] B. Harrison, Not only the 'Dangerous Trades': Women's Work and Health in Britain 1880-1914 (London, 1996), p. 44.
[16] Such a concept was an extension of the assumption of women's inherent deference to the male sex. This is explored in Marriage as a Trade, p. 3, a social commentary on the position of women by Cicely Hamilton in 1909. In a commentary Jane Lewis states, 'Marriage as a Trade argues that women are trained to become what men believe them to be and want them to be, because what men really want is a combination of romance and service: a woman must combine the divergent qualities of an inspiration and a good general servant'.
[17] R. Croucher, Engineers at War 1939-45 (London, 1982), p. 260.

and, significantly, worked independently of the female employees.[18] The situation was similar at Findlay's Lamp Factory, which was later taken over by the B.T.H. Mrs Hutchinson started working there in 1917 at the age of fourteen. The factory is an example of a 'female ghetto' as the work was considered suitable for dexterous, small fingers. Mrs Hutchinson recalled that she was asked to take on extra responsibility:

> It employed a lot of girls ... it was one of the biggest employers at the time. There was a lot of small little outlets for women. I eventually got in charge of a little section down there. I wasn't exactly completely in charge; I was assistant to the forewoman.

In these types of establishments women could achieve small promotions, but significantly this was linked to the 'ladylike' nature of the work they were undertaking and to the fact that all the staff were female.[19] The notion of 'suitable' work for women again reflects the image of the 'angel' advocated by the Victorian middle classes.[20] When moral champions called for the working-class female to act and work in a feminine manner, they promoted work which was seen as encouraging women to become good wives and mothers. Domestic work was therefore seen as training for married life and in turn ensured that the moral

[18]The employment of men was similar at Aviss' Box Factory and Lodge Plugs, where they were placed in positions connected to the maintenance of the machinery. Glucksmann, Women Assemble (London, 1990) p. 202, argues that men therefore controlled the work place, as they were associated with the technology and effectively held positions of power and authority over the female workers.

[19] J. Norris found that her female silk workers were seen as appropriate because of their 'ladylike' skills. See article 'Well fitted for females: women in the Macclesfield silk industry' in Employers and Labour in the English Textile Industries 1850-1939, J.A. Jowitt and A.J. McIvor (eds), p. 195.

[20]See Purvis, Hard Lessons, p. 66. A full description of the middle-class perception of the working female is offered.

conscience of society endured the changes of the period. In support Norris has stated that women were expected to reap 'non-quantifiable' rewards from their work, rather than high wages and promotion.[21] It was thought that women employed in such appropriate trades would gain a moral and spiritual satisfaction and a pride in their work. Any promotion was therefore considered to be a bonus to an existing 'spiritual' working experience.

Clerical work was seen as especially fitting for young girls. Significantly, the B.T.H. offered chances for promotion and employed a number of female supervisors in their typing pool. Of particular importance was the Staff Lady Supervisor, who was responsible for all female clerical employees.[22] From the memories of B.T.H. workers, it would appear that the employment of a Staff Lady Supervisor was a direct welfare policy of the company to ensure the morality and well-being of their female workers. Here again is another example of a company providing a 'parental role' towards its staff. Oral respondents frequently recalled how the B.T.H. was considered to be an exceptionally moral and upstanding employer in the local community. Parents were usually content to know that their daughters were cared for by the Staff Lady Supervisor. Miss Marsh became Staff Lady Supervisor in 1935 and was aware of her semi-parental role for the girls:

> I kept in close contact with all my staff. They had their ups and downs, with their various families, and I did my best to help them through

[21] Norris, 'Well fitted for females', p. 195.

[22] The existence of female supervisory staff was also evident at Woolwich Arsenal during the First World War. From the end of 1914, the Arsenal authorities appointed a women's welfare supervisor because of the planned female workforce. See D. Thom, 'Women at the Woolwich Arsenal 1915-1917, Oral History, 6:2 (1978).

> whatever problems they had. You couldn't have been responsible for hundreds and hundreds of girls without problems. The company were very, very kind people, the directors and I were anxious to have a happy family.

Oral testimony is varied with reference to the 'friendly' nature of the Staff Lady Supervisor. General opinion was that although Miss Marsh was strict, she was also fair-minded. However as a welfare issue, the B.T.H. was providing a 'female' point of contact for its girls, rather than the traditional male manager. The importance of female supervisors is reinforced by Sarsby who studied female pottery workers:

> The individual character of managers and supervisors made a great difference to the enjoyment or discomfort of work. A supervisor told me that she thought women preferred a woman as a supervisor. [One recalled] 'I think we get on better with a woman, because in my position you have to listen to all their tales and the little woes, and if they fall out with their husbands, you know, where they won't tell somebody else, they'll tell you ... And women have little problems where they can't talk to a man, they talk to a woman, you see.'[23]

Significantly, at the B.T.H., Miss Marsh achieved a high degree of recognition within the company for her work. However, it must be remembered that her

[23] J. Sarsby, Missuses and Mouldrunners: an Oral History of Women Pottery Workers at Work and at Home (Milton Keynes, 1988), p. 145.

importance and influence were associated with the female work force. She did not have any authority beyond her sphere of influence and was never consulted in connection with male employees. Male workers were kept distinct and controlled by male supervisors and managers.

In contrast, female factory workers at the B.T.H. did have to answer to male managers. They did not have the support of a specific personnel member to care for their interests, unlike staff workers. It would appear that within the traditional male sphere of the factory, male authority continued to rule. Mr Cass recalled his time in a supervisory role over women factory workers at the B.T.H. in the late 1940s:

> I learned one lesson that if you'd got women working in a factory with blokes, best thing to do is put a woman supervisor in, because, er, to suddenly put women amongst men, the men used language in a factory which is not what they normally use outside, and er, the men when they got these young women there, some tried to take advantage of it, you know, and er, I had to sort 'em out. Some of the women were a bit difficult because if you were a bit impatient and you happened to swear, they were quite likely to go and report you to the women supervisor. The blokes were never right, so you had to sort of be a bit diplomatic at time, and er, sort 'em out a bit.

Comments such as these illustrate the ambiguous position for women in the

factory. It was not regarded as their 'natural' surroundings and yet they were expected to 'fit in' with the ways of a factory environment. Mr Cass's memories give the impression that he was somewhat overawed by the presence of women in the factory and found himself in an unenviable position as supervisor. In addition, while the male supervisors had ultimate authority, women still displayed traits of influence over their male superiors, as will be discussed later.

It was not only factory girls who experienced male authority. Those girls who entered the 'protected' environment of the typing pool were eventually sent to various departments after their training. The majority of women therefore, despite having the Staff Lady Supervisor in overall control, were also confronted with male superiors. As Mrs Bridge recalled upon starting work in the 1930s, 'I was overwhelmed ... [by] the terrifying looking men who were in charge with stone faces'. Such feelings have been noted in other studies. As Harrison states, the 'intimidatory nature of such an environment served as a further reminder to women of their lack of power and social worth.'[24] This apprehension of working with men was evident in many of the oral respondent's testimonies and they recalled that having the Staff Lady Supervisor 'on their side' was important to their working confidence. Mrs Pearson recalled,

> It was an excellent system, I think, don't you, to have one lady in charge of all the girls. If you felt your boss, was what they call 'groping' these days, if you went and told her, he'd be for it. She became a dragon then, she'd go

[24] Harrison, Not only the 'Dangerous Trades', p. 44.

> tearing along there ... she stood up for women, young and old. She went in one office and the men had put up what in those days were called 'filthy' postcards, and calendars ... and she went straight to the boss and she said, 'I'll have all those postcards and calendars taken down immediately' and he had to, she said 'My girls don't like it'.[25]

It is a fair comment that many respondents recalled Miss Marsh with a unique respect and awe for her position in the company. As Mrs Pearson recollected concerning her prospects of promotion at the B.T.H.,

> I didn't aim for anything like that, I didn't ... I wasn't in these places long enough was I. To get promoted you'd got to be dedicated, you can't just be ordinary can you.

Consequently as far as the 'feminine' skilled occupations were concerned, female authority was accepted and expected by many to ensure the morality and welfare of the many girls employed by the company.

In contrast, factory work had a dual description during the period. Many factory operatives were women as it was felt that the work was 'suitable' and of a light nature for the female constitution. However, women within the factory continued

[25] Instances of sexual harrassment are uncovered by L.Grant in her research. See 'Women in a car town: Coventry 1920-45' in P. Hudson and W.R. Lee, Women's Work and the Family Economy (Manchester, 1990), p. 233.

to be seen as a deviation to the accepted 'norm' or values of the period, as they failed to relate to the 'housewife' image. For example, Lodge Plugs in Rugby employed a large number of women. It cannot be disputed that the work involved 'light' engineering duties, such as testing spark plugs and sticking labels on products, and therefore was seen as appropriate work for women. However, some women were involved in 'mica-splitting'. This was a dirty process using semi-heavy machinery, and it was work of this nature that was seen as dangerous and inappropriate for women. Mrs Byfield recalled her experience of mechanical discipline at Lodge Plugs:

> They were very strict, used to have to keep on your job, used to come and look over your shoulder. I got suspended for three days, once, when I was doing this chamfering job on the machine, er because I was doing it too quick. You used to have to do one at a time, but it was piecework,... well I thought I was being clever earning a bit more money, so I used to line them up, and go up the drill. But I realized after that it was a danger.

Glucksmann has suggested that women suffered in the factory through lack of control.[26] Women's work in factories and on assembly lines was primarily machine dominated and paced. As Mrs Byfield experienced, women had no control over the speed of their work, as it was the machinery that dictated their tasks.

[26] Glucksmann, Women Assemble.

Despite having no authority over the rate of work, Croucher argues that over the long term, female labour did exercise some power in relation to health, safety and welfare.[27] He argues that women were not complacent to workplace conditions and demanded action from employers to improve the situation. Croucher quotes an experience of female workers at a factory in Aylesbury who went home in an effort to persuade the management to improve the heating. This is distinct from male employees who did not take action.

Did women show any signs of control in the workplace? From the oral evidence, it would appear that in one particular firm, Lodge Plugs, there was a 'workshop culture' among the female population of the factory. Such comradeship and manipulation of authority was not evident in other firms or offices and therefore it is notable here.

Those ladies who worked for the company did not achieve any promotion and wielded little authority while undertaking their tasks. Such a situation was regarded as typical for the period and within the work place. As Harrison states, 'at any time when women remained in subordinate social positions to men, the exercise of male power was a feature of their lives.'[28] All supervisors and managers were male, and therefore it could be assumed that the women did not have any 'power' within the work place.[29] However, I would suggest that the

[27] Crocher, Engineers at War, p.262.
[28] Harrison, Not only the 'Dangerous Trades', p. 44.
[29] Melling argues that foremen were used by employers to promote 'a common intellectual culture' amongst employees to ensure productivity and efficiency. See J. Melling, 'Employers, workplace culture and workers' politics: British industry and workers' welfare programmes, 1870-1920' in J. Melling and J. Barry (eds), Culture in History: production, consumption and values in historical perspective (Exeter, 1992), p.122.

female workers had a hidden code of influence while at work that was used to ensure that they would 'get their own way' in small disputes, despite lacking in official authority. Examples of this 'hidden influence' raise questions about who was actually wielding the power in the factory.

Mrs Leigh started work at Lodge Plugs in 1938 at the age of fourteen. She worked there for ten years, and recalled the relationship which existed between the foremen and the female workers:

> You had a foreman, he was horrible. A foreman and a superintendent, a charge-hand and then the men were there for repairing the machines. We were making plugs you see, during the war, mostly for lorries and aeroplanes.

When asked about tea-breaks during the day, Mrs Leigh said:

> You took a flask of tea and you had to stay at your bench. You couldn't go anywhere, to the canteen or anything. We thought it was wonderful ... we'd worked from 7.30 to 12 without a break and if you wanted to go to the toilet the foreman would want to know where you'd been and how long you'd been there and why. It was more than embarrassing.

Instances such as this illustrate the authority of the foreman and the women's acceptance of company rules, despite their disagreement. However, in some

instances the women ignored the dictates of their superiors. Mrs Leigh recalled:

> We used to sing all day because it was so boring, and then he [the foreman] would come along and give you a good telling off and then we would be quiet for an hour and then we would start all over again. You were supposed to be working you see.

Although such events were not major disagreements, the determination to continue to alleviate boredom by singing is an example of the women's 'workshop culture'.[30] Other strategies include just making conversation between themselves.[31] In addition, in ignoring the foreman's request to stop, the women were challenging company authority and simultaneously allowing themselves some form of independence, however small. Mrs Leigh also remembered the times when one of the girls was due to get married.

> Well, if anyone was getting married, we used to make a lot of baby clothes out of paper and hang them all in a line, 'Happy Marriage' and all the rest of it. There were always lots of baby clothes and ladies' frilly knickers and men's underpants. Years ago, that was rather risqué. We used to get told off by the foreman, but I think quietly he had a laugh to himself.

[30]Norris, 'Well fitted for females' discusses singing in the factories. She argues that those women who worked on machines had little training and job satisfaction and therefore recalled their friends at work rather than the process they were undertaking. Singing whilst they worked was a constant memory.

[31] D. Fowler, The First Teenagers: The Lifestyle of Young Wage-earners in Interwar Britain, (London, 1995) argues that despite evidence that young workers were extremely deferential towards their employers, the strategy of conversation could be used to interrupt production. See p. 44.

In celebrating marriages in their own style, the women were again displaying their ability to disregard the rules of the foremen. Mrs Huggett also worked at Lodge Plugs from 1938 until 1951. Her memories support those of Mrs Leigh. She recalled the times when the women took small amounts of alcohol to work to celebrate various occasions, such as birthdays and weddings.

> We used to just celebrate it in a quiet sort of way ... and bring some drink in as long as you kept it under wraps. I was the one chosen to go and keep watch. Then they would give the word.

Mrs Huggett's memories also include visits during breaks to the local fish and chip shop. She recalled:

> When the buzzer went at half past five, or was it five? We knew we were stopping there until half past seven, we used to have a rota, 'Who's along to the fish shop tonight?'. And there used to be two of us ... and we would dash off. Well, but the time we'd got back, it was near enough time for the bell to go again. But the foreman used to know what we were up to and he'd walk up smoking his pipe and he'd stand at the back of us. Of course we couldn't eat our chips. And he'd stand there, and we'd keep on saying 'Oh, when's he going?' cause we couldn't eat them. But that was what we had to do.

Mrs Huggett's last comment is significant. The women were breaking the rules by

leaving the work place during the break period and by eating in the factory. However, in their small way, they were proving that they could disregard the rules of the company and show the strength of their 'workshop culture'. Nonetheless, it would also appear evident that the male supervisors, in knowing what 'tricks' went on, were willing to give the women a certain amount of freedom in order that they might continue to work efficiently. Thus there was a mutual 'give and take' situation which ensured productivity in the factory.

It is interesting to note that the women, in the instances when they knew they were breaking the rules, did protect each other. I would suggest that this stems from a 'natural' deference that the members of the working-class, in general, had between themselves. However, the working-class ethos also continued to respect authority, and importantly the rules that were broken were of no real consequence to the employer. Nevertheless, displays of autonomy were meaningful to the female worker to show their independence. Thus women in the factory had an ambiguous working relationship with their employer. There can be no doubt that they were aware of their inferior position in the working hierarchy, but they were willing to disregard and manipulate some rules in order to achieve a feeling of autonomy, however small.

Glucksmann has challenged the idea of the inferior nature of women's factory work, in her research concerning female workers in the 'new' industries in Britain.[32] Firstly, she agrees that women employees did occupy an inferior

[32]Glucksmann, Women Assemble.

position because of their connection to the domestic economy, household and reproduction. However, she maintains that women resided in a strategic and 'central position in production' within the 'new' industries.[33]

> It was ... women who occupied the lowest position in the hierarchy of the division of labour, yet at the same time the success of the whole production process depended on each and every woman performing her allotted tasks in the right way and at the right speed.[34]

Importantly, factories where the majority of their workers were female could have been susceptible to group strike action if the women formed an homogeneous assembly. The 'female ghetto' was united both in terms of gender and occupation. In the case of electrical engineering (which was so vital to the Rugby economy) in 1935, 35% of all manual operatives in Britain were women. This is a stark contrast to the turn of the century when 97% of operatives in engineering were male.[35] Consequently it could be argued that female employees, like those at Lodge Plugs in Rugby, had more power than they realized. If female workers on assembly lines or factories had taken action over major disagreements, then production would have suffered immensely. However, no such disputes or strike action occurred in Rugby. Carl Chinn declares that urban women were rarely involved in 'political, ideological or trade-union movements' and that their 'lack of participation ... in such activities can lead to the feasible conclusion that they

[33] Glucksmann, Women Assemble. p. 199.
[34] Glucksmann, Women Assemble, p. 204.
[35] Glucksmann, Women Assemble, p. 200.

were weak or powerless'.[36] I would suggest that this is associated with the 'natural' acceptance of male superiority within the work place and the perception that women were 'fishes out of water', which was distinct from their 'natural' home with a husband and family, believing that they had relatively little power or control over their working lives. However, as discussed in this chapter, 'power' in the work place can be apparent in varying forms. Women might not have had a great amount of authority, especially over colleagues in the form of supervisors, but could wield a degree of control over their working habitat by manipulating circumstances to their favour.

'Power' within the home

> *Family ideologies related to women's position vis-a-vis the home and family and embodied a number of assumptions. It was commonly believed that family life and paid work should be separated, and that women should be located within the private sphere of the home, ideally as full-time wives and mothers.*[37]

If the majority of women interviewed did not achieve any substantial influence or power within the work place, how does this compare to their authority within the home? Women held an ambiguous position within society during the period, and especially after the First World War. Firstly, as we have seen, they held an

[36]C. Chinn, They Worked All Their Lives: Women of the Urban Poor in England 1880-1939 (Manchester, 1988), p. 22.
[37]Purvis, Hard Lessons, p. 53.

inferior position in the formal, employment economy. However, when at home, women were seen as the moral superiors in the household and held many powers within the domestic economy. The concept of two spheres, the 'waged public economy' and the 'unwaged domestic economy', has been advocated by Marxist and other historians.[38] These descriptions are extremely useful, but I intend to further this analysis by extending the argument beyond its economic reasoning, using the oral evidence of my interviewees to highlight the everyday 'powers' of women. After all, working-class women were not aware of the economic theories and ramifications of their actions.[39] The 'naturalness' of female power within the home will be explored.

It is first essential to confront the dual economic spheres of females during the period to illustrate their ambiguous position. Glucksmann suggested that women had a unique duality within society. The female worker was involved in both the formal economy and the domestic economy. In contrast, the male 'breadwinner' was only present in the waged economy and was responsible for providing an income for the household, but was not expected to help or work within the home.[40] Female subordination was therefore a result of women being members of both spheres. As a Marxist historian, Glucksmann advocates the importance of the domestic economy and women's membership thereof, as the reproduction of labour power for the future. Women's 'natural' participation in the domestic household economy therefore acted as a 'filter' that affected and placed

[38] See Glucksmann, Women Assemble, for a detailed description, p. 209.
[39] This is distinct from middle class women who would have had more economic awareness.
[40] My argument relates to work `within' the home, ie. household tasks which were considered to be `female' in nature. Husbands did help `outside' the home with odd jobs and gardening, which was perceived to be traditionally `male' in character.

constraints on their availability for paid work and resulted in women being financially dependent upon the male breadwinner.[41]

The oral evidence supports the argument that women were primarily concerned with the domestic sphere. The reasons for this stem from the societal expectations explored in Chapter 1. Paid work, outside the home, was regarded as a temporary and short-term activity before marriage and child-rearing. As discussed, inferiority at work was accepted and expected. Most women interviewed felt that the domestic environment was their niche and that they had a relative amount of power within what was considered to be their natural habitat.

The nature of female power in the home is linked inextricably to the development of the industrial economy in this period. Thus the ambiguous nature of women's power continues. If we accept that the domestic economy was essentially female in character, then this was reinforced by the introduction of the 'new' industries and their products. Previously, the nineteenth century economy was regarded as essentially 'male', especially when connected to 'heavy' industry. Finance and its associated tangents were traditionally linked to the male sphere and considered beyond the potential of the female mind.[42] However, it would appear that during the 1920s and 1930s there was a 'new and much closer relationship between women and capital'.[43] Crucially women were participating in the 'new' economy by producing and subsequently buying the new consumer durables produced in

[41]Glucksmann, Women Assemble, p. 210.
[42]Purvis, in her work Hard Lessons, reinforces the opinion that the formal economy was seen as 'male' in character. She presents the thoughts of the middle classes in the nineteenth century who saw masculinity as tied to paid work outside the home and femininity to domestic life. See p. 58-9.
[43]Glucksmann, Women Assemble, p. 227.

various industries and specifically the electrical engineering industries. For example, in Rugby, those women working at the B.T.H. on the shop-floor created components for electrical household goods, which they themselves were purchasing. Women's power was evident, 'because women both produced and consumed the new goods, were wage earners as well as spenders, they became indispensable to the extension both of commodity production and of the wage economy.'[44]

As more and more women were working, it has been argued that 'women of all ages benefited from the more general redistribution of wealth and income that took place during the course of the twentieth century'.[45] Whereas previously, female participation had contributed only a small proportion of the nation's wealth, the rise in the number of female workers during the period meant that women quickly gained more 'power' to purchase goods. For example, in 1851 there were 2.8 million women in the work force, but by 1951 this had risen to 7 million women working in the formal economy.[46]

The power of females in terms of consumer expenditure brings the argument back to the question of authority within the home. Who decided what purchases were made and, more importantly, who ensured that food and clothing was provided for all family members? Other studies have suggested that working-class women had a tremendous role to play in the financial transactions of family

[44] Glucksmann, Women Assemble, p. 228.
[45] J. Benson, The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain, 1880-1980 (Harlow, 1994), p.21.
[46] Benson, The Rise of Consumer Society, p. 22.

life.[47] But others, such as Benson, have suggested that in the past it has 'generally been agreed that most women exercised very little control over the finances of the households in which they lived'.[48] Despite the dubious nature of Benson's argument, he maintains that although women did become involved in purchasing consumer durables, their primary task was still to provide food and clothing for the family tasks that were traditionally feminine in nature. Benson argues that consumer power 'did nothing to alter the fundamental balance of power within marriage.'[49]

It could be proposed that an increase in consumption and consumer products helped to liberate women in terms of choice and their control of the domestic economy. However, Benson has argued that simultaneously the rise of consumption helped to confine women to the home and reinforce traditional beliefs.

> Although changes in consumption offered women new economic power, new social possibilities, and new opportunities for improving their social status, it did so within the limits that confirmed and reinforced, rather than challenged and undermined women's conventional role and status.[50]

The labour-saving devices of the 1920s and 1930s therefore encouraged many women to stay in the home and placed them in an unenviable position of having

[47] E. Roberts' work advocates the pivotal role of the wife and mother within the household. See A Woman's Place (Oxford, 1995 edn.) and Women and Families (Oxford, 1995).
[48] Benson, Rise of Consumer Society, p. 22.
[49] Benson, Rise of Consumer Society, p. 68.
[50] Benson, Rise of Consumer Society, p. 181.

to find ways to afford such items from the family income. It has been argued that the inter-war years served to 'professionalize' the housewife, as a consequence of 'the vacuum cleaner, the washing machine, the gas cooker, the electric fire and the gas or electric iron, gadgets which promised to take the drudgery out of housework and turn it into a skilled and fulfilling job'.[51]

New consumer durables allowed the housewife and mother to achieve a higher degree of comfort and convenience for the family. The domestic ideal, as advocated by popular attitudes and perceptions, was steadily becoming more attainable. Pugh's research concerning feminism and the women's movement has argued that a 'cult of domesticity' was apparent in the 1930s.[52] He maintains that the growth of consumer choice in the 1930s allowed women to feel more self-reliant: 'she herself felt less of a victim and more an independent decision-maker'.[53]

In addition, housewifery skills were an important part of a working-class girl's education. Boys did not receive such lessons and therefore the division of labour was accepted from an early age. The teaching of household tasks was an inherent part of the education of Rugby women. Most recall their lessons in ironing, cooking and basic housewifery at school, and some Rugby girls received supplementary lessons at the Day Continuation School. Such education reinforced the belief that a woman's role was that of housewife and mother.

[51] S. Humphries and P. Gordon, A Labour of Love: the Experience of Parenthood in Britain, 1900-1950 (London, 1993), p. 83.
[52] M. Pugh, Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914-1959 (Basingstoke, 1992), pp. 209-234.
[53] Pugh, Women and the Women's Movement, p. 218.

Housewifery education dispelled the idea that housework was natural and simple. The idea was to promote housework as an important skill, which was not intuitive, but a skill that used new technology.[54] Such a skill was in turn dignified by the emergence of the term 'domestic science' and the educational programmes propagating it.[55]

New skills meant new levels of competence and proficiency that were encouraged by many popular magazines. According to 'Good Housekeeping', she [woman] was the 'craft worker of today'.[56] The popularity of such magazines during the inter-war period reflects the desire of many women to accomplish a higher level of skill and success within the home.[57] As avid readers, they were informed that in order to meet the requirements of the 'new' challenge they had to purchase the many consumer durables available.[58] However, the advances in domestic appliances served to strengthen the family division of labour and the conventions of female domesticity continued. Pugh has argued that young women could see slight improvements in their domestic positions.

[54] J. Bourke, Working-Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity (London, 1994), p. 57.
[55] The importance of domestic education is argued by Bourke in her research concerning housewifery. She argues that domestic education was introduced from the 1880s and served to 'professionalise' the housewife and in turn made staying at home a more desirable option for many women. See J. Bourke, 'Housewifery in working-class England 1860-1914' in P. Sharpe (ed.), Women's Work: The English Experience 1650-1914 (London, 1998), p. 332.
[56] Bourke, Working-Class Cultures in Britain, p. 84.
[57] P. Tinkler, Constructing Girlhood: Popular Magazines for Girls Growing Up in England, 1920-1950 (London, 1995) stresses the importance of magazines for working-class girls. She maintains that popular publications served to reinforce the belief that girls would be 'dependent' on men for their futures and therefore they 'assisted the patriarchal cause through their production of sexual difference and, more specifically, their encouragement to girls to maintain a feminine appearance'. See p. 155.
[58] In 1924, the 'Electrical Association for Women' was founded in response to the new purchasing power of women. It offered practical instruction in how to use the latest electric appliances. (See Humphries and Gordon, Labour of Love, p. 85.)

> Many younger women, who had seen the near impossibility for their mothers of having a clean, attractive and comfortable home, in spite of their efforts, could not see the ideal being realized in part in their own homes; the hard time-consuming work remained virtually unchanged, but the greater reward increased their self-respect as managerial figures.[59]

Labour-saving devices might have been perceived as the saviour of domestic drudgery, but women still continued to undertake all the household tasks alone that were essentially 'exhausting, soul-destroying and isolating'[60]. True emancipation from the confines of the household was therefore not achieved, but there is still the question of 'power' in various forms within the home.

In many studies the female financial matriarch is upheld as the norm in working-class households. As Roberts argues, 'Women's dual role as family financial manager and moral guide cannot be underestimated'.[61] Her study highlights cases of women seeking credit from local shops, using pawnbrokers and bargaining for extra food and clothes. It is therefore possible to see the female as the administrator of the household income.

> Women themselves, or their children asked for credit; men virtually never did this, partly, presumably, because it was the woman's responsibility to

[59] Pugh, Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, p. 221.
[60] Humphries and Gordon, Labour of Love, p. 85.
[61] E. Roberts, A Woman's Place: an Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940 (Oxford, 1995 edn.), p. 125.

> make ends meet, but also perhaps because of the reflection on a man's character which inability to provide for his family meant.[62]

The importance for the man to provide was recalled by Mrs Hutchinson, who married in 1926. Her husband suffered from ill health and she constantly sought paid work to help with the family income. She remembered that her husband had been very unhappy about his inability to provide, 'He was very upset, you know, that I'd got to do it'. Mrs Davies married in 1941 at the age of twenty-one, and recalled that her husband always paid the bills and that if wives went out to work, it was a sign that 'they were really desperate' and that the male breadwinner was not realizing his responsibilities. As Rubinstein has argued,

> The concept of the family wage was natural in a society which took the subordination of women for granted.[63,64]

If the ability of the breadwinner to supply an income for the family was paramount, even more so was the assumption that the woman could 'manage' on whatever she was given. 'Making the money stretch' was a common weekly occurrence. Sarsby recalled one of her interviewees:

> Mrs Madeley (born 1898) emphasized that it was the married woman's job to deal with money, even during the pit strikes of the 1920s: 'You'd got to

[62] Roberts, Woman's Place, p. 148.
[63] D. Rubinstein, Before the Suffragettes: Women's Emancipation in the 1890s (Brighton, 1986), p. 100.
[64] See Lewis, Women in England, for a lengthy discussion concerning the concept of the 'family wage', p. 45.

pay your way whether you worked or not, and my ring had to come off and go to pawnshop because I couldn't pay my rent'.[65]

It is interesting to note the phrasing of Mrs Madeley's memories. Significantly, she saw the paying of the rent as 'hers', not the responsibility of both herself and her husband. It would seem that Mrs Madeley felt that she commanded the 'purse-strings', but in reality such responsibility could mean an ongoing burden for many wives and mothers. However, Mrs Williams recalled with pride that her mother 'never owed a penny' and that 'she never bought a thing she couldn't pay for'. Mrs Williams declared definite ideas about credit:

> It wasn't respectable to pawn, it was as bad as getting drunk. We were just a notch above that - those who went to work in ties were just above those in factories.

It would appear from other studies that such instances and attitudes towards credit were rare. As one of Roberts' oral respondents recalled,

> When you got paid on a Friday you went and paid it off, or some of it off. In most cases it was never-ending. It was never paid off. The shopkeeper never got his money ... you either owed the milkman, the coal man, the doctor, or you were in arrears with the rent. There were a lot of arrears in them days'.[66]

[65] Sarsby, Missuses and Mouldrunners, p. 36.
[66] Roberts, Woman's Place, p. 148.

It has been argued that the use of the pawnshop and credit at local shopkeepers was a product of the irregularity of income within working-class households.[67] Tebbutt highlights the cyclical nature of some trades and problems of illness. Essentially credit postponed any expenditure indefinitely, and wives and mothers had to learn to 'live from hand to mouth'. Women were the 'managers' by firstly having to organize the distribution of the weekly wage and secondly by physically and mentally having to survive on the income available.[68]

Mrs Catchpole, born in 1907, recalled her childhood visit to the pawn shop in Rugby. Her mother always managed the money, after her father had taken a small amount for his tobacco and beer money.

> We had a pawn shop ... I did go in once. I was with my mother, I know, but what she went in for, she must have had to take something or fetch something out or something, but I can't remember that.

Significantly, Mrs Catchpole's memories of seeking credit and visiting the pawnbrokers are only linked with her mother. She married in 1931 and, recalling her own arrangements for the management of money, she said,

> My husband dealt with the affairs. I told my mother that he was doing it and she said, 'You stick to it, don't you have the worry of the money. I've

[67] M. Tebbutt, Making Ends Meet: Pawnbroking and Working Class Credit (Leicester, 1983), p. 11.
[68] Tebbutt, Making Ends Meet, p. 37 highlights the creation of a 'sub-culture' in terms of obtaining credit and using pawnbrokers. The use of such services was often seen as poor management and therefore was applied to those women who resorted to such measures.

always had it and if he'll take over, you let him', and of course I did. And if I wanted any extra he always gave it me you know.

Instances such as these were gradually more common during the later part of the period. However, Mrs Catchpole is referring to her husband managing the money for major purchases. The food and clothing of the household was still her responsibility and she was given housekeeping for the purpose.[69] It would seem that shared responsibility for the finances was common in Rugby. Oral respondents recalled that large bills were discussed and considered by both the husband and wife.[70] Mrs Huggett married in 1951 at the age of twenty-six.

Well I used to have so much, about five pounds, and you used to have to do quite a lot on that, but when the bills came in, if there was anything when I just hadn't got enough, my husband would say, 'Now what's the bill come to and we'll see to that'.

Mrs Pearson married in 1937. When asked if she herself handled the money within her marriage, she recalled:

Oh, no, the gaffer. Me and money, I could look after it, but he worked it out. He just gave me housekeeping and a little bit for myself.

[69] It has been suggested by Bornat that a woman's economic power was heightened by daughters giving them their wage when first starting work as a contribution toward the family's finances. See J. Bornat, 'Home and work: a new context for trade union history, Oral History, 5:2 (1977).

[70] Roberts, 'Working-class women in the North West', has argued that working-class husbands and wives formed a partnership, whereby each needed the other. The wife needed her husband to earn the family wage and the husband needed the wife to fulfil her household duties and manage the financial affairs.

Mrs Pearson argued that the reason for this was that she had not been very good at mathematics at school and she felt her husband would be more successful at managing the household accounts. In contrast, Mrs Cryer, born in 1915, recalled her money management after her wedding.

> My husband was very good as he used to hand all his money over, he was good. I used to sort it out because I suppose it was my job. I think we had to pay ... sixteen shillings to the building society and five shillings for rates. I used to keep it all in a little book and I had this tin. I used to put it all in the different sections.

Mrs Purnell's husband was also happy to let his wife solve the financial problems and pay the bills. She was born in 1917 and met her husband when she was in her twenties. She recalled,

> My father handed all his wages over and he just had pocket money. Perfectly happy to do that. The same as my husband was perfectly happy right to the day he died, he didn't worry two hoots what I spent; he didn't want to bother with that. He did the working, gardening, building all the responsibilities like that. He didn't want to bother paying bills.[71]

[71] It is too easy to see financial arrangements between working-class couples as idyllic. Tebbutt, in her research, Women's Talk: a Social History of 'Gossip' in Working-Class Neighbourhoods, 1880-1960 (Aldershot, 1997), highlights cases where husbands spent most of their wages on alcohol, tobacco and entertainment. Not only therefore were wives confronted with small incomes, but also had to face drunken husbands who often resorted to violence. See pp. 115-118.

The ability to save for the future was another feature of female management of financial affairs. It has been argued the 'working classes lived up to their means and never thought of a rainy day'.[72] The oral evidence, however, suggests an awareness of the need to save for the future and again highlights the financial astuteness of females.[73] Many interviewees mentioned that they were involved in savings clubs in the work place, often to buy clothing from catalogues or to save for Christmas. Most women did 'save' for their 'bottom drawer' before they were married. Such ideas filtered through to their married life and they were able to plan financially for future expenditure. Such oral evidence contradicts the research by Tebbutt, who maintains that the working classes only saved when there was a definite purpose in mind. The reason for this attitude towards saving was that it was not considered as a way of bettering themselves. Instead the working classes sought tangible assets which could be pawned on a regular basis.[74]

Other pieces of oral evidence highlight instances of husbands being allocated 'pocket money' for themselves from their weekly wage. Mrs Marsh recalled how her mother managed the financial affairs.

[72] Tebbutt, Making Ends Meet, p. 12.
[73] It has been argued that the female link with finance has a long-standing tradition. For example, in the seventeenth century many widows were successful money-lenders using the skills they had learnt during their marriage. See B.A. Holderness, 'Widows in pre-industrial society: an essay upon their economic functions' in R.M. Smith (ed.), Land, Kinship and Life-Cycle (Cambridge, 1984).
[74] Tebbutt, Making Ends Meet, p. 12.

> Mum had to take in lodgers to help pay the rent, because you see dad wasn't on much money then. Dad used to have two shillings for a bit of tobacco and she used to have two pounds.

However, this 'power' is ambiguous. Women like Mrs Cryer and Mrs Purnell, who did not work in the paid economy, only had financial power with that money given to them by their husbands. Most cases from the oral evidence recall that they always had sufficient resources to provide a comfortable lifestyle for their husbands and families. However, it must not be forgotten that a woman's financial stability was at the mercy of a man's willingness and competence to provide. In the cases of Rugby women, none of the oral evidence suggests that women were deprived of money by their husbands. Nevertheless, despite the reliance on the male breadwinner, I do not wish to suggest that a female aptitude for financial affairs should be underestimated. The allocation of funds was often a difficult task that was successfully completed by the wife and mother. To be completely fair, financial responsibility and 'power' for the family was dual in nature. Husbands provided the income and distribution was essentially a female endeavour.

The provision of 'housekeeping' was a constant feature in the memories of the oral respondents. Mrs Williams recalled that she always coped with the housekeeping and clothing and that her husband paid the main bills. She insisted that 'It was always an amicable arrangement'. The 'housekeeping' money was therefore a symbol of a woman's power within the home. With the

continuation of the expectation of the female to provide food on the table and clothes for the family, the sphere of influence for wives was relatively stable. However, Benson has suggested that, as shopping became less of a daily chore during the period (for example, food no longer had to be purchased every day and supermarkets offered wider choices), other family members began to take an interest in the everyday running of the household. It was therefore possible for many women to relinquish some of their autonomy related to the domestic economy.

In support of the above argument, Roberts has maintained that 'the clear delineation of gender roles which had been observable earlier in the century was becoming increasingly blurred'.[75] I would suggest that the willingness of other family members to help with household tasks was a result of the easier nature of cleaning and shopping. As Benson states, 'they discovered that they retained control over household consumption so long as it remained arduous and challenging, but that they began to share control when it seemed as though it was becoming more interesting and enjoyable.'[76]

However, from the memories of the respondents, it would seem that most wives had to 'ask' for help with what were still considered to be 'their' chores. Mrs Fuller married in 1937 at the age of twenty-three, and continued to work at the local Marks and Spencer's shop. She recalled that at first her husband refused to help with the household tasks.

[75] E. Roberts, Women and Families: an Oral History, 1940-1970 (Oxford, 1995), p. 234.
[76] Benson, Rise of Consumer Society, p. 184.

> My husband didn't work indoors. I remember I'd done some washing one day and ... he always got in before me, and I said, 'Didn't you get the washing in?' and he said, 'I'm not domesticated Charlie ... you don't keep a dog and bark yourself'. Mind you I soon got him out of that.

Such opinions, although not usually frequently verbally expressed, were a common insight into a few husbands. However, Mrs Fuller stated that she soon changed the circumstances and taught her husband a few basic lessons in housewifery and simultaneously declared her 'power' within the relationship. She maintained that the reason for her husband's aversion to housework was due to the fact that as a child his mother had always been at home and had never called upon him to help her around the house. Gittins has argued that a woman's power relationship within the home was directly related to whether or not she worked for a living.[77] Her evidence shows that those women who did go out to work were more inclined to 'demand' help with the household chores.

It appears from the oral evidence that the allocation of household chores was frequently a matter of contention. Mrs Grey married in 1940 at the age of twenty-eight. Her husband failed to help in the house. When asked if she objected to this arrangement she recalled;

> His job was outside, my job was inside. Now when we got married, he

[77] D. Gittins, 'Women's work and family size between the wars', Oral History, 5:2 (1977).

> said, 'This is your home and you please yourself what you do' and I said, 'Don't tell me I've got to do anything. I'll do my work when I want to do and will not be told when to do it'.

Mrs Grey was obviously intent on expressing her 'power' in the relationship. However, Mr Grey's comment on the home being 'hers' and essentially female in character is indicative of the beliefs of many during the period. National attitudes suggested that it was that the husband who was responsible for providing a home, but the aftercare and maintenance of the household was considered to be the duty of the wife. This included not only the housework, but also the caring for future offspring, which fell into the feminine sphere of influence. As Mrs Williams remembered,

> It was just automatic, I got on with the job of housekeeping and so on, then of course the babies, and there was no question of going back to work.

The 'automatic' nature of the division of labour is a constant feature of the evidence. Within my research there were no cases of role-reversal whereby the husband was running the household. Even in marriages where the wife continued to work, whether full or part-time, husbands did not expect to undertake household tasks. As Mrs Jennings recalled when asked if her husband helped around the house, 'No, I don't think I ever saw him with a duster in his hand all our married life'. As wives were given complete control over the

domestic sphere, many found that this allowed them to exert a certain authority in their marital relationship. Mrs Grey recalled that she was determined to have some control: 'When I got married I said I'd do my work when I wanted to, and not to be told what to do.' Mrs Grey obviously did not want any interference in her daily life and wanted to achieve some 'power'.[78] Notably she referred to housework as 'my' work rather than 'the' household tasks. A refusal to allow men into the domestic daily routine could be indicative of a woman's desire to hold on to as much 'power' as possible within the home. Many oral respondents recalled that male interference often disrupted their housework routine. Women were aware that the domestic sphere was essentially theirs and did not want husbands encroaching on what they considered to be their powerbase. As Bourke has argued, 'they worked to increase their power within the household in this period by focusing on the irreplaceability and indispensability of their skills and resources'.[79]

However, other types of 'power' existed within the home. Was the patriarchal ideology of the dominant male accurate? From the oral evidence there are a number of differing attitudes. For example, Mrs Lambert married in 1941 at the age of twenty-nine. She had completed a degree and was gradually achieving promotion in the personnel department of the company. However, once married, her career deviated because of her husband's wishes. She recalled:

[78] Mrs Grey's attitude towards housework is reinforced by Bourke who argues that women wanted to carry out their chores without interference from men. See Bourke, 'Housewifery in working-class England', p. 344.
[79] Bourke, Working Class Cultures, p. 96.

> And then quite early on I got the chance of a welfare job ... personnel management ... but at that time my husband didn't fancy me working. So, er, at that time as I say the early days of marriage, one rather followed husband's ideas, so I didn't take that, but, not quite long after that we were more or less compelled to go to work. So I ended up in the B.T.H. doing various office jobs, little jobs. I didn't have a responsible job as I might have had if I hadn't had a wifely, or husbandly, connection.

Mrs Lambert was therefore 'condemned' to a job in which she did not achieve her potential, firstly by her husband's desire for her to be at home and secondly by the needs of the war which eventually dictated that she undertook a mundane occupation. Importantly, Mrs Lambert's willingness to comply is significant. It would appear that her husband exercised 'power' over her working career. However, such statements could be seen as too strong and damning. It must be remembered that women often expected to consider the needs of the home before themselves. As Mrs Lambert stated about housework, 'tradition indicated that I should do it ... and that was the tradition I'd been brought up in'.

It is therefore essential to question who was the dominant partner in a relationship. Bourke has suggested that women had a variety of ways to exert their authority including silence and 'super-sweetness'. Her study depicts instances of wives locking husbands out of homes, meals being given to the dog and refusing to cook altogether as examples of 'non-confrontational' power.[80]

[80] Bourke, 'Housewifery in working-class England', p. 346.

However, the oral evidence did not highlight any such instances in Rugby, but of course this is not to say that such events did not occur.

There is also the question of moral authority within working-class households. This is of particular interest in relation to the upbringing of children. I have stated previously that women were under a societal obligation to follow the wishes of the patriarchal ideology, both whilst growing up, starting work and later when they married. These expectations were of no significance to the oral respondents who regarded their actions as 'natural' and intuitive for the female sex. As commented by June Purvis,

> In social relationships between men and women, the concept of 'woman' was constructed 'in relation to' man - women were defined as daughters, sisters, wives and mothers, rather than as independent and autonomous beings. Closely linked to this idea was the notion of woman as a man's 'property', a being who is disposable and may be transferred to another 'owner'. A daughter was a father's property and transferred, in a marriage ceremony, to a husband, when a wife, a woman became a husband's property.[81]

From my evidence, the perception of a husband 'owning' his spouse does not match ideas of marriage during the period. Unlike some documented cases in the nineteenth century, most respondents who were married in the twentieth century

[81] Purvis, Hard Lessons, p. 50.

married for 'love' rather than convenience. In the oral interviews, despite a sense of 'ownership' never being conveyed, there was a consistent awareness of patriarchy - as Lewis states in connection with middle-class marriages, 'patriarchal behaviour is incompatible with autonomy, but not with love'.[82] A husband believed that it was his duty to care for his wife in a similar way as her father had cared for his daughter, which allowed a continuation of dependency from the female to the male partner. From the oral evidence, it would appear that the concept of 'ownership' was eroded and husbands tended to feel a responsibility towards their spouses rather than the feeling that they had gained 'property'. Many respondents recalled their marriage as a 'partnership', as they considered finance and obligations jointly. 'Power' was often relegated to a secondary position until, I would argue, children arrived.

The advent of offspring altered the balance of 'power' within the home. Gittins argues that women were often the main decision maker in relation to birth control, the eventual size of families and their future role as mothers.[83] As has been argued, women did command a certain amount of authority related to the running of the household, but the arrival of children served to increase such 'power'. Carl Chinn has maintained that, 'devotion to children was the catalyst which ensured the centrality of mothers of the urban poor and which enabled them to exercise authority.'[84]

[82] Lewis, Women in England, p. 112.
[83] Gittins, Women's work and family size between the wars', p. 95.
[84] Chinn, They Worked All Their Lives (Manchester, 1988), p. 22.

It has been suggested by Humphries and Gordon that the inter-war years saw a 'new parenthood'.[85] Not only did the popular magazines of the period offer advice to the housewife, but also proposed ideas concerning the disciplining of children as an important part of family respectability. Humphries and Gordon maintain that, 'when father was at home - especially at mealtimes - his word was law. But usually it was the mother, responsible for most discipline, who inflicted punishment'.

Such statements are indicative of the fact that in many working-class homes, fathers worked long hours and therefore could not administer a full-time disciplinary programme for their children. In addition as argued by Thom, during 'the war removed fathers (as such) from the public mind, since they were so often physically absent, but also because it elevated motherhood'.[86]

The father was recognizable as the 'master in his own home', but his connection with the outer world, away from the family, served to weaken his absolute rule.[87] 'Parental power' was often a blanket term; in reality, the matriarch of the family controlled morality and had the role of 'guardian' of the behaviour of the children.[88] Importantly, it was the mother, who 'naturally' was at home while busy with the household tasks, but at home nevertheless, who was responsible for the moral guidance of their offspring. Mothers, it was thought, due to a biological naturalness, felt at home in this niche and were in some ways becoming an

[85] Humphries and Gordon, Labour of Love, p. 86.
[86] D. Thom, Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War I (London, 1998), p. 174.
[87] As argued by R. Hoggart, Use of Literacy (London, 1957).
[88] See R. Roberts, The Classic Slum (Manchester, 1971), p. 26.

extension of the Victorian 'angel'. The 'angel' had provided a haven for her husband and family, for peace and contentment. Who better was there than a child's mother, to know and uphold the moral discipline of the future generation? Here we see the working-class woman achieving a natural 'power'.

Commentary concerning the middle classes has suggested that wives were not only economically, but emotionally dependent on their husbands.

> A woman was often defined as someone unable to act and make decisions on her own. Men ... could be ascribed the role of deciding 'for her own good' such issues as the appropriate form of education, occupation, maternity conditions and child care.[89]

Such observations relate to a slightly earlier period and to a different class, but are representative of the attitude towards the wife and mother. However, as previously stated, my research into working-class women depicts a homogeneous group which could exert strength and had a significant role to play in the upbringing of children, especially concerning their choice of education and their first type of employment. Attitudes towards childcare remained constant from the oral testimony. Those women who achieved promotion in terms of social status, from the working class to the middle classes took their attitudes with them and continued to have a significant role in the up-bringing of their children. The

[89] Purvis, Hard Lessons, p. 51.

women interviewed were not passive observers but active participants in the upbringing of their children and the home they created for their fulfillment.

The most important attribute for any mother was to provide as best she could for her children. If we accept that working-class women played a pivotal role in household management, then child-care relates to their 'power' at home. In a study by the National Union of Public Employees concerning women's health, it was stated that:

> It became clear to us, as we delved into the realities of women's lives that they were the pivotal centre around which working class life in Northern Ireland revolved: holding families together, providing for their material needs, contributing to the household income, responsible for finding accommodation and ministering to the health of all the family members.[90]

This argument places 'power' in a different context. The term 'power' has previously been used as having authority over someone or something. However, if 'power' describes the ability to provide or create a circumstance, then women were allowed to flourish. As Davies argues, concerning the working-classes in Salford between 1900-1939, 'self-sacrifice was the essential virtue of a 'good' mother'.[91] Controlling the finances to ensure that food and clothing was provided

[90] National Union of Public Employees (comp.), Women's Voices: an Oral History of Northern Irish Women's Health, 1900-1990 (Dublin, 1992), p. 114.
[91] A. Davies, Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working-class culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939 (Buckingham, 1992), p. 54.

for her children, rather than providing for herself, placed a mother in an unenviable but commanding position.

> It was upon a woman's shoulders that responsibility lay for providing a well-organized, stable, supportive environment for husband and children. In her attempt to make the home into 'a bright, serene, restful, joyful nook of heaven', it was frequently emphasized that the wife and mother should be self-sacrificing, putting a husband's needs before her own.[92]

Undertaking the role of the 'angel' must have been difficult on the tight budgets controlling the lives of working-class women. Leap and Hunter, in their oral history of midwives, found mothers suffered ill health in the 1920s and 1930s due to self-sacrifice.

> Poverty meant little choice in food, but the women we interviewed were proud of their ability to 'make do' and concoct something appetizing to put on the table. W. reinforced this idea: 'There were fourteen of us kids. I never saw my mother have a dinner. We'd all sit round the table, and she'd be like a waitress, giving it all out, passing it on. Whether she had any before or after, I'll never know. I don't think she did when I look back. She worked really hard to feed us lot'.[93]

[92] Purvis, Hard Lessons, p. 54.
[93] N. Heap and B. Hunter, The Midwife's Tale: an Oral History from Handywoman to Professional Midwife (London, 1993), p. 137.

The working-class mother's success in maintaining the household must not be underestimated. Most oral respondents recalled that their mothers were proud of their ability to provide food and clothing in the stable surroundings of the home.

The inherent role of motherhood was a constant feature of the memories of my oral respondents.[94] As Mrs Pearson stated, 'Marriage and motherhood interrupted my work naturally'. There can be no doubt that Mrs Pearson regarded her children as totally within her sphere of influence. She continued to work mornings after her daughter was born, and recalled:

> Dad, my husband, didn't mind me going mornings, but he wouldn't have liked full time [work] and I made proper arrangements. I'd got a daughter ... and during the school holidays my mother came and stayed, so nobody was neglected. I wouldn't have gone otherwise.

There are two points of interest in Mrs Pearson's statement. Firstly, she frequently relates to her husband as 'Dad' or 'Daddy'. It could be that this term was used because of their offspring and therefore it became natural to refer to her husband as 'Dad'. Alternatively the usage may suggest a feeling of duty and a sense of patriarchy towards her spouse. Secondly, Mrs Pearson relates child care and the employment of her mother in the school holidays as 'her'

[94] The notion of motherhood and maternalism is advocated by Clapp in her work about American female reformers. Her argument states that mothers began to feel a responsibility towards all children that fulfilled a female's traditional caring and nurturing role. See E. J. Clapp, Mothers of all children: women reformers and the rise of juvenile courts in progressive era America (Pennsylvania, USA, 1998). Additional material referring to motherhood can be found in J.R. Gillis, A World of Their Own Making: a history of myth and ritual in family life (Oxford, 1996) p. 152.

responsibility. She made the arrangements and ensured her daughter was cared for. Ultimately then, Mrs Pearson had 'power' and created the environment for her daughter's upbringing.

Oral evidence therefore successfully describes a woman's natural 'power' within the home. She was regarded as a moral superior and a guardian for her husband and family. Roberts states as her ultimate conclusion that,

> Women's considerable powers were all exercised, firmly, in the perceived interest of their families - that is how they saw their 'place'.[95]

Conclusion

The nature of the female 'powerbase' during the period is therefore two-fold. The experiences of work and home life have been considered separately to highlight the ambiguous character of female authority. To summarize, women in the work place weathered a variety of experiences. The majority did not achieve promotion or gain recognition for their contribution in the office, factory or shop. Any advancements at work were restricted to those industries associated with 'suitable' trades for women which could be related to the domestic ideal, such as laundry work. The only exception was secretarial work at the B.T.H. that provided women with some chance of promotion and the advantages of the support of the Staff Lady Supervisor. In the factories, chargehands or supervisors were

[95]Roberts, Woman's Place, p. 203.

primarily male and most women accepted their subordination as 'natural'. Patriarchy was a constant feature of the work place during the period. Female authority was limited to unofficial leverage while at work by flouting some of the insignificant rules of the factory. In spite of women's ever growing importance in the twentieth century formal economy, especially during the First World War and inter-war years, the concept of wife and mother continued to be dominant.

This leads to the second aspect of the ambiguous nature of the female powerbase. While at work female workers suffered from subservience, but on returning to the domestic sphere they were confronted with more scope and opportunities to exert authority and influence. During the period, the 'home' was reinforced as the natural habitat for women, especially mothers. As Bourke maintains,

> The great symbol was the parlour ... in working-class England, it became the symbol of the housewife's power and control over her family'.[96]

As discussed, wives often had financial control and moral superiority within the household. Essentially, the 'home' of a wife and mother can be compared to the work place of a husband. It was considered vital for the 'breadwinner' to provide the family wage to sustain a spouse and offspring. Consequently, men at work sought firstly increased wages and secondly control, authority and promotion if it was available. Comparably, women at home looked for the same recognition in

[96]Bourke, Working Class Cultures, p. 66.

the domestic sphere as men achieved in the formal economy. A housewife's role was all-encompassing. She was supervisor of the family finances, custodian of her children, chief of household tasks and an 'angel' of morality. As Carl Chinn has maintained, 'a mother of the urban poor was multi-functional in her nature'.[97]

> Home was their work place, where role-playing persisted even after the front door had closed on the outside world ... women had to remain vigilant and were frequently the protective partner in the sense of keeping men in ignorance of the struggles needed to ensure the family's survival.[98]

A woman's desire to master housewifery was assisted by the arrival of labour-saving devices during the inter-war years. Housework became a 'skill' which involved the use of new technology. Ultimately, however, the skills were still feminized and women continued to be 'tied to the kitchen sink' in an effort to ensure proficiency and efficiency. The biological function of mothers remained a pivotal component of societal expectations for young women. Children and their welfare were essentially a mother's responsibility and an integral part of a woman's purpose in life. The affinity of the female to the home and children ensured that women's 'power' and influence in the domestic ideal continued. This was reinforced by popular publications and societal expectations, which emphasized the need for women to stay at home for the sake of future generations.

[97] Chinn, They Worked All Their Lives, p. 19.
[98] Tebbutt, Women's Talk, p. 116.

It is therefore not surprising that many women 'chose' to stay at home. At work, a female employee could not achieve formal appreciation or promotion. Such inferiority did not inspire many women to continue to work after marriage, and society expected that they remain at home. The exception to the rule was when financial circumstances dictated that an extra income, perhaps the only income, was vital. Paid work for women remained a temporary occupation, until they could find 'the man of their dreams'. In the home, or domestic ideal, women could thrive and accomplish the role of a 'good' wife and mother and become the archetypal 'angel'. For Mrs Timms, to become the 'angel' was her ultimate wish and she recalled, 'Well, I think in those days all you thought of was running a house'.

CONCLUSION

Oral History is a rich source of information for the researcher, particularly in areas where written or manuscript evidence is sparse.[1]

Howarth's statement above provides a definite view concerning the positive attributes of using oral testimony. As a conclusion for my thesis I would like to assess my work in relation to this view and for future research using oral history. I intend to assess my research and create a number of specific arguments concerning working women in Rugby during the period. This will be completed in two distinct parts.

First, the success and use of oral testimony will be discussed. Was using oral history a positive experience? Did the oral respondents supply the necessary information? Most importantly, how reliable is the information and data used in this thesis? In addition, would the writing of this research have been impossible but for the use of oral testimony? A conclusion will then be drawn as to the importance of memories as a historical source.

Secondly, conclusions must be drawn from the data and information itself. Can a number of arguments or opinions about working women in Rugby be validated? Is the experience of Rugby women unique and does this thesis have implications for the study of working women in a national perspective during the period? What possibilities are there for future research?

[1] Ken Howarth, Oral History: A Handbook (Stroud, 1998), p. 175.

Oral history – a success?

My research started in the belief that oral memories could provide the necessary information on which to build a research project. My experience of using oral history reinforced this belief.[2] Despite previous experience of using oral history, I was forced into relying heavily on the memories of women in Rugby because of the lack of written or documentary evidence. Initial inquiries into the possibility of finding written documentary sources at the beginning of the research period were disappointing but not really surprising. The lack of written sources within social history and in particular women's history is a frequent occurrence for many researchers.[3] Local history records tend to consist of information relating to the buildings and political happenings rather than the day-to-day lives of the ordinary people. For example, there were plenty of references in the local press to the building of the local factories, but little concerning the welfare and lives of the employees, either male or female.

From a personal perspective the decision to follow the oral tradition for my research was the correct one. As a person born and educated in Rugby I had a desire to preserve a section of social history about my home town, taken directly from those people who experienced it. My involvement in a local history group had reinforced my interest in documenting oral testimony. So many times as a group the general public would inform us of a particular

[2] E. Robinson, 'The servant problem: domestic service in the 1920s and 1930s', Nene College, 1992 and 'A Rugby company and their female clerical workers: The British Thomson-Houston Company Ltd, 1930-1950', Warwick University, 1993.
[3] For confirmation of the problem of the lack of historical sources relating to women's history see the introduction in J. Giles, Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain, 1900-1950 (London, 1995), p. 9.

event that was worthy of being recorded.[4] As Stuart argues, 'Oral history is concerned with gathering people's life stories and enabling a multitude of different voices to be heard'.[5] These different voices exist in all areas, whether city, town or village. Oral history allows memories to be accessible and in turn to become important historical sources.

However it is necessary to ask whether my belief in oral testimony was well founded? Have oral testimonies provided a well-rounded research project or one that is based on the idle chatter of an older generation? Previous studies such as that by Sutton stated that the major problem with the oral tradition 'is that the results are impressionistic and unquantifiable'.[6] I would agree with half of that statement. Sutton is correct when she maintains that interviewees are giving their own perspectives about the situation that they experienced. Frequently, it is a personal viewpoint that has the constraints of up-bringing and situation.[7] However, who is to say that this is not worthy of documentation? Many historians welcome diaries of the 'ordinary' person as appropriate to historical study. My task as oral historian is to record oral testimony and transcribe the words of others into a written analysis. It could be claimed that because the words of the oral interviewee are recorded by a third party, historical accuracy is lost. However, by using the constraints

[4] The importance of recording oral testimony is supported by Stephen Caunce, Oral History and the Local Historian, (London, 1994). He advocates that the recording of women could take on a rarity value as the traditional attitudes towards work change frequently over the years.
[5] M. Stuart, 'You're a big girl now: subjectivities, feminism and oral history', Oral History, 22:2 (1994).
[6] M. Sutton, We Didn't Know Aught (Stamford, 1992), p. xiii.
[7] For a discussion relating to the constraints on reminiscences, see the introduction of Gilda O'Neill, Pull No More Bines (London, 1990). She focuses on the experiences of hop-pickers in Kent and argues about the importance of recording reminiscences before they are lost.

detailed earlier in the introduction, clear boundaries can be created and kept to.

Nevertheless Sutton insists that such memories are 'unquantifiable'. This is surprising, as she has used her findings to write a fascinating study of sexuality and superstition. By stating the exact words of testimony, I believe I have been able to give the reader a 'balanced' and accurate viewpoint. [8] At no time during the interviews did I knowingly 'feed' any oral respondent answers with the purpose of gaining a 'suitable' quote that would correlate with my ideas. For that reason I started my research with very broad ideas. The eventual content of this thesis has been produced by the oral testimony itself and that has dictated my line of thought. From my own perspective, I wanted to present the recorded experience of Rugby women as exactly as it could possibly be.

My chosen subject gained the interest of many local inhabitants, and this encouraged oral participation. But despite interviewing a large number of women, this was only a sample of the women who might have been interviewed. The result was an account of women who wanted to share their memories, rather than a definitive collection of oral testimony from Rugby women.

[8] The value of the spoken word is of particular interest to M. Tebbutt, in her research, Women's Talk? A social history of 'gossip' in working-class neighbourhoods, 1880-1960, (Aldershot, 1997).

A Local Study – a success?

The reasoning behind my choice of location was simple. Due to my association with a local history group in the town, and as a Rugby girl myself, I had wished to uncover a sphere of local history that was being ignored. My fascination with women's history was encouraged during my early years of university education and by researching this thesis I have combined these two interests.

However I do have more altruistic intentions. One of the reasons for studying Rugby women was because I felt that any information gathered could provide comparison for other studies and research projects. Oral history is unique and it is within local history that the tradition has found its niche. Oral testimony is a vital system of recording local information and ensures that local heritage is preserved for longer than individual memories.

Once oral memories are established they can be compared and contrasted with other towns or areas giving a fuller agenda of possibilities for research. My intention has therefore been to provide a stimulus for further research into the lives of working women. The subject of paid work for women can cover numerous opportunities for the historian. Rugby offered the chance to study the lives of women connected or involved in some way with the 'new' industries. Other localities offer the possibility to focus on different occupations. For example, research on Northampton might concentrate on the leather and shoe industry, work on Kidderminster would focus on the

carpet industry, and research on Leicester would be concerned with the hosiery. Questions relating to female choices and opportunities would provide a comparison with the findings of this thesis. Each locality has unique opportunities. In addition, particular occupations could be chosen over a larger area - for example, farmer's wives, the dairy industry, rural craftswomen - did such women have the same choices as those in the towns and cities? Such questions have yet to be considered and could provide exciting new opportunities for future research.

I hope that this study of Rugby has provided a basis for future research and comparison. As a resident of Rugby I was aware of the industrial nature of the town and that this would provide a good basis for research. I do not intend to provide the definitive history of working women during the period, but rather to offer a 'cameo' of the events in a small market town. Nevertheless I do not want to underplay the worth of the oral memories from Rugby. The words of Rugby women are unique and original insofar as they will never be uttered in the same way again. This statement could be said of any oral memories from any area. It is true that my oral interviews were based on conversation about the past and as some would argue, just a method of everyday communication, but they are now saved for all time.

The choices and experiences of Rugby Working Women – some conclusions.

The results of this thesis stand as a study of a particular place in the United Kingdom. They offer a unique insight into the working choices and experiences of women in Rugby between 1920-1950. Future research to compare such findings is inevitable and desirable. There are many opportunities to further research on female labour in a variety of occupations. The following section aims to outline my results.

Chapter 1 discussed the national perspective or 'external' factors and their effect on Rugby women. It posed questions as to how far Rugby girls were concerned with national issues concerning female roles in the labour market. Rugby inhabitants were deeply affected by economic and political changes in the country. For example, a large proportion of work was related to the production of war goods and weapons. The necessities of war production offered Rugby women new employment opportunities to earn their own incomes. In addition advances made during the inter-war years relating to electrical engineering allowed female workers to benefit during post-war progression within the 'light' industries.

Chapter 1 also examined the creation of 'girlhood' during the period and how this affected the Rugby working female. The ambiguous term of 'girl' was contrived to 'fit' those females who had yet to achieve the status of 'womenhood' upon marriage. The oral evidence does support the concept of

'girlhood', that girls did experience a new chapter of their lives between school and marriage. For the first time many girls were earning their own wages and achieving independence, although this depended for the most part on the attitudes of parents. Experiences of work were combined with socialising with the opposite sex and this was a period when a 'suitable' partner would be sought. Frequently, oral respondents recalled events in their adolescent lives that offered them new and exciting opportunities. Day trips organised through companies gave young girls the chance to 'find their feet' away from parental eyes. Weekly dances in the town offered entertainment without chaperones. From the oral evidence it is suggested that girls experienced a 'rite of passage', especially during the 1930s and 1940s.

However the degree of freedom achieved by many girls is questionable. Parents still had a 'say' in the actions of their daughters and the desire to keep a daughter 'pure' ensured that morality was enforced. New opportunities regarding work and leisure were evident and a unique culture was available via books and magazines, but these experiences were nearly always at the discretion of parents, and in particular of the mother. Nevertheless the desire for marriage and motherhood did not change and the concept of 'girlhood' was considered by many oral respondents to be a temporary rather than permanent state.

The desire for a 'good' partner allowed many parents to exercise authority over their 'off-spring'. The working life of many young girls was dictated by the feeling that they must undertake 'suitable' work for the female form. Clerical

work therefore satisfied many social commentators, as it was clean, required 'nimble' fingers and did not place females within the realms of immorality apparently found on the factory floor.

How did Rugby women fit with the national image of 'women's work'? A large number of women were interviewed and employment details were varied. Many oral respondents recalled working in the factories in rather dirty conditions, but this was mainly during the war and was therefore seen as necessary. Female workers were an available source of labour and solved many of the problems felt by Rugby companies. It cannot be said that all Rugby girls conformed to societal expectations. The oral testimony suggests that girls sought work that would satisfy their parents and their own local expectations for employment.

The question of 'choice' has been a major concern throughout this thesis. Chapter 3 concentrated on this issue. Opportunities for working girls in Rugby were discussed in Chapter 2, which gave details of particular companies offering work to young females. Nevertheless it was important to ask whether or not girls had the 'choice' to take up these opportunities or were their working lives dictated by a number of internal or external factors? From the evidence given by the oral respondents it would seem that most girls suffered constraints because of their backgrounds and familial attitudes, beliefs, loyalties and economic status. Situation at birth therefore altered the employment prospects for young girls. In addition there appears to have been a natural shift to persuade girls to undertake traditionally female duties and

professions, such as clerical or shop work. Factory work was considered but only that which involved light tasks.

The most influential member of the family was either the mother or father. Their decision was often the determining factor. Parental ambition placed young girls into particular professions. For example, those parents who wanted their daughters to learn a skill were prepared to push them into clerical trades, even though the starting wage was slightly lower. In contrast some oral respondents recalled that they sought factory work, often paid on a 'piece-work' basis, solely because their parents needed extra money at that time. These girls were learning a skill that was unmarketable and therefore they could not progress in the future or achieve promotion. Nevertheless no respondents recalled any resentment about this decision. A working-class acceptance of parental authority was evident in the oral testimony.

A secondary factor, after that of the family, was the Day Continuation School. This unique institution was designed to offer young adolescents increased opportunities to extend and develop their education. The success of the scheme is without question. However, young girls tended to be placed in one of two groups which often 'chose' their future careers for them. Those girls who were considered to be academic were offered clerical skills, whilst others were offered homemaking classes, which did not involve a 'professional skill'.

Chapter 4 took these occupational 'choices' further to see how decisions made upon leaving school would affect progression later in life. When ascertaining why young girls 'chose' certain occupations, I was eager to

establish how this would restrict future life choices. From the oral evidence, it is possible to identify four factors that had implications for future decisions. First, a young girl's choice would affect her future economic status. The financial differences between 'piece-work' which was relatively unstable and a salary, if somewhat lower, achieved by many clerical workers was great. Some oral respondents recalled worrying about money if work was slow that week or if they were ill, as often parents relied on this source of income. Clerical workers had a more stable environment.

The choice of employer also had future ramifications for young girls. Rugby had a very definite hierarchy of employers and some oral respondents recalled a sense of inferiority whilst working in certain companies. Employment hierarchies often affected friendships and social relationships were based around the place of work. There can be no doubt from all the oral testimonies that the most regarded employer in the town was the British Thomson-Houston Company Ltd. A job within the B.T.H. was considered to be a 'prize' job and employment 'for life'. Consequently B.T.H. employees, whether male or female, rarely resigned from the company. Rugby inhabitants saw no reason to leave what was considered to be a safe, secure and highly respected source of employment.

The choice of employment upon leaving school also affected a girl's chances of receiving additional training. As discussed, the possibilities of extra education were a factor when choosing employment. Girls were separated into two distinct spheres, clerical and housewifery. Future ramifications are

therefore evident. Once a girl was placed into a certain category, then she found it extremely difficult to change her type of employment. A lack of clerical training forced many young girls into remaining 'unskilled' for the rest of their working lives. It became obvious from talking to the oral respondents that 'missed' opportunities at an early age affected their destiny.

However it is questionable as to how much young girls thought about their future. Oral testimony suggests that it was the parents who saw the importance of training. Consequently some parents encouraged occupations which involved clerical training. Other oral respondents recalled that their parents regarded them as an additional source of income, or stated that they were enthralled by the possibility of earning more money than their friends undertaking 'piece-work' and that their hedonistic day-dreams won the day.

Lastly Chapter 4 discussed the future of young working girls in terms of finding a partner and marriage. From the oral testimony grew a concept that the choice of employment affected a girl's ability to secure a 'good' marriage. The definition of 'good' was thought of as finding a man who would successfully provide passion, love, and caring and also economic stability. It was not surprising that most women interviewed expressed a desire that they always wanted to marry and very often assumed that this would be the case. Paid work until marriage was often seen as a 'stop-gap' before their destined occupation of wife and mother started. However a girl's employment upon leaving school affected her ability to secure a 'good' husband.

The main conclusions relating to marriage partners were drawn from those experiences of women who had worked at the B.T.H., and essentially those who had worked in the offices of that company. B.T.H. employed a large number of working-class girls from the town to undertake clerical duties. Simultaneously the company sought new graduate apprentice engineers from all over the country to work on the development side of their business. These men arrived in Rugby and stayed at B.T.H. accommodation and not surprisingly socialised with the girls from the offices. The oral testimony highlighted numerous instances whereby couples met at B.T.H. dances and events. The usual pattern was for the man to have been a non-Rugbian, whilst the women were always Rugby girls. Employment at the B.T.H. meant that these couples stayed in the town for the rest of their lives. These 'couplings' were recognised as normal from the oral respondent's point of view. However, from a social history perspective what is noticeable is the change in economic status of the girls who eventually married these graduates.

As discussed, while Rugby did not have a slum working-class area, most women interviewed considered themselves to be from 'working class' homes. In contrast, graduate apprentices at the B.T.H. often had degree qualifications and were aiming for middle-class occupations. In a number of cases it was possible to identify significant leaps within the class structure for Rugby women. For example, women who had been born in small terraced houses found themselves moving to semi-detached or detached homes upon marriage to a graduate apprentice. This progression did not occur among

those women who had found work at other establishments in the town. Marriage partners were usually found via friendship groups at places of work and social events organised by associated groups.

There can be no doubt that the lives of young girls were affected by their choices upon leaving school. This thesis has aimed to categorise such factors as 'internal'; factors from the Rugby area or their home situation. Throughout this thesis I have maintained that young females in Rugby failed to achieve autonomy in terms of occupational choice. Their working lives in essence were controlled by a number of forces, over which, they seemed to have little control. Chapter 5 therefore redressed this balance and discussed the female 'powerbase' at home and in the workplace. Did young females assert any authority n their lives? Importantly this chapter dealt with females who had left the parental home and had therefore established themselves in married life. I suggested that a 'paradox' existed: women quickly established themselves within a marriage and created their own relative authority, but that this triumph was never achieved within the workplace. Marriage mysteriously gave women a sense of moral superiority and they were given authority over the realms of the household. In contrast, at work women suffered inferiority largely because of their ability to bear children. In instances where unmarried women achieved promotion, particularly at the B.T.H., this was usually due to their single status.

The aim of this thesis has been to 'track' the experiences and choices available for young females embarking on their first job and their subsequent

lives via the oral testimony of Rugby inhabitants. From hindsight and the oral evidence, young girls were faced with a number of important decisions regarding employment upon leaving school. This is a significant change from previous decades of women's history. Girls in Rugby benefitted from a unique variety of occupations that had previously not existed. This was a result of the growing 'light' industries in the local area.

The girls were faced with appeasing many factors, taking note of parental advice, considering the financial need of the family and thinking about their future hopes for training and education. How aware these girls were of the importance of their 'choices' is debatable. Decisions, as have been discussed, carried ramifications for the future. For example, there were the questions of how much could a girl earn, how would she achieve promotion, in which social group would she find herself and lastly how well-placed would she be to find a marriage partner.

These local stories happened against a background of national events, the media and societal expectations. Rugby's workforce was sustained by war-production and many women re-entered employment at this time. The inter-war period encouraged the use of labour-saving devices and changed the concept of housework for many women. Nevertheless the oral evidence depicted a traditional, maternal image for women during the period. Most respondents remained at home once they were married and looked forward to married life and child-bearing. Here women found their power niche. The authority achieved by women in the home was never achieved in the work

place. Family morality and child-rearing were considered to be 'female', while many companies and factories continued to exercise masculine authority.

As discussed, such conclusions are presented in the hope that future research will provide comparisons with different localities. Oral history is a spontaneous and ever-growing commodity. It exists through people's memories, thoughts and opinions. The oral respondents in Rugby provided many individual experiences. Some women when interviewed did not understand how their story could be important. It is my hope that this thesis shows that all memories have a role to play in understanding the past, and in furthering historical debate.

APPENDIX A

ORAL INTERVIEWS

Listed below are the major interviews undertaken. Other interviews did take place, but are not listed as only general information was obtained. In addition, please note a number of sessions took place at residential homes and involved group discussions of ten or more ladies at one time. These sessions are not listed individually.

The length of each interview varied from 30-90 minutes.

Name of respondent — Date of interview

Miss Coultard — **6th October 1995**
Born in 1924 in Scotland. Came to Rugby in 1946 when leaving the forces. Found employment in the laboratories at the B.T.H.

Miss Court — **24th April 1995**
Born in 1914 in Rugby. Father was a plasterer's labourer and her mother worked during the war at the corset factory. Found employment in the factories of B.T.H. and Lodge Plugs.

Miss Crouch — **15th November 1994**
Born in 1912 in Yorkshire. Father was a coalminer and her mother died when she was nine. Came to Rugby in 1931 and worked in many branches of the local Co-operative Stores.

Miss Sales — **18th November 1994**
Born in 1916 in Rugby. Father was a labourer and her mother only worked after her father's death. Found work as a companion and then trained as a nurse.

Miss Wearing — **29th March 1995**
Born in 1913 in Coventry and came to Rugby in 1915. Father was a bricklayer and her mother undertook cleaning jobs. Became a domestic servant and in the war years worked for Lodge Plugs.

Miss Webster — **31st October 1994**
Born in 1915 in Rugby. Father was a painter and decorator and her mother did not work. Stayed at school until eighteen and then went to teacher training college.

Miss Wilde — **7th November 1994**
Born in 1913 in Liverpool; came to Rugby in 1936. Father was an engineer and her mother did not work. School teacher and later headteacher.

Misses Arkell — **21st April 1995**
Born in 1909 and 1910 in Rugby. Father was a shoe repairer and later a sub-postmaster. Both daughters always worked for their father.

Mr and Mrs Jeffs **26th October 1994**
Born in 1919 and 1925 respectively. Mr Jeffs' father was a telegraphist and his mother did not work. Mrs Jeffs' father was a farm labourer and her mother worked at a local bicycle-making factory. Both Mr and Mrs Jeffs worked for the Post Office as telegraphists, which is where they met.

Mr and Mrs Simpson **13th April 1995**
Born in 1920 and 1921 respectively. Mr Sharman was born in Wales and arrived in Rugby in 1937 as a graduate apprentice to work at the B.T.H. Mrs Sharman was born in Rugby. Her father was a groom and her mother did not work. Met each other at the B.T.H.

Mr Cass **13th February 1995**
Born in 1920. Came to Rugby in 1943 to work at Willans and Robinson.

Mr Elliott **10th November 1994**
Born in 1910 in Rugby. Father was a builder and mother was a domestic servant at Rugby School. Found employment as an apprentice builder in the family business.

Mr Price **1st November 1994**
Born in 1905 in London and moved to Rugby in 1910. Father was a groom and his mother a seamstress. Mr Price was a postman.

Mrs Allen **27th February 1995**
Born in 1914 in Rugby. Father was a plumber and her mother a dressmaker. Found employment in domestic service.

Mrs Black **31st March 1995**
Born in 1917 in Rugby. Father was a coppersmith at Willans and Robinson and her mother did not work. Started work at the cardboard box factory and then moved to both the steam laundry and Lodge Plugs. Husband worked for the B.T.H.

Mrs Brick **20th October 1994**
Born 1912 in Hillmorton, Rugby. Father was a council worker and mother took in laundry. Worked at Lodge Plugs at age of 14. Husband worked for the waterways.

Mrs Bridge **11th January 1995**
Born in 1920 in Rugby. Father worked in the factory at Willans and Robinson and her mother died when she was thirteen. Found employment at Lodge Plugs and later at the B.T.H. Married a worker from the B.T.H.

Mrs Brown **25th January 1995**
Born in 1903 in Dunchurch, Rugby. Father was a groom and her mother did not work. Found employment as a dressmaker.

Mrs Byfield **17th February 1995**
Born in 1923 in Rugby. Father worked for the B.T.H. and her mother undertook cleaning and took in washing. Found employment as a factory worker, firstly at the B.T.H. and then at Lodge Plugs.

Mrs Cashmore **21st February 1995**
Born in 1921 in Rugby. Father was a moulder at Willans and Robinson and her mother was a dressmaker. Found employment in the B.T.H. office.

Mrs Catchpole **9th November 1994**
Born in 1907 in a village just outside Rugby. Father was a gardener and her mother did not work. Worked at the cardboard box factory in the town. Married a postman.

Mrs Constable **6th June 1995**
Born in 1914 in Rguby. Father was a farmworker and her mother did not work. Found employment initially at her auntie's public house and later worked for Marks and Spencers. Husband was a printer.

Mrs Cooper **7th March 1995**
Born in 1917 in Rugby. Father was a hedge-cutter and her mother did not work. Found employment at the corset factory and later in the factory at the B.T.H.

Mrs Cryer **21st February 1995**
Born in 1915 and came to Rugby in 1922. Father was a butcher and her mother worked in their shop. Found employment firstly as a shop assistant in a shoe shop and then at the family's shop. Married an apprenticed patternmaker.

Mrs Dawson **6th June 1995**
Born in 1906 in Rugby. Father was a carpenter and her mother did not work. Became an apprentice hairdresser and eventually started her own hairdressing shop. Husband worked for the Co-op.

Mrs Davies **20th February 1995**
Born in 1920 in Rugby. Father was a bricklayer labourer and her mother did not work. Found employment at Lodge Plugs and later in the B.T.H. offices.

Mrs Drake **3rd April 1995**
Born in 1910 in Rugby. Father was a turner at the B.T.H. and her mother took in washing. Found employment at a local printers and then a cycle factory. Married a gardener.

Mrs Dutton **5th April 1995**
Born in 1911 in Sunderland. Came to Rugby in 1919. Father was a car mechanic and her mother did not work. Found employment at the Cigar Factory and later at the B.T.H. Married a B.T.H. worker.

Mrs Engels **27th February 1995**
Born in 1922 in Rugby. Father was a signalman in the railway and her mother did not work. Found employment at the B.T.H. in the offices.

Mrs Fletcher **29th November 1994**
Born in 1911 in Lincolnshire and came to Rugby in1929. Father was a traindriver and her mother used to make extra money by fruitpicking. Found employment as a cook. Married an electrical engineer from the B.T.H.

Mrs Fretwell **17th March 1995**
Born in 1917 in Rugby. Father was a turner at the B.T.H. and her mother did not work. Found employment in the B.T.H. offices and worked in the typing and ediphone departments.

Mrs Fry **3rd April 1995**
Born in 1904 in Rugby. Father was a labourer at the B.T.H. and her mother worked at a local laundry. Found employment at the Lamp Factory and stayed there 41 years. Married a railway worker.

Mrs Fuller **17th November 1994**
Born in 1914 in Rugby. Father work at the B.T.H. and died there due to an industrial accident. Mother did not work. Found employment at Lodge Plugs and Marks and Spencers. Married a post office worker.

Mrs Garaghty **27th March 1995**
Born in 1931 in Rugby. Father was a tinsmith at the B.T.H. and her mother did not work. Found employment at Woolworths before and after marriage.

Mrs Gardner **8th November 1994**
Born in 1924 in Rugby. Father was a railway linesman and her mother was a publican's daughter. Found employment in a shop in Rugby and then joined the army.

Mrs Grahame **6th March 1995**
Born in 1916 in Rugby. Father was a steward for the British Legion and her mother worked evenings at the club. Found employment at the corset factory.

Mrs Grey **8th February 1995**
Born in 1911 in Rugby. Father was a motor mechanic and mother did not work. Found employment at the corset factory and later at the B.T.H. Lamp Factory.

Mrs Hartman **25th May 1995**
Born in 1905 in Rugby. Father was a chauffeur and her mother did not work. Found employment at the Corset Factory.

Mrs Hill **29th March 1995**
Born in 1916 in Coventry and came to Rugby in the same year. Father was a carpenter and her mother did not work. Trained as a teacher and then married a photographer and helped him in their own business.

Mrs Holmes **16th February 1995**
Born in 1924 in Rugby. Father was a coal man for the Co-operative and her mother did not work. Worked as a counter assistant in a shop and later undertook clerical work for the ATS.

Mrs Huggett **3rd November 1994**
Born in 1924 in Rugby. Father worked in the factory at Willians and Robinson, whilst her mother took in washing when necessary. Worked at the Corset Factory and Lodge Plugs. Married a worker from the B.T.H.

Mrs Hutchinson **1st November 1994**
Born in 1903 in Worcester; came to Rugby in 1910. Father was an iron moulder and her mother did not work. Mrs Hutchinson worked at the Lamp Factory for nearly ten years before marrying a foreman from the B.T.H.

Mrs Jennings **24th October 1994**
Born in 1906 in Rugby. Father worked at the B.T.H., but her mother did not work. Started as a B.T.H. clerical apprentice in 1922.

Mrs Jessop **3rd November 1994**
Born in 1926 in Rugby. Father was a solicitor's clerk and her mother did not work. Was employed as a bank clerk and later undertook clerical and secretarial work.

Mrs Lambert **6th March 1995**
Born in 1914 in Lancashire. Came to Rugby in 1938. Father were in the cotton mills and her mother did not work. Had her own cake shop in the town.

Mrs Langton **7th December 1994**
Born in 1912 in Scotland. Came to Rugby for work in 1934. Father was a farmer and her mother a housewife. Found employment at the B.T.H. in the personnel department after taking a degree. Married a fellow worker at the B.T.H.

Mrs Leigh **31st October 1994**
Born in 1924 in Rugby. Father and mother owned and ran a small shop. Mrs Leigh worked in the factory at Lodge Plugs and the B.T.H.

Mrs Linford **1st May 1995**
Born in 1915 in Birmingham, but lived in Rugby since childhood. Father worked at Willans Works and her mother was a dressmaker. Found employment as an apprentice dressmaker and later worked at a steam laundry. Married a Test Inspector from Willans and Robinson.

Mrs Marsh **22nd March 1995**
Born in 1916 and came to Rugby in 1922. Father worked at the gas workers and her mother took in lodgers. Became a general domestic servant before marriage.

Mrs Marshall **28th March 1995**
Born in 1933 in Rugby. Father was a railway labourer and her mother worked due to her father's ill-health at the B.T.H. Found employment in the typing pool at the English Electric, where she met her husband.

Mrs Mason **10th April 1995**
Born in 1930 in North Kilworth and arrived in Rugby in 1947. Father was a railway worker and her mother did not work. Found employment at Boots' Library.

Mrs Mayfield **4th January 1995**
Born in 1902 in Rugby. Father owned a gentleman's outfitters and her mother did not work. Found employment in the family shop at the age of sixteen. Married an engineer from the B.T.H.

Mrs McGrath **24th May 1995**
Born in 1920 in Rugby. Father was a factory worker and her mother did not work. Found employment at Marks and Spencers on the shopfloor.

Mrs Miller **3rd November 1994**
Born in 1923 in Rugby. Father was a post office worker and her mother was a nursemaid. Found work in a local dress shop.

Mrs Morse **15th February 1995**
Born in 1911 in Rugby. Father was a plumber and her mother did not work. Found employment as a domestic servant for ten years and then worked at the Lodge Plugs during the second world war.

Mrs Pearson **14th November 1994**
Born in 1914 in Nuneaton; came to Rugby in 1928. Father was a policeman and then later worked at the B.T.H. and her mother did not work. Found work at the B.T.H. undertaking clerical work. Married an army soldier.

Mrs Purnell **8th March 1995**
Born in 1917 in Rugby. Father worked in the foundry at the B.T.H. and her mother took in washing. Found employment as a clerical apprentice at the B.T.H. and later became secretary to the Town Clerk. Married a graduate apprentice.

Mrs Read **8th June 1995**
Born in 1901 in Rugby. Father worked in the factory at Willans and Robinson and her mother did not work. Found employment at the corset factory.

Mrs Struthers **7th April 1995**
Born in 1915 in Rugby. Father was a draughtsman at the B.T.H. and her mother did not work. Found employment in local shops as a shop assistant.

Mrs Thatcher **8th November 1994**
Born in 1913 in Wales. Arrived in Rugby in 1929 to go into service. Father was a railwayman and her mother did not work. Worked in domestic service until her marriage to a factory worker.

Mrs Thomas **19th February 1995**
Born in 1910 in Rugby. Father worked for the B.T.H. and her mother took in paying guests to make some extra money. Found employment in the B.T.H. offices.

Mrs Weaver **20th March 1995**
Born in 1912 in Leamington. Father had his own carriers business and her mother worked in the village shop. Came to Rugby in 1928 for work. Found employment as a nanny and later owned her own cake shop.

Mrs Whetstone **28th May 1995**
Born in 1915 in Rugby. Father was an invalid and could not work. Her mother took in laundry jobs. Found employment at the Lodge Plugs. Married a man who worked at in the factory at Willans Works.

Mrs Williams **15th March 1995**
Born in 1907 in Thurlaston, just outside Rugby. Father was a chauffeur, but he died in the 1920s. Mother did not work. Stayed at school until she was seventeen and then remained as a student teacher. Married a manager at the A.E.I.

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Background information

Interviewee's name, present address, year of birth, marital status, year of marriage.

Where were you born? (street or district if known)
Do you know why your parents settled there? Did you move during your childhood and for what reasons?
Tell me your recollections as a child living in this area?

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

How old was your father when you were born?
What was his occupation? Did he seek other employment - part time or casual labour?
Did your father remain employed all of his life? (seasonal/unemployment)
Do you remember your father ever being out of work?
If father was out of work: Did your mother have to work, when your father was not earning? Did she provide a `safety-net'?

How old was your mother when you were born?
Did she have a job before she was married; if so, what did she do?
Can you remember her working when you were a child?
What jobs did she undertake? What hours did she work?
Did she work at home? If so, what did she do?
eg, baking bread and cakes, laundry
Did your mother work around her domestic responsibilities?
Did she have to work during the war years?
Can you ever remember helping her out with a job at home?
Did you have a babysitter to look after you?

2) Domestic household

Can you describe to me what your life was like living at ....*street or district*
Did the street/district have a `true' community feel? Did neighbours help in times of trouble?

Can you remember if most mothers worked or stayed at home? If they worked, what did they do?
Who undertook the housework in the house?
Did your parents employ anyone to help in the house?
If yes, numbers and tasks of servants.

Did you have any tasks you had to carry out regularly at home to help your mother and father?
Was your freedom constrained, for example, more than your brothers?
How long did you continue to do these tasks? After you left school?
Did your mother dominate the home?
Did she manage the money?

3) School life

At what age did you start school?
Was the school near your home and did you go to the same school as your friends?
Did the teachers encourage you to learn male/female subjects?

While you were at school, did you have a part-time job or any means of earning a little regular income? If yes, how did you get it?
What job was it? What hours did you work?

4) Transition from school to work

How old were you when you left school?
Would you have stayed longer if you had had the opportunity?
What did school mean to you?
Can you describe to me your feelings when you left school; happy, sad, fearful?

Did the school play any part in finding work for you? Did they influence you in any way? Did school prepare you for work?

What choices were available to you in terms of future occupations?
Where did your parents want you to find work? What was yours mothers opinion to you going out to work? How much influence did they have in choosing your future occupation?

Can you remembered feeling pressured into finding work quickly in order to help you parents out financially?
Did you worry about starting work?
Could you talk to your parents easily about what you wanted to do? Were you pushed into `female' work?
What did you see or believe to be suitable work for women?

Personal aspirations
Did you have any positive ideas about your future occupation?
When left school, how many years did you expect to work for?
Were you free to choose your job? What constraints and considerations were there?

Evening classes
Did you attend any part-time education afterwards?
Day Continuation School
Did you look forward to learning new skills?
Did you employer approve of you having time off to go to the DCS?
What classes did you attend? Were they typically `female' subjects?
Were you stopped from attending a particular class, as it was thought of as `male'?
Did you regard this as fair?

5) Homelife after starting work/leaving school
Did you continue to live at home? Were you happy about this? Did you want to leave home?
How long did you live at home? Why did you leave?

Relationship with parents
Did starting work change your relationship with your parents at all?
Were you wages your own?
How much board and lodgings did you pay?
How important was your wage to the family income and for what reasons?
Did you dispute the amount you had to pay?
Were you allowed to lead your own life?
Did you have to look after younger brothers and sisters to help the family?

4) Work

What position did you start your working life and with which company?
Did you feel that company offered security and a job for as long as you wanted it?
Would you have preferred a different occupation? Did you feel superior/inferior to other occupations?
Was it large company or a small concern?

How did you get the position?
By advertisement, word of mouth etc
Did your parents play any part in getting you the position? Did they worry that you would be mixing with the wrong type of people, for example factory workers?
Did your parents worry about your welfare at work?

Tell me about your first day at work?
What were your impressions of the company a) before you started, b) your first day and c) after you had worked there a number of weeks?
Did a number of young people start on the same day?
Can you remember knowing anyone on your first day?

Were you put through any training for your first job?
Were you taken on as an apprentice?
Did the older workers have to train you?
Were you undertaking the same task all day or was the job varied?

Conditions
What hours did you work?
Did you have to clock in?

How much were your wages?
Did you feel that your wages was fair?
Did you ever work overtime? What was the difference in the pay?
How did the rate of pay compare with other companies? Were friends receiving similar wages?
Had the money attracted you to working for that company?
Was it common knowledge, as to who received the highest wages?

Were you ever put on `short-time'?

How much holiday entitlement did you receive?

Dinner hours, breaks during the day?
How long was the lunch break?
What did you do at lunch time - go home, into town etc?
Did the company provide somewhere where you could eat your lunch or a canteen?
If you used the canteen, who did you sit with? Was the canteen self-segregating?

Did you receive any perks or benefits in your job?
Did the company provide any clothing or uniforms?

What happened when you were ill? Did you continue to go to work?
Did you receive sickness benefit?
Did the company send any welfare officers to your home if you were ill for a longer period?
What happened in times of bereavement; were you allowed time off?

Atmosphere
Tell me about the atmosphere within your workplace - noisy, happy, frustrating?
How did you get on with your fellow workers?
Were they a similar age to yourself - if not, what age range?

Did men and women work together?
What was the composition of the workforce - numbers of man and women?
Could you talk or relax at all?

Did you feel as if you had any power or authority?
Did your attitude change ie increase/decrease over time?

Tell me about your relationship with your superior/employer?
What was your first impression of your superior?
Did you feel comfortable in the presence of your manager/supervisor; strict or friendly?

Were there any chances for promotion?

Friendships
Did you see any of your work colleagues out of work hours?
Did they live in the same area or district?

Did the company provide any social clubs or groups?
Were there company dances, outings and events?
Were celebrations held for example, for birthdays, weddings, Christmas etc?
Were there any office/work romances?

Union activity
Did you or any of your colleagues join a trade union or professional organisation?
Did you take part in any of its activities?

Length of employment
Did you enjoy your work?
How long did you do it for?
Why did you leave?
What did you do after that?

7) Leisure activities
Can you tell me how you spent your spare time as a young woman?
Were you involved in any local clubs, church etc?
Did you make new friends at work?
Did you stick to one small group of friends - were these friends the people you went to school with and grew up with in the same district?
Did your parents expect to know where you were, when you went out?
Did you have to home by a certain time?

8) Courtship
How did you meet your husband?
What attracted you to him?

Engagements
Did you have a long engagement?

What did engagement mean? ie long or short
Was it assumed that the man you were engaged to, as definitely the man you would marry?
Can you remember anyone calling off an engagement?

Did you always expect to get married?
At what age did most people of your generation get married?
Did you expect to leave work when you got married? Was it expected of you?
Tell me your thoughts about working after marriage?
Did your parents have the same opinion?
At work, was there a rapid turnover of staff due to marriage?
What was the management's attitude towards female staff and marriage - did they expect them to leave?
Did you consider having a family as a natural progression after marriage?

9) Marriage

What was your family's/parents attitude to you getting married?
What age were you when you married? How long had you known your husband/wife?
Did you save up money before getting married?
Did your parents help you set up a home? Did they help you financially?
Did you buy/rent your own house when you married?
In which area did you live? Was it near to your parents or did you move away?

Did you leave work as soon as you were married?
If yes, how did you feel about this? Did you want to leave work?
How did you see your domestic role as wife/mother?
Did you believe that your working days were over when you married?
If you had had the chance would you have continued to work after marriage?

Did you consider your husband to be the major breadwinner?
Was his job always secure (was he ever made redundant)?
Were you ever forced to find work, due to economic circumstances?

Homework
Did you undertake any part-time or work from home?
What did you husband think of you earning extra money for the family?

Did you husband express a preference for you working, either full or part time? For what reasons?
Working from home: Did you mother or sisters help you? Was it a family business?

If informant worked after marriage: What did your husband feel about you continuing to work? Did he want you to stay at home?
Did you work after marriage, `fit-in' with your domestic responsibilities?
Did you husband help you more, as you also had to go out to work?

What was more important to you a) doing the household chores
b) going out to work?
Did you have to perform a balancing act with your time?

Finances and decisions
Who had control of the housekeeping money in the marriage?
Did you decide how the money should be spent or was it a joint decision?
Who would you say was dominant in your marriage? Who made the decisions?
Was money a major problem? What did you do if there was not enough money for one particular week? Did you ever have to resort to credit?

If informant worked after marriage; Did you pay any of the bills yourself?
How did you spend your wages? Were they included in the family income in general, or were they already spent every week? Necessities or luxuries?
Did you wages give you more power in the household? Could you make decisions concerning household expenditure?

10) Children
Did you have any children? How many?
Did you leave work when you had your children?
If not, who looked after your children for you?
Was there any provision for childcare facilities in your area?
What did other friends do after having children? What were your opinions of this?

What did you consider to be the best start in life for your children?
Would you have considered placing them with a childminder?

Did you undertake any part-time work or any work from home, as a compromise rather than putting them in childcare?

Did you seek the advice of your mother when bringing up your children?
Did the locality provide `back-up' services when bringing up children, such as babysitting?

Did you ever go back to full-time work after you had children?
If yes, for what reasons did you decide to go back to work?

APPENDIX C

N.B. All data taken from national census material.

Table 1: Occupation of Rugby workers over the age of 12 in 1921.

OCCUPATION	MALES	FEMALES
Clerks and draughtsmen	778	613
Domestic servants	43	735
Electrical apparatus makes/fitters	754	444
Laundry workers	7	72
Makers of cardboard boxes/stationery	5	13
Makers of tobacco	2	21
Metal workers	1969	91
Printers	100	72
Railway workers	806	9
Shop assistants	194	239
Teachers	116	155
Textile workers	106	204

Of particular interest is the number of women involved in Cigar making, printing, electrical engineering and office work. All these occupations were significant in Rugby during the period.

Table 2: Number of rooms per person in Rugby, 1921, 1931 and 1951

	Rooms per person		
Geographical area	**1921**	**1931**	**1951**
Rugby	1.27	0.70	0.68
Leamington	1.45	0.67	0.64
Nuneaton	1.02	0.88	0.75
Stratford	1.31	0.71	0.68

Table 3: Population by age in 1921 and 1931

DATE	AGE	MALE	FEMALE	MARRIED FEMALES
1921	15-19	1473	1199	5
	20-24	1019	1181	243
	25-29	1041	1167	672
	30-34	1036	1051	720
	35-39	889	1036	790
	40-44	892	950	733
	45-49	749	790	602
1931	15-19	986	1077	12
	20-24	1088	1091	184
	25-29	989	1024	546
	30-34	832	940	693
	35-39	819	984	765
	40-44	880	901	711
	45-49	748	883	659

APPENDIX D

During the inter-war period, Rugby was experiencing a 'boom' economically due to the electrical engineering industries that had located there at the turn of the twentieth century (namely British Thomson-Houston Ltd and Willans and Robinson). These 'new' industries provided new sources of employment. Unemployment figures help to illustrate the importance of the 'new' industries for the Midlands.

Table 1: Regional insured unemployment rates, 1924-38

	South –east %	South -west %	Mid-lands %	North-east %	North-west %	Scot-land %	Wales %	GB %
1924-38	5.8	8.2	9.4	14.3	12.6	13.1	17.5	10.7
1930	8.0	10.4	14.7	20.2	23.8	18.5	25.9	15.8
1931	12.0	14.5	20.3	27.4	28.2	26.6	32.4	21.1
1932	14.3	17.1	20.1	28.5	25.8	27.7	36.5	21.9
1933	11.5	15.7	17.4	26.0	23.5	26.1	34.6	19.8
1934	8.7	13.1	12.9	22.1	20.8	23.1	32.3	16.6
1935	8.1	11.6	11.2	20.7	19.7	21.3	31.2	15.3
1936	7.3	9.4	9.2	16.8	17.1	18.7	29.4	12.9
1937	6.7	7.8	7.3	11.1	14.0	16.0	23.3	10.6
1938	8.0	8.2	10.3	13.6	17.9	16.4	24.8	12.6

Source: P. Dewey, War and Progress: Britain 1914-1945 (Harlow, 1997), p. 259.

Table 1 gives unemployment figures for the Midlands, which were always below average between 1930 and 1938 and were significantly lower than in the North, where traditional heavy industries were facing decline. Dewey notes the differences between unemployment in the regions;

> The incidence of unemployment was also uneven within regions. This was true of regions with expanding or contracting industries. Much depended on local conditions. Thus on average in 1936, London had an unemployment rate of 7.7. per cent, but this ranged from 4.6 (Greenwich) to 12.4 (Poplar). Cornwall's average of 16.2 per cent covered variations from 6.5 (Newquay) to 31.0 (Redruth). Even in Warwickshire, with an expanding workforce, unemployment varied from 2.3 percent (Rugby) to 9.3 (Bedworth).[1]

Dewey highlights the particularly low unemployment rates in Rugby and also maintains that electrical engineering was an 'example of the rapidly growing industries'.[2]

Dewey highlights further indications of Rugby's affluence when focusing on particular industries, as shown in Table 2. Again these statistics show that while unemployment rose in 1932, those involved in the electrical engineering industry did not suffer as much as those working in heavier industries such as shipbuilding. In general, the 'new' industries performed much better than the

[1] P. Dewey, War and Progress: Britain 1914-1945 (Harlow, 1997), pp. 258-259.
[2] Dewey, War and Progress, p. 259.

traditional trades in the 1930s in providing fuller regional employment. Rugby therefore was in a position to benefit from the explosion of manufacturing and electrical engineering opportunities. The experience of the inter-war years was inevitably different for Rugby people than for those (for example) who depended on coal mining or shipbuilding in the North.

Table 2: British unemployment and employment in certain industries, 1929-37

	Insured unemployment			Employment in 1937 as a % of 1924
	1929 (%)	1932 (%)	1937 (%)	
Declining/ slow growth industries				
Coal mining	15.5	33.9	14.7	60.0
Cotton	13.1	28.5	11.5	76.6
Shipbuilding	23.8	62.2	23.8	76.7
Woollen and worsted	13.7	20.7	10.2	86.2
General engineering	9.6	29.1	5.4	114.1
Fast growth industries				
Chemicals	6.3	16.5	6.5	119.0
Building	12.2	29.0	13.8	146.0
Metal industries	8.0	19.3	6.0	162.7
Electrical engineering	4.4	16.3	3.1	167.2
Motor vehicles	7.1	20.0	4.8	179.5
Electrical equipment	4.8	12.7	5.2	247.3

Source: P. Dewey, War and Progress: Britain 1914-1945 (Harlow, 1997), p.261.

Layboum reinforces such statistical evidence.[3] His research concentrated on how the economy affected the social and political history of Britain. His statistics support the view that Rugby and its region were experiencing relative prosperity in the inter-war period.

Table 3: Geographical Distribution and Changes, 1921-1938

Regions	Population in 1938 (millions)	% change 1921-1938
South East	14.49	+18.1
Midlands	7.21	+11.6
West Riding	3.46	+6.0
E. Counties	1.85	+3.7
Lancashire and Cheshire	6.16	+3.5
South West	2.08	+3.3
Northern rural counties	1.29	+3.1
Scotland	4.99	+2.1
Northumberland and Durham	2.20	-1.0
Central Wales	0.68	-4.8
South Wales	1.78	-8.1

Source: K. Laybourn, Britain on the Breadline (Stroud, 1997), p. 96.

Table 3 illustrates the geographical distribution of the population during the 1920s and 1930s. Between 1921 and 1938, the Midlands was the second

[3] Keith Laybourn, Britain on the Breadline: a social and political history of Britain, 1918-1939 (Stroud, 1998).

largest area in terms of population growth. This corroborates the oral evidence that maintained that the electrical engineering companies, and the like, continued to offer new opportunities during the period often attracting in-migration. Table 3 indicates that the Midlands offered new prospects to many people hitherto living in areas with high unemployment. Thus there was a move away from Wales, Northumberland and Durham, towards the more affluent areas and in particular to the South East and the Midlands.

Further clarification of Rugby's relative prosperity is indicated by infant mortality rates. Infant mortality rates have been used by historians as an important indicator of the general health of the population. Due to the small size of Rugby town, statistics relating solely to Rugby are unavailable. However comparisons between national and regional data show lower levels of infant mortality in the Midlands. For example in Table 4 the infant mortality rates for both males and females between 1921-30 were lower that the national average and significantly lower than in the North and in Wales. These statistics illustrate how the Midlands experienced lower levels of poverty and ill health. The Midlands were enjoying a degree of relative affluence because of the developing nature of electrical engineering, vehicle manufacture and other such industries, and because the region did not have to contend with the decline of the older Victorian heavy industries.

Table 4: Infant mortality rates (all causes) in the decennium 1921-30.

Area	Sex	Infant mortality rate per 100,000 births
England/ Wales	Male	8146
	Female	6266
North	Male	9718
	Female	7477
Midlands	Male	7389
	Female	5651
South	Male	6776
	Female	5212
Wales	Male	8684
	Female	6796

Source: The Registrar General's Decennial Supplement, England and Wales 1931 (London, 1952).

Table 5 illustrates further the differences between selected towns in terms of infant morality rates. As previously stated statistics specifically for Rugby are unavailable, but Coventry and Northampton provide regional similarities in terms of prosperity during the inter-war period. The northern cities on the table, such as Halifax, Salford and Sheffield show higher rates of infant mortality, indicating a worse situation for the general health of the population. Only the South fares better than the Midlands.

Table 5: Infant Mortality Rates for selected cities, 1921-30.

City	Sex	Infant mortality rate per 100,000 births
Blackburn	Male	10531
	Female	7774
Bournemouth	Male	6439
	Female	4534
Coventry	Male	7725
	Female	6250
Derby	Male	8212
	Female	6034
Halifax	Male	9820
	Female	7708
Newcastle upon Tyne	Male	10097
	Female	7846
Northampton	Male	6520
	Female	5032
Oxford	Male	5603
	Female	4219
Salford	Male	11505
	Female	9095
Sheffield	Male	9597
	Female	7315
Wolverhampton	Male	8735
	Female	6514

Source: The Registrar General's Decennial Supplement, England and Wales 1931 (London, 1952).

Table 6: Infant mortality rates by selected county, 1921-30.

County	Urban/Rural	Male	Female
Warwickshire	Urban	6638	5247
	Rural	6820	5186
Lancashire	Urban	9270	6983
	Rural	7718	5899
Northumberland	Urban	9655	7145
	Rural	7189	5355
Yorkshire West Riding	Urban	9081	6983
	Rural	8892	6620
Kent	Urban	6212	4719
	Rural	5693	4453
Leicestershire	Urban	7156	5939
	Rural	6800	5157

Source: The Registrar General's Decennial Supplement, England and Wales 1931 (London, 1952).

Table 6 reinforces this view of prosperity in Rugby and its region. The infant mortality rates for Warwickshire are significantly lower than Lancashire, Northumberland and Yorkshire. Warwickshire's results were very close to those of Kent, which as a southern county is not expected to have high mortality rates. Rugby, as part of Warwickshire, is included in these statistics.

Lastly, do the statistics offer some indication of the length of Rugby's prosperity? Tables 4, 5 and 6 refer to the period 1921-30. Did the situation change in the 1930s?

Table 7: Infant Mortality Rate (under one year of age) in 1938 and 1939.

	Rates per 1000 live births registered in year	
Area	1938	1939
England/Wales	52.7	50.4
South East	46.6	41.2
North	60.3	59.4
Midlands	52.4	51.8
East	44.3	41.9
South West	46.5	42.6
Wales	56.7	59.7

Source: The Registrar General Statistical Review of England and Wales for the years 1938 and 1939 (London, 1947).

Table 7 illustrates any progression in terms of infant mortality in the 1930s. By

1939 all areas had decreased their infant mortality rate except Wales. However the degree of reduction varies. In the Midlands, despite a decrease in the number of babies dying, the figures do not keep up with the national average. The North also struggled to improve which indicates a continuation in the poor state of health for many in that area. Table 7 substantiates the view that Rugby and its region were experiencing relative prosperity in the inter-war period, and this owed much to the 'new' industries and the opportunities they offered for a more stable occupation, more regular wages and a relatively buoyant standard of living.

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