

An age of emotion: expertise and subjectivity in old age in
Britain, 1937-1970

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List of abbreviations and notes

ASL	Albert Sloman Library
CWL	Clifford Whitworth Library
MOA	Mass Observation Archive
UKDA	United Kingdom Data Archives
US	University of Sussex

Transcription

I have corrected spelling and grammatical errors in my sources in order to convey the meanings that were intended by their authors, and to maintain their dignity.

Personal names

Where archivists have requested it, I have omitted the names of research participants. This is the case for the Mass Observation and *The Last Refuge* projects. Everywhere else, I have employed the first names of my historical subjects, in keeping with this thesis' focus on private lives and subjectivity.

Short abstract

This thesis heeds W. Andrew Achenbaum's call for historians of ageing to analyse the inner lives of their subjects. Building on and problematizing existing studies of health and welfare policies for the old, it explores the ways that mid-century public and private life shaped how individuals felt about old age. Both public discussions and private narratives of ageing are used to consider how older people understood and expressed their emotional experiences during a challenging period of the life cycle.

I argue that old age in general, and its emotional dimensions in particular, are missing from British historiography. Yet both were vital to social life in the mid-century, when the ageing population was an important political issue and a large number of experts hoped to manage the emotional and psychological aspects of this 'problem'. This thesis begins by setting out this national context for old age, showing that heightened interest in ageing and emotion were significant influences over the expansion of the welfare state. However, contrary to the expectations of mid-century researchers and policy-makers, my subsequent chapters show that older people frequently maintained their social roles and relationships through informal means. This thesis explores how ageing men and women engaged with work, retirement, ill health, marriage, bereavement, fashion, beauty culture, and autobiography as opportunities to find meaning in late life.

Together, these varied perspectives on old age make a series of interventions in its history. I argue that historians could do much more to detail the significance of the life cycle for their subjects, whether they write political, social, or cultural history. As this thesis shows, such studies should approach ageing as a lifelong and personal process, which has been shaped by reminiscence and story-telling. I suggest that historians of emotion are best-equipped to write scholarship that is sensitive to the passing of time and personal biography in this way.

Extended abstract

This thesis represents the first sustained academic study of the emotional experience of ageing in mid-century Britain. In examining this subject, my research lies at the intersection of an underexplored historical experience — ageing — and the underutilised methodological and theoretical practices demonstrated by historians of emotion. I argue that older Britons have been unjustly side-lined within histories of British politics, culture, and private life. We suffer from their absence within histories of mid-twentieth-century Britain, in particular, because, without them, we have been unable to give a full account of the influence of contemporary fears about the ‘ageing population’ on the development of the welfare state on one hand, or the evolution of private life under the influence of state pensions and widespread retirement on the other. As I argue here, during the period between 1937 and 1970, the proponents of state welfare, and representatives of the fields of expertise that directed its expansion such as the social and psychological sciences, drew attention to the emotional dimensions of ageing, made them relevant to national debates, and aimed to intervene in individuals’ apprehension of them as never before. Yet, to understand the effects of the burgeoning power and status of experts, historians must do more than recount the introduction of new theories and policies within public institutions and the state’s management of aspects of private life. Instead, as this thesis begins to do, we must interrogate the production of mid-century expert knowledge and return to the research that

underpinned influential statements about old age. In particular, as this thesis shows, we can usefully adopt perspectives from historians of emotion in order to analyse the interplay of research methodologies, political concerns, and subjectivity within the lives of older individuals.

In detailing an ‘age of emotion’ in this way, I seek to establish a new conceptual framework for the study of old age in mid-century Britain. The analysis presented here suggests that ageing has been experienced as a personal process, rather than as a social category in the mode of the welfare entitlements or retirement packages that arrived at certain chronological points within the life course. Taking a range of perspectives on the nature of emotional experience and subjectivity in late life, each chapter within this work makes a fresh call for greater scholarly recognition of the depth and complexity of inner lives in old age. Further, my examination of these aspects of affective life alters our conception of a number of significant social changes in mid-twentieth-century Britain, including the expansion of the welfare state, new working and leisure opportunities, and the rise of ‘companionate marriage’. In fact, I argue that the period that I study here, spanning from 1937-1970, should itself be re-evaluated for its significance as an ‘age of emotion’. Gesturing to the increasing importance attached to subjective experiences during this period, this study begins its analysis in the year in which the famous social research group Mass Observation was formed, and thus at the beginning of their efforts to create a ‘science of ourselves’ out of the thoughts and feelings of a ‘mass’ of ordinary British citizens. It ends in 1970, the year in which the Local Authority Act streamlined the mixed economy of welfare which had provided for the emotional needs of older Britons since 1945, through the services offered by the plethora of voluntary, business, and state organisations that feature throughout this

thesis. Thus the chronological boundaries of this study usefully focus our attention on the mid-century validation of emotions and psychology as subjects of public concern and state activity, highlighting the increasingly close relationship that was forged between public and private life during this ‘age of emotion’.

My research thus addresses a range of academic literatures including the work of historians, sociologists, psychologists, and literary theorists. After reading the analysis presented by historians of emotion, and Michael Roper in particular, I have become more attuned to the ‘silences’ and contestations that are apparent in archival sources, sometimes within the expressions of feeling that were made by their authors, or were recorded within descriptions of the behaviour displayed by others. In an original contribution to this body of literature, I insist that this methodology can tell us as much about public life and politics as it does about experiences in the private realm, where it has most often been applied. Also inspired by recent scholarship in the history of social science, such as the study of sociology authored by Michael Savage, I have come to view disciplinary methodologies and theories as systems of thought that reshaped political and academic discourses within mid-century Britain. However, this study deepens our understanding of the influence of mid-century social science by identifying its effects within the private lives and identities of older research participants, an analytical step which Savage did not take. In particular, working with the data collated by mid-century social scientists, I suggest that the increasingly common experiences of telling stories to interviewers or writing responses to questionnaires required ageing Britons to enact the social scientific idea that their everyday experiences contributed to new and important theories of social life. I highlight the ways that participation in social research was a distinctive mid-century endorsement of the value of the elderly. Of course,

the involvement of older people in these projects simultaneously generated records of habits of expression and informal socialising that have been underused by twentieth-century historians to date. Finally, while not always replicating their methodology, this thesis looks beyond works of history to key into the questions about age and subjectivity that have been raised by sociologists, psychologists, and literary theorists. My project emerges from its engagement with these varied approaches to old age marked by their shared commitment to the task of tracing the sometimes messy, and sometime mundane, but always telling interactions of corporeal life, memory, and feeling within late life.

Beginning the substantive work of this thesis, chapter one establishes the national context for old age that was established by participants in new fields claiming expertise over old age, such as social surveying, psychology, sociology, and the health and welfare professions. It describes how questions of emotions and psychology increasingly became important concerns within these public arenas and establishes how old age was understood as a particular kind of emotional and psychological experience — especially as lonely, isolating, and meaningless — due to set of concerns about the lives of the elderly that were shared by experts, mainly because of their economic implications for the state. Historians have noted the centrality of new forms of knowledge to mid-century public life but, typically of twentieth-century British history, have often left private life out of the picture. Addressing this oversight, I explain how it was that the emotional lives of older Britons became valid points of social and intellectual inquiry and motivation for state action, as well as a subject of contestation between social scientists, policy-makers, and the administrators of welfare services. I place mid-century theories about ageing within high-profile contemporary

debates about poverty, welfare, and institutional life; work and retirement; home and family life; and illness and death, in order to trace their effects on the public treatment of the aged.

As chapter two suggests, these fields of expertise articulated differing notions of emotional and psychological need as they redefined the social problem of old age as being about emotional and psychological life, as much as about social isolation or physical decline. Through a case study of Peter Townsend's *The Last Refuge* study into residential institutions for the old, the second chapter of this thesis tracks the complex process of the implementation of mid-century policies in old age care — as well as the resistance and subversion that followed. Undermining popular visions of a hegemonic mid-century welfare state, I demonstrate the disaggregated delivery of welfare services for the elderly and multivalent interpretations of the ethics of social democracy among welfare workers and residents of old age homes. I argue that historians must pay greater attention to the perspectives of, and interactions between, the Britons who lived and worked within public institutions in order to understand how welfare policies worked on the ground, and what their interventions meant within the lives of individuals.

The following chapters turn our attention to the nature of old age within private life and local communities, albeit from the perspective of elderly Britons' engagement with the work of the mid-century social researchers who visited their homes. I argue that mid-century social research into old age, with its novel emphasis on first-person narrative, drew on and influenced informal modes of story-telling and identity-formation that operated within British households. Further, I suggest that both formats for telling stories about the past were vital components of the ageing process. In particular, older people's life histories

affirmed their value among friends and family, and made the passing of time into a subject of discussion and reflection within their social circles. Together, chapters three and four consider the ways in which this function of narrative complicates our understanding of older people's experiences of work, retirement, ill health, marriage, and bereavement — pointing to unexpected sources of pleasure and pride along the way. What did older men's boasting about their working achievements mean in retirement? And what role did the photographs and belongings of the dead which adorned Britons' homes play in the emotional lives of families? By following these lines of questioning, I evoke an emotional landscape of late life that has been richer and more varied than scholars have supposed.

Building on this analysis, chapters five and six introduce some of the tools of selfhood that were available to old people within mid-century British cultural life: particularly the grooming of their bodies and the activity of writing about their lives. These chapters explore the interrelation of the physical, mental, and emotional dimensions of the ageing process, by detailing the inclusion of older people in mid-century fashion and beauty culture and published autobiography. Writing against the sociological argument that older people have felt divorced from their bodies, I argue that, before the mid-1960s, fashion items lent ageing bodies a degree of glamour, elegance, and fun. At around the same time, the genre of autobiography offered a steadily-diversifying group of Britons the chance to publically consider the meaning of living through time. The publications of older writers suggest the ways in which mid-century generational and personal histories intersected, for instance when life narratives mapped onto the introduction of broader developments such as state education or slum clearances. These sources also complicate and extend our notion of subjectivity by suggesting the interweaving of private reflection and familial or community

projects of remembering; the formative and circling effects of memory and story-telling in individuals' lives; and the power of both past and present influences to determine self-identity in old age. While both these sets of practices, of grooming and reminiscing, evoke some of the inward-focused aspects of ageing, they also demonstrate the engagement of older people with public life — in appearing fashionably or publishing a life story — and therefore some of the aspects of mid-century culture which upheld meaningful identities in late life. These dimensions of British popular and literary culture have previously been outside the scope of the historiography of old age; in part because of its over-reliance on prescriptive literature which has detailed different aspects of the emotions and psychology of ageing. In contrast to the omissions that characterise other histories of old age, chapter six of this thesis marks the culmination of the study's examination of how the subject of ageing might encourage historians to push at the boundaries of what our discipline usually describes, for instance by attempting to account for the experiences of inhabiting an ageing body or looking back over a long life as I do here. Such biographical analysis poses many challenges for historical research, as it requires that we deal better with the accumulation of experience and knowledge over time so that our historical subjects must be viewed — as they understood themselves — within the context of their own life, and not as belonging only to the decade, social context, or position in the lifecycle in which we encounter them.

This study makes important contributions to our understanding of old age, emotion, and expertise in mid-century Britain. I uncover diverse personal experiences of growing older which show how our expectations of old age have been misconstrued, especially through a historiography that focuses almost entirely on the political and medical management of the 'problems' of an ageing population. Using the testimony of social research participants,

published autobiographies, and even the images of ageing men and women that were published in high-fashion periodical British *Vogue*, I explore the cultural tools, social roles, and personal relationships that made later life meaningful, and analyse how the expansion of professional and state expertise in old age influenced the lives of individuals. Ultimately, I demonstrate that old age was more than the sum of its physical impairments and welfare entitlements; for older Britons, the process of ageing was embedded in subjectivity, socialising, and life history. Further, this thesis suggests that a broader application of the creative methodologies that have been developed within histories of emotion and studies of ageing like this one, would deepen and complicate our understandings of public and private lives — and particularly of their interrelationship — within twentieth-century Britain.

Introduction:

An age of emotion

During the decades between 1937 and 1970 many of the Britons who claimed leadership in the public life of the nation, especially in the arenas of medical care, policy-making, and the development of new health and welfare professions, told an increasingly positive story about their treatment of older generations. In one example, Nesta Roberts wrote an official history for the National Old People's Welfare Council's thirtieth anniversary in 1970, which celebrated the organisation's involvement in such changes for the better. The Council had been set up by the National Council of Social Services in 1940 to coordinate assistance for older people (especially elderly evacuees) in wartime, and continued to mediate between voluntary and state organisations to secure the population's wellbeing afterwards. In this context, Roberts framed the organisation as a symbol of mid-century advances in knowledge about late life, and the elaboration and extension of the state's participation in social welfare. Pointing to the many benefits that had accrued to older Britons over the Council's life, Roberts celebrated how,

Today the old, like the rest of the population, can obtain hearing aids and properly prescribed spectacles and, if they are sufficiently enterprising, false teeth which fit at least approximately. When they are ill they can be cared for at home by doctor and district nurse — though both general practitioners and district nurses are overburdened.

In theory, at least they can count on having small adaptations like handrails, or a ramp over an awkward step, made in their houses; they will be taken to and from hospital for physiotherapy; a chiropodist will attend to their painful feet; holidays may be arranged for them; if they suffer from failing sight the local library will supply large-print books, and, in any case, will bring a library van to their door; if they find it difficult to get in and out of the bath unaided an attendant will come round to help; if they can no longer get to a church visitors may bring a tape-recording of a service and play it to them; if they can no longer look after the garden a squad of schoolboys will take it over and if cooking is too much for them a hot meal will appear on their table at least five days a week.¹

Roberts listed the fruits of extensive mid-twentieth-century research into the lives of the elderly, which had quantified the difficulties caused by ill health, stairs, sore feet, and the other problems of old age which she rehearsed. At the same time, she highlighted that state and voluntary organisations had established services to address each of these previously unmet needs, which were variously administered by the National Health Service, occupational therapists, chiropodists, and voluntary workers. The reassuring structure of Roberts' passage, in which each ailment or frustration was matched by its remedy, suggested the security and self-esteem this system afforded individuals who were fearful of growing old. Her formula was a popular way of explaining how the older generation fared in mid-century Britain in contemporary political and professional discourse, and its outline has been repeated in histories of twentieth-century Britain which chart the same story of the expansion of welfare and medical services over the period.

This thesis explores multiple gaps within this account; drawing our attention to the silences which, I argue, deserve as much analysis as the schedule of achievements that this history presented. Most significantly, Roberts left questions of emotion and subjectivity implicit and only partly visible in her passage, particularly by assuming that the needs of the elderly could be met by a set of material and social interventions, whether through the delivery of medical

¹ Nesta Roberts, *Our Future selves*, London, 1970, pp.114-5.

implements, library books, or hot meals. I posit that Roberts' elision of the internal dimensions of ageing has extended into our histories of old age, many of which rely on such institutional or expert literature for evidence of the characteristics of this period. By contrast, this thesis argues that individuals' emotional responses to ageing were both more complex and more influential than Roberts allowed. Specifically, I suggest that Britons' understandings of old age were shaped by personal biographies and domestic habits of socialising and story-telling as much as they reflected the physical and material changes that were associated with the ageing process or the political and professional management of those developments. Hence, the effects of mid-century expertise and welfare politics were different than Roberts and subsequent historians of old age have supposed. While the extension of the welfare state did not end patterns of inequality and exclusion in old age in the way that Roberts implied, the fields of expertise she referenced — particularly those of psychology, social science, and the welfare professions — shaped a distinctive mid-century understanding of emotional life in old age, and influenced the way many Britons interpreted their own experiences of growing old through the mechanisms of occupational education, social research, and medical and welfare services.

I argue that we should see mid-century Britain as an 'age of emotion' in two ways. First, the rich and multitudinous emotional dimensions of late life deserve greater attention, not least for the way they push at the boundaries of current historical practice by demanding that we engage with the physiological processes of the human life cycle and the philosophical challenges of mortality. Ageing should be viewed as a process involving individuals' recognition of, and response to, changes in physical, social, and personal aspects of life that occurred over a lifetime. Second, the middle of the twentieth century should be understood

as an ‘age of emotion’ in itself. As I discuss throughout this thesis, the public life of the period was shaped by experts who were uniquely concerned with understanding and intervening in emotional and psychological experience on a national scale. In the chapters that make up this study, I highlight the interweaving of these two fields — the internal worlds of ageing individuals, and the mid-century projects that aimed to explain and influence them — and show that charting this interaction can alter our understanding of both. Reframed as a constitutive and descriptive component, rather than a summary, of the experience of old age, Roberts’ passage becomes an intellectual puzzle that the remainder of this thesis will break apart and examine. Roberts wrote her history as an insider to new ways of thinking about social and emotional life in old age; the disciplines of social science and psychology had shaped her own conception of old age, and she was invested in proving the worth of the welfare interventions their practitioners had recommended. Stepping outside the framework of mid-century expert knowledge, I am less concerned with judging the success or failure of its proponents in achieving their stated goals of improving the material context of old age. Instead, I adopt a more critical view of the production and dissemination of expertise, and raise questions about its influence within the private lives of individuals.

To illuminate these two ‘ages of emotion’ I have employed different historical methods to the tracking of policy developments that characterises existing histories of old age.² I have adopted an array of the techniques used by historians of emotion such as Michael Roper, historians of social science such as Michael Savage, and literary critics in the field of

² See Pat Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, Oxford and New York, 2000.

autobiography such as Paul John Eakin.³ While I have not repeated their interviewing and observational methods, I have also been inspired by the nuances of recent works in the sociology of old age, notably by Julia Twigg and Peter Öberg, and especially by their findings about the complex interplay of material culture, corporeal life, and gender norms with the experience of ageing.⁴ This thesis also draws on the history and theory of family photography, the meaning of dreams and visions, and personal interpretations of fashion and beauty culture, among other fields.⁵ In what follows, these varied methods of critical inquiry build a diverse and comparative body of analysis that highlights the emotional dimensions of growing old.

My methodology involves, first, situating mid-century expertise over old age within the development of the disciplines of psychology and sociology, and the methods employed by the researchers, administrators, and practitioners who aimed to implement their findings about ageing Britons. Second, asking how this rhetoric and these patterns of policy-making shaped the interactions of individuals within the welfare state and, in particular, reframing social research as a formative influence within mid-century debates about care for the elderly. Third, examining social research interviews for evidence of personal processes of ageing that did not fit with the interests of social researchers or the national scope of policy-making, but highlighted how social research contributed to informal habits of story-telling and identity-

³ Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*, Ithaca and London, 1999; Michael Roper, 'Slipping out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History', *History Workshop Journal*, 59, 1, 2005, pp.57-72; Michael Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method*, Oxford, 2010.

⁴ Peter Öberg, 'Images Versus Experience of the Aging Body', in *Aging Bodies: Images and Everyday Experience*, Christopher A. Faircloth, ed., Walnut Creek, 2003, pp.103-39; Julia Twigg, 'The Body and Bathing: Help with Personal Care at Home', in *Aging Bodies: Images and Everyday Experience*, Christopher A. Faircloth, ed., Walnut Creek, 2003, pp.143-69.

⁵ Kathy Lee Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*, New York, 1998; Gillian Rose, *Doing Family Photography: The Domestic, the Public and the Politics of Sentiment*, Farnham, 2010; Christine Stansell, 'Historic Passion: Dreams', *History Workshop Journal*, 62, 1, 2006, pp.241-52.

formation. And, finally, detailing older people's engagement with forms of self-expression that have not been addressed by historians, such as beauty and fashion ideals and the writing of autobiographies. Taking all of these perspectives into account, ageing emerges from this study as a personalised and deeply emotional process, not as a social category in the way that extant histories of old age imply. Each of the forms of narrative examined here did vital work in the apprehension of ageing as older Britons drew strength and found meaning within diverse cultural resources in the face of the many challenges of late life.

Old age: history, theory, policy

Old age is a qualitatively distinct period of life which has not often been explored by modern British historians, despite Selina Todd and Claire Langhamer's insistence that addressing the life cycle is vital to understanding the social mechanisms of work, gender, and family life in early- and mid-twentieth-century Britain.⁶ A handful of academics across the disciplines of psychology, economics, sociology, gerontology, geography, and history have placed age alongside gender, race, region, religion, and class as 'a crucial determinant of economic, social and cultural life'.⁷ Yet most historians have been reluctant to give age the analytical primacy they have afforded to class, race, and gender in particular. As this thesis will show, this is a gap in our understanding of the mid-twentieth century, which was a period when ageing influenced individuals' lives and developments in public life in equal measure. I argue that, within public life, mid-century interest in emotions and psychology influenced policy-

⁶ Claire Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-60*, Studies in Popular Culture, Manchester, 2000; Selina Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family in England, 1918-1950*, Oxford and New York, 2005.

⁷ John Benson, *Prime Time: A History of Middle Age in Twentieth-Century Britain*, London, 1997, p.1; Peter Laslett, 'Necessary Knowledge: Age and Aging in the Societies of the Past', in *Aging in the Past: Demography, Society, and Old Age*, David I. Kertzer and Peter Laslett, eds, Berkeley and London, 1995, p.4; Öberg, 'Images Versus Experience of the Aging Body', p.106.

making and the development of theory around old age. In turn, resulting interventions, services, and methodologies shaped the personal lives and identities of a large number of older individuals.

These mid-century transformations in the public treatment of old age established many elements of the theory, policy, and infrastructure that we associate with later life today. In particular, the pattern of lengthening life expectancy and lower birth rates (the former mostly the result of lessening mortality in infancy and youth) and therefore the ‘dramatic long-run increase in the proportion of older people’ in Britain began in the late-nineteenth century and became a source of social anxiety when the ‘ageing population’ became statistically apparent in the 1920s and 1930s.⁸ When Albert Davies published his study on Britain’s ageing population for the Fabian society in 1938, he opened the discussion by pointing to the increasing average age of the British community, tracing the rise in the number of Britons aged over 70 from one million in 1914, to two million in 1938, and predicting the further rise to a total of three million by 1965.⁹ Publications of the latter decade only extended Davies’ concern. Writing in the forward to Kenneth Hazell’s pioneering 1960 publication in gerontology, the medical doctor and researcher Joseph Sheldon called the ‘recency and speed’ of increasing life expectancy ‘remarkable’.¹⁰ In the following study, Hazell identified this as a new ‘social pattern’ and wrote of the growing proportion among the British population who were of pensionable age, which was then one in seven: ‘Unless it is properly dealt with, it could reduce the welfare state, full employment, and our whole

⁸ Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, p.333.

⁹ Albert Emil Davies and Fabian Society, *Our Ageing Population, Fabian Tract*, London, 1938, p.2.

¹⁰ Kenneth Hazell, *Social and Medical Problems of the Elderly*, London, 1960, p.9.

economy, into a chaotic muddle'.¹¹ In part the cause of this concern, this mid-century older population enjoyed a fresh set of social rights which we still recognise as a baseline of modern welfare support, particularly the pension which was first introduced in Britain by the Liberal government in 1908.¹² The concern of mid-century commentators such as Davies, Sheldon, and Hazell and their frequently 'alarmist' predictions about the nation's ability to afford such privileges in the future — peopled, as they imagined it would be, with a skyrocketing proportion of unproductive, financially-dependent elderly — would have sounded familiar to the ears of political students of the 1980s, or to broadsheet or tabloid-readers today.¹³

Likewise, the first public iterations of the idea that old people required particular medical attention and the services of specialists who understood the physiology of ageing and could develop treatments and technologies for associated health problems, along with the underlying argument that ageing and disease were distinct from each other (and therefore treatment and rehabilitation should be the aim of such specialist medical care), were made by doctors and psychiatrists during this period. Geriatric medicine was 'invented' around the time of the First World War and was practiced by innovative physicians led by Marjory Warren in England and William Ferguson Anderson in Scotland from 1935, although the professional status and official reforms sought by geriatricians came much later.¹⁴ Psychiatrists began to make similar distinctions between the process of ageing, diseases such as Alzheimer's, and the manifestations of mental health problems in the elderly from the

¹¹ Ibid., p.11.

¹² Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, p.225. Among others, Joseph Chamberlain had campaigned for the introduction of the old age pension since the late 1890s.

¹³ Ibid., p.336.

¹⁴ D. A. Matthews, 'Dr. Marjory Warren and the Origin of British Geriatrics', *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, 32, 4, 1984, pp.253-8; Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, pp.436-7, 44-49.

mid-1940s, although the sluggish spread of their diagnostic tools can be seen in the lack of a language to describe mental health issues, as opposed to psychological neuroses, that characterised contemporary medical, professional, and welfare literature.¹⁵ This broad context — the phenomenon of the ‘ageing population’, the assumption that its members deserved a period of retirement and special forms of governmental support, and fascination with the scientific and medical advances that might mediate the consequences of growing old or perhaps combat ageing all together — still dictates much public discussion of old age today.

A number of twentieth-century British historians including Christopher Conrad as well as Pat Thane, Paul Johnson, and John Macnicol have been intrigued by these important changes and have looked closely at some of the intellectual and political shifts underpinning them.¹⁶ This has produced a field of literature that often seeks to interrogate the claims that were made by mid-century experts and reformers about what difference they would make in the lives of old people, and to assess the success or failure of their interventions in raising standards of life for the aged. For example, this body of work has picked up on problems of funding and implementation that were suggested in the passage that opened this introduction, in which Roberts expected false teeth to fit ‘at least approximately’ and cautioned that the medical practitioners who attended the health problems of the aged were

¹⁵ Claire Hilton, 'The Clinical Psychiatry of Late Life in Britain from 1950 to 1970: An Overview', *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, 20, 5, 2005, pp.423-8; Claire Hilton, 'The Origins of Old Age Psychiatry in Britain in the 1940s', *History of Psychiatry*, 16, 3, 2005, pp.267-89.

¹⁶ See Christopher Conrad, 'Old Age and the Health Care System in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity*, Paul Johnson and Pat Thane, eds, London and New York, 1998, pp.132-45; Paul Johnson, 'Parallel Histories of Retirement in Modern Britain', in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity*, Paul Johnson and Pat Thane, eds, London and New York, 1998, pp.211-25; John Macnicol, *The Politics of Retirement in Britain, 1878-1948*, Cambridge, 1998; Tony Salter, *100 Years of State Pension: Learning from the Past*, London, 2009; Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*.

overburdened.¹⁷ As well as pointing to the slow expansion of geriatric medicine and old age psychiatry, Thane and Macnicol have argued that both major political parties made grand claims about their newly humane treatment of old age in the mid-century but ultimately undermined the redistribution of wealth to the elderly and the reform of old age institutions. As Thane has detailed, during the mid-century the Conservative Party favoured minimal and contribution-based services while Labour raised the value of the pension without making it more redistributive, or tying it to living costs or the level of average wages.¹⁸ Echoing the findings of mid-century social surveys such as those authored by Joseph Sheldon, Peter Townsend, and Michael Young, and particularly their ‘rediscovery’ of poverty in the 1960s, these historians have pointed to the intransigence of poverty in old age over the twentieth century.¹⁹ As Johnson expressed in the title of his chapter addressing this issue, historians have had a strange sense of two ‘parallel’ histories of old age and retirement, which describe immense change and improvement in the living standards enjoyed by older people but also the consistent failure of governments (or professional and voluntary services) to transfer an equitable share of the nation’s wealth to the old.²⁰ Markedly similar to Charles Booth’s findings in late-nineteenth-century London, the European Commission Observatory on Ageing and Old People reported that 30 per cent of the British elderly lived below the poverty line in 1992.²¹

A handful of scholars have touched on the cultural implications of these changes. For instance, Thane and Sarah Harper have discussed the influence of retirement pensions in

¹⁷ Roberts, *Our Future Selves*, p.115.

¹⁸ Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, pp.367-78.

¹⁹ Pat Thane, 'Older People and Equality', in *Unequal Britain: Equalities in Britain since 1945*, Pat Thane, ed., London, 2010, pp.7-28.

²⁰ Johnson, 'Parallel Histories of Retirement in Modern Britain', pp.211-25.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp.211-2.

defining old age chronologically, beginning at the age of qualification (which was 65 for men and 60 for women, the distinction appeared after Labour reduced the age for women in 1940 under pressure from the National Spinsters' Pensions Association), and creating a stereotype of the financially-dependent 'old age pensioner'.²² Examining the American experience, Thomas Cole has argued that the shift from Calvinist to evangelical religious interpretations of old age from the late-nineteenth century meant that ageing lost significance as a spiritual journey, and the problems of the old were interpreted as personal failures or punishment for sin. However, Cole has suggested that both were subsequently overtaken by the twentieth-century 'scientific management' of old age, in all the guises described by Roberts at the outset of this chapter.²³ Despite enthusiastic celebrations of the human longevity that might be possible through the application of modern science and technology, Cole has identified this twentieth-century shift as a disaster for ideals about old age in the public realm, which lost all potential for moral or philosophical guidance as they became a set of scientific or professional problems to be solved. Addressing a different time period and section of the life cycle, Kay Heath has argued that the concept of 'midlife' and the notion that it would 'begin an inevitable and calamitous decline' was 'invented' in Victorian Britain through its fiction, advertising, and statistics, which addressed the period's broader anxiety about degeneration in society and individuals, and refracted a Victorian-era obsession with the body as expressive of character.²⁴

²² Sarah Harper and Pat Thane, 'The Consolidation of "Old Age" as a Phase of Life, 1945-1965', in *Growing Old in the Twentieth Century*, Margot Jefferys, ed., London, 1989, pp.43-61; Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, p.332.

²³ Thomas R. Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America*, Cambridge, 1992, pp.88, 92-8, 196.

²⁴ Kay Heath, *Aging by the Book: The Emergence of Midlife in Victorian Britain*, Albany, 2009, pp.1, 13-9.

These frameworks for public discussions of age — including the explanatory significance afforded to demographic patterns, and political and mass media concern about the financial implications of care for the elderly, most recently in the context of ‘austerity’ politics — still operate in the present day, bringing late life to the forefront of public debate and catalysing a keen interest in old age among social scientists. Contributors to this literature, especially Mike Featherstone, Mike Hepworth, and Andrew Blaikie, among others, have pursued a more nuanced understanding of ageing than historians have attempted, through their interest in the connections between these policies, their cultural consequences, and the subjective experiences of individuals.²⁵ Yet, although twenty-first-century scholars are responding to a similar set of issues as their mid-twentieth-century counterparts did, their conclusions about personal experiences of ageing in the contemporary context should only be taken as clues to the complexity of subjective processes of ageing — as this thesis shows, their models of selfhood do not map on to the stories told by older people in the mid-century.

In this study I establish the historical specificity of common notions of ageism (such as the dismissal of older workers from paid employment, or the exclusion of the elderly from the fashion industry) and of forms of emotional response to them. Significantly, I show the inapplicability of a series of historically-influential sociological theories of ageing such as those of disengagement and ‘social death’ which maintain their popular, if not academic appeal, and have tended to guide assumptions about old age in the absence of historical evidence and analysis. The emotional experience of growing older in the mid-century is not

²⁵ See Andrew Blaikie, *Ageing and Popular Culture*, Cambridge, 1999; Mike Featherstone, Mike Hepworth, and Bryan S. Turner, *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory, Theory, Culture & Society*, London, 1991; Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick, *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, London, 1995; Mike Hepworth, *Stories of Ageing, Rethinking Ageing Series*, Buckingham, 2000. See also Bethany Morgan’s work on middle life: B.R. Morgan Brett, ‘The Negotiation of Midlife: Exploring the Subjective Experience of Ageing’, Doctor of Philosophy thesis, University of Essex, 2011.

best explained by the theory of ageing as a process of social and emotional ‘disengagement’ that was posited by American sociologists Elaine Cummings and William Henry in 1961; the notion of the state’s creation of a ‘structured dependency’ for old age during the twentieth century that was popularised by British scholars in the 1980s; the assertion that older people have been oppressed by youth-centric cultural norms or lived in a state of anomie, as Haim Hazan has argued; or the idea that has emerged from sociological case studies, that older people disown their appearances as ‘masks’ of ageing that have nothing to do with their true selves.²⁶ Indeed, recent psychological testing and sociological observation of people’s attitudes towards their own bodies have suggested more nuanced patterns of thought and behaviour in old age, which several studies have reported to result in greater levels of happiness and feelings of physical attractiveness with advancing age.²⁷ Treating ageing as an emotional and psychological process in this way is integral to this thesis, in a departure from, and important intervention in, the approach taken in the field’s existing historiography.

In this study I employ inspiration, insights, and methodologies gleaned from historians working in the loosely-defined ‘history of emotions’ to access and analyse similar nuances in the emotional responses of older people in the middle of the twentieth century. In so doing, this thesis reorients our histories of both ageing and the welfare state. By asking questions about emotional, corporeal, and material experiences in the past — and therefore in the absence of subjects to interview, observe, and submit to psychological tests, in the way contemporary scholars have — historians working in the field of emotion have employed

²⁶ Elaine Cumming and William Earl Henry, *Growing Old: The Process of Disengagement*, New York, 1961; Bill Bytheway, 'Visual Representations of Late Life', in *Aging Bodies: Images and Everyday Experience*, Christopher A. Faircloth, ed., Walnut Creek, 2003, p.106; C. J. Gilleard and Paul Higgs, *Cultures of Ageing: Self, Citizen and the Body*, Harlow, 2000, p.13; Haim Hazan, *Old Age: Constructions and Deconstructions*, Cambridge, 1994, pp.33-5.

²⁷ Helene H. Fung, Bob H. Ching, and Dannii Y. Yeung, 'Age Differences in Emotional Regulation: Findings from Western and Eastern Cultures', in *Ageing and the Elderly: Psychology, Sociology and Health*, L. O. Randal, ed., New York, 2007, pp.63-88; Öberg, 'Images Versus Experience of the Aging Body', pp.103-39.

innovative analyses of archival source material and challenged the boundaries of what our discipline can reveal. Similar to Langhamer's work on love, I argue that the emotional experience of old age has been 'shaped, deployed, invoked, and ultimately subjectively "felt" by individuals in dialogue with their material and discursive worlds', establishing its cultural and historical specificity.²⁸ Drawing on William Reddy's characterisation of statements of feeling as 'emotives' which are designed to act on the world as well as describing it, I take a critical stance on the stories that old people recited to social researchers, as well as emotional responses to ageing that were described by the experts themselves, revealing both to have been strategies within mid-century debates about what constituted humane treatment of the elderly.²⁹ In carrying out this analysis of both social research data and published autobiographies, I have been inspired by the work of Michael Roper, which offers a series of creative and insightful readings of the letters that were written by early-twentieth-century soldiers and businessmen. Roper explores some of the many ways that written sources can suggest 'what is hinted at, unspoken, or unspeakable' through their 'slips of the pen, grammatical errors, contradictions, repetitions', omissions, and platitudes, an insight which I extend in my consideration of what was and was not said to social researchers, and what could and could not be explained within published autobiographies.³⁰

Drawing on all of these literatures, I present a different history of late life to Thane's descriptions of old age as a political issue and basis for social action or Cole and Heath's

²⁸ Claire Langhamer, 'Love and Courtship in Mid-Twentieth-Century England', *The Historical Journal*, 50, 1, 2007, p.175.

²⁹ William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*, Cambridge, 2001.

³⁰ Michael Roper, 'Re-Remembering the Soldier Hero: The Psychic and Social Construction of Memory in Personal Narratives of the Great War', *History Workshop Journal*, 50, 2000, pp.181-204; Michael Roper, 'Splitting in Unsent Letters: Writing as a Social Practice and a Psychological Activity', *Social History*, 26, 3, 2001, pp.318-39; Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War*, Manchester and New York, 2009.

cultural histories of ageing.³¹ I engage critically with this existing historiography of old age and with the interdisciplinary literature on ageing, with the primary purpose of heeding W. Andrew Achenbaum's call for historians of old age to 'probe the inner lives' of their subjects.³² I employ these approaches in my analyses of both personal experiences and the efforts that were made to interpret and control them, in order to build on the work of Martin Francis by showing that emotional culture had purchase in the public and political realms as well as in the private sphere of home and family, where we more often encounter them in historical analysis.³³

Expertise: history, chronology, sources

This thesis begins its analysis in 1937 with the foundation of Mass Observation, a sometimes controversial social research project whose founders proclaimed their intention to conduct 'anthropology at home' but whose research practices reflected the blurry and shifting boundaries of mid-century social knowledge by employing techniques and interpretations from across the humanities and social sciences, including from anthropology, social psychology, surrealism, literary criticism, and sociology.³⁴ Attracting oppositional responses among social scientists, who periodically published admiring and denigrating, even damning, reviews of the group's methods and findings (although the latter depictions have dominated the organisation's reputation among British historians), Mass Observation displayed a unique

³¹ Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America*; Heath, *Aging by the Book: The Emergence of Midlife in Victorian Britain*.

³² W. Andrew Achenbaum, 'Toward a Psychohistory of Late-Life Emotionality', in *An Emotional History of the United States*, Peter N. Stearns and Jan Lewis, eds, New York and London, 1998, pp.417-30.

³³ Martin Francis, 'Tears, Tantrums, and Bared Teeth: The Emotional Economy of Three Conservative Prime Ministers, 1951-1963', *Journal of British Studies*, 41, 3, 2002, pp.354-87.

³⁴ Tom Harrison, Humphrey Jennings, and Charles Madge, 'Anthropology at Home', *New Statesman and Nation*, 30 January 1937, p.155; Tom Jeffery, *Mass-Observation: A Short History*, 2nd edn, Brighton, 1999, p.4.

version of mid-century intellectual interest in the everyday, the subconscious, and the emotions.³⁵ Their interest in the ‘collective subconscious’ of modern Britain emerged out of interwar anxieties about the spread of fascism and political instability, and the organisation’s founders’ ambivalence about cultural change and the potential for individual Britons’ manipulation by government, media, and mass culture.³⁶ The organisation’s collation of a staggering number of accounts of British men and women’s views, feelings, ambitions, and even their dreams, through their voluntary participation in diary-writing, street interviews and questionnaires and, famously, their involuntary role in Mass Observation’s recording of street life and commercial entertainments, offers fascinating evidence for the construction of social knowledge in the mid-century as well as the perceptions of individual participants in the project.

The role of the social researcher changed in the context of total war and the heightened interest of the National government in civilian ‘morale’, especially because of aerial bombardment and the untested ability of Britons to cope. For example, Mass Observation worked with the Ministry of Information (1940-1941) and the Admiralty (1941-1942) while some of its members joined the more ‘structured’ governmental projects of the Wartime Survey and its subsequent postwar Social Survey.³⁷ Wartime Britain was also the site of many successful implementations of government planning and control in aspects of everyday life, notably through rationing, which was believed to have improved the nutritional value of

³⁵ The influential British anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (professor of anthropology at the London School of Economics from 1927 until the late 1930s) was among the organisation’s supporters while the mid-century academic critique culminated in Mark Abrams’ history. Tony Kushner, *We Europeans?: Mass-Observation, 'Race' and British Identity in the Twentieth Century*, Aldershot, 2004, pp.9-10. Mark Abrams, *Social Surveys and Social Action, Contemporary Science Books*, London, 1951.

³⁶ Jennie Taylor, 'Mass Observation as Cultural Critic: The Problem of Leisure in the Worktown Study, 1937-1940', Doctor of Philosophy thesis, University of Sydney, 2012, p.2.

³⁷ James Hinton, 'Mass-Observation (Act. 1937–1949)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (online), Oxford University Press, Available at: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/theme/92530>, (5 July 2012).

the average diet in a time of national food shortage.³⁸ It was also a time of organisation and advocacy around the specific welfare needs of the elderly, for example in the work of the National Old People's Welfare Committee from 1940 and the National Corporation for the Care of Old People, which was established with wartime fundraising money in 1947.³⁹ However, as James Vernon pointed out in *Hunger: A Modern History*, even as governments began to 'sponsor' these forms of social intervention their delivery 'remained dependent upon local initiative and voluntary endeavour' within the mixed economy that would underpin welfare initiatives until the 1970 expansion and reorganisation of social services — which was recommended in the 1968 Seebom Report and included the establishment of separate local authority welfare departments — which marks the end point of this study.⁴⁰

Postwar Britain has been called the age of the expert for its burgeoning network of professional groups, new forms of career training, and belief in social planning.⁴¹ These developments have roots in nineteenth-century responses to the social 'problems' caused by industrial society and urbanisation, including poverty and vagrancy, through social investigation, philanthropy, and new forms of government intervention. In the face of mounting evidence that great inequality and poverty persisted despite the wealth industrialisation had created, social researchers and reformers such as Henry Mayhew and Charles Booth pursued a full account of the state of the working classes within the nation's

³⁸ James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 2007, p.146.

³⁹ Henry J. Pratt, *Gray Agendas: Interest Groups and Public Pensions in Canada, Britain, and the United States*, Ann Arbor, 1993, pp.90-3, 129.

⁴⁰ In the Local Authority Social Services Act, 1970. J Harris and C McDonald, 'Post-Fordism, the Welfare State and the Personal Social Services: A Comparison of Australia and Britain', *British Journal of Social Work*, 30, 1, 2000, p.55.

⁴¹ Becky Conekin, Frank Mort, and Chris Waters, 'Introduction', in *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945-1964*, Becky Conekin, Frank Mort, and Chris Waters, eds, London and New York, 1999, p.14. This characterisation was also employed more recently by many speakers at the 'Burdens' postwar British history conference, April 2012, at the University of California, Berkeley.

capital, and a wide variety of social groups insisted that the government should do more to provide a setting where individuals were able to improve their lives.⁴² As Mary Poovey has theorized, the quantification of the state of society created a new social domain which could be imagined as a whole and whose problems could be identified and fixed by ‘isolating the offending populations, abstracting from individual cases the general problems they shared, and devising solutions’ in keeping with existing British social relations and systems of power.⁴³ Building on this argument, I posit that twentieth-century developments in social research had equally profound effects on the way British society and its citizens were understood and treated by the institutions of public and political life. Beginning in the late-nineteenth century, both old age and the emotional experiences of individuals were increasingly understood to be subjects of interest within the fields of medicine, poverty studies, and welfare provision. For example, among the earliest influential social surveys, Booth’s studies isolated old age as a matter of social concern and potential government intervention.⁴⁴ Over the subsequent decades, and especially as growing numbers of health and welfare professionals looked to their samples, in-depth interviews, and surveys to direct their projects and practices, British social research shifted its focus from social deviancy to routinized aspects of social life, including the daily trials of old age.

Initially operating outside institutional academia in the mode of Mass Observation, Peter Townsend’s postwar research — an important source of data for this thesis — engaged with the social science trend towards influencing government policy and responded to a set of social concerns that characterised public discourse at the time. Townsend worked within the

⁴² Melvin Richter, *The Politics of Conscience: T.H. Green and His Age*, London, 1983, p.235.

⁴³ Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-1864*, Chicago and London, 1995, p.8.

⁴⁴ Charles Booth, *Pauperism; a Picture: And Endowment of Old Age; an Argument*, London, 1892; Charles Booth, *The Aged Poor in England and Wales*, London, 1894.

think-tank Political and Economic Planning (as did ex-mass-observers) and then at the Institute of Community Studies from 1954-1957, where he researched and wrote *The Family Life of Old People* (1957).⁴⁵ The London-based Institute, established by Michael Young and Peter Willmott in 1954, carried out social research projects with the support of small grants. The initiatives driven by Young eventually spawned over 60 organisations, including the Consumers' Association, Open University, and the University of the Third Age that engaged elderly teachers and students.⁴⁶ Townsend's interest in the family lives of old people aligned with the Institute's social scientific attention to everyday life in the context of postwar developments such as slum clearances, the building of council estates, suburbanisation, and the expansion of the white-collar workforce.⁴⁷ His motivating interest at this time was investigating the extended family, and when the Institute of Community Studies moved away from this field (to focus on consumer rights, health, and education) Townsend applied for money from the Nuffield Foundation to complete his next study, *The Last Refuge* (1962), at the London School of Economics with Richard Titmuss.⁴⁸ In 1962 Townsend was one of the first appointments in sociology at the University of Essex, and served as their first Head of Department.⁴⁹ His *Last Refuge* study contributed to the wave of anti-institutional literature that was published in Britain and America in the mid-1960s, thereby generating changed expectations of state activity and the establishment of the ethics of consumer choice and

⁴⁵ Peter Townsend Interviewed By Paul Thompson, 'Reflections on Becoming a Researcher', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 7, 1, 2004, p.87.

⁴⁶ The Institute of Community Studies was renamed the Young Institute in 2005.

⁴⁷ See also Peter Marris and Institute of Community Studies, *Widows and Their Families, Reports of the Institute of Community Studies*, London, 1958; Peter Willmott and Michael Dunlop Young, *Family and Class in a London Suburb, Reports of the Institute of Community Studies*, London, 1960; Michael Dunlop Young, Peter Willmott, Richard Morris Titmuss, and Institute of Community Studies, *Family and Kinship in East London, Reports of the Institute of Community Studies*, London, 1957.

⁴⁸ Peter Townsend Interviewed By Paul Thompson, 'Reflections on Becoming a Researcher', p.90.

⁴⁹ Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method*, p.128.

community care that would inflect social services for the elderly in the later twentieth century.⁵⁰

The postwar projects pursued by British anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer, which also inform my research, suggest the influence of mass media and popular forms of psychology within the discussions of national social life that were framed by social science. Also operating outside formal academia, Gorer developed his intellectual interests through a close relationship with the influential anthropologist Margaret Mead and fieldwork in West Africa, Southeast Asia (particularly Nepal) and America.⁵¹ His studies of British life such as *Exploring English Character* published in 1955, and *Death, Grief, and Mourning in Contemporary Britain* in 1965 (whose interviews inform my analysis of marriage and widowhood in old age) were advertised, funded, and facilitated by the national newspapers *Sunday People* and *Sunday Times* respectively.⁵² Especially in the case of *Exploring English Character*, Freudian psychoanalysis vitally informed Gorer's characterisation of Britain as an emotionally repressed society, as well as his version of the anthropologist's customary interest in collective symbols and rituals, for example as expressed in Britons' mourning for their dead.⁵³ Although his neo-Freudian analysis of Anglo-American culture attracted much criticism, Gorer was not an outlier in the intellectual world examined in this thesis. For instance, he acted as psychological consultant for the Institute of Community Studies from

⁵⁰ See Bleddyn Davies and David Challis, *Matching Resources to Needs in Community Care: An Evaluated Demonstration of a Long-Term Care Model*, Aldershot and Brookfield, 1986.

⁵¹ Peter Mandler made Gorer's extra-institutionalism (his ability to be 'his own rabbit') central to his explanation of the anthropologist's unstructured and 'un-scientific' methodology. Peter Mandler, 'Being His Own Rabbit: Geoffrey Gorer and English Culture', in *Cultures, Classes, and Politics: Essays on British History for Ross McKibbin*, C. V. J. Griffiths, James J. Nott, and William Whyte, eds, Oxford, 2011, pp.192-208.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp.200-1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.206.

1958.⁵⁴ As Mathew Thomson has clearly established, the theories of psychology and psychoanalysis achieved legitimacy far beyond their core disciples in twentieth-century Britain, permeating the popular practices of Pelmanism, self-help, and, childcare (to name only a few examples) as well as the dissemination of Gorer's aims and findings in the popular press.⁵⁵ Laura King has recently shown the frequency with which the mid-century British press reported on sociological and psychological findings about parenthood, and their employment of the same ideas as these academic studies.⁵⁶

While historical accounts of British social surveys and the social sciences have traditionally aimed to establish their proponents' influence on political policy and the welfare state, recent scholars have taken inspiration from the literature describing earlier practices of philanthropy and poor relief such as 'slumming' to interrogate the methods and underlying assumptions that shaped each field.⁵⁷ Within recent publications, James Hinton has explored mass-observers' realisation of social identity and 'active citizenship' in the diaries they kept for the organisation, Mike Savage has outlined the difference sociological method made to the way Britons' apprehended mid-century social life, and Jennie Taylor has explored the opportunities for creative play and fluid interpretations of social change which researchers enjoyed while engaged in participant observation for Mass Observation's Worktown project.⁵⁸ In its teasing out of the significance of mid-century methods of data collection and

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Mathew Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain*, Oxford, 2006.

⁵⁶ Laura King, 'Hidden Fathers? The Significance of Fatherhood in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain', *Contemporary British History*, 26, 1, 2012, pp.33-4.

⁵⁷ Martin Bulmer, Kevin Bales, and Kathryn Kish Sklar, *The Social Survey in Historical Perspective, 1880-1940*, Cambridge, 1991; Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London*, Princeton and Oxford, 2004; Peter Mandler, *The Uses of Charity: The Poor on Relief in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis*, Philadelphia, 1990.

⁵⁸ James Hinton and Mass-Observation, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass-Observation and the Making of the Modern Self*, Oxford, 2010; Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method*; Jennie Taylor, 'Pennies from Heaven and Earth in Mass Observation's Blackpool', *Journal of British Studies*, 51, 1, 2012, pp.132-54.

analysis, this literature informs the questions I ask about how social scientific publications informed popular perceptions of old age, the ways social scientists' methods influenced the identity of participants, and what was left out of their conclusions. Especially by working closely with both academic publications and research data such as interviews, observation notes, photographs, and questionnaires, I do more than Hinton, Savage, or Taylor to stress the conversational nature of all of these sources. Here, I suggest that the power of experts, welfare professionals, and the state to influence the emotional responses of individuals also worked the other way around when the stories and feelings expressed by research participants were judged essential to the legitimacy of theories and practices of social intervention for the first time.

Structure: the national, the local, and the personal

Chapter one of this thesis describes key developments in influential fields of mid-century research that took the emotional experiences of ageing as their primary focus for the first time, and traces the spread of their findings through professional, political, and academic life in mid-century Britain. I highlight the intellectual frame — that is, the key questions, assumptions, and methods — employed within this research culture and its interrelation with mid-century developments in the psychological, social, and political sciences, and their popular iterations. I pay particular attention to the intellectual role of ideas about the home, the ageing body, family life, retirement, and loneliness; these themes seemed significant to mid-century researchers, health and welfare professionals, and political representatives, and therefore greatly influenced contemporary perceptions of old age. In so doing, this chapter introduces important aspects of mid-century emotional life that I will return to from a

number of perspectives in order to explore how they were perceived in public life and within personal biographies, and how the two were related. This chapter demonstrates the centrality of emotion to public discussions of old age across the health and welfare services and professions, the platforms of the main political parties, and notions of service within voluntary and religious groups. The next chapter further explores the mechanisms — the publications, research methods, professional training, welfare programs, and building projects — which made these ideas part of the lives and identities of growing numbers of older Britons.

My second chapter introduces the multitudinous practical problems that were encountered by welfare administrators and professionals as they attempted to affect the changes that researchers had established needed to be made in the personal lives of the elderly who lived in institutions. Having outlined the mid-century ideal of emotional life in old age — in which the welfare state provided material comfort but also intellectual stimulation, companionship, and emotional satisfaction — this chapter considers how the implementation of this vision was complicated by the limitations of postwar government spending, and the resistance of many local authority officials, business owners, and welfare workers, who were unconvinced that such attention to emotional need was a necessary and desirable component of their work. Using Peter Townsend's *Last Refuge* observations, photographs, and interview notes, I make a similar point about mid-century social research, whose proponents were restricted by such dissent, for example in their difficulty in finding private spaces within which to conduct interviews. These disruptions to social scientific method and argument usefully highlight social researchers' roles as participants in a debate and advocates for change in residential care, rather than their ostensibly impartial recording

of social phenomena. Thus, I read these sources as intellectual deployments — as one side of a heated argument — rather than as a definitive account of care for the aged, particularly by drawing out the interaction of administrators, workers, researchers, and older people in their production, and directing attention to the ways that researchers altered the behaviour of their research subjects and were implicated in the social hierarchies they critiqued. Even as a source of consternation, the mid-century ideal of serving the emotional needs of old people was spread through social researchers' interventions in the routines of institutions.

Turning to the life of local communities and families, chapters three and four work together to deepen our understanding of areas within the social history of Britain which scholars have emphasised as sites of significant change in the mid-twentieth century, including work, leisure, marriage, physical health, and death. British historians working in many of these fields have insisted on greater attention to the life cycle, which they have deemed vital to understanding the social dynamics of modern life, often focusing on the implications of youthful rites of passage such as entrance to the workforce and courtship.⁵⁹ I argue that dynamic changes were also occurring at the other end of the life cycle, and that we must expand our conception of the drivers of mid-century cultural change to include the effects of physiological ageing and widespread retirement. At the same time, I explore the function of the social roles and relationships that were claimed by ageing research participants within domestic cultures of story-telling and the construction of personal identity in later life, complementing historians' assertions of the flexibility and interrelationship of definitions of work, leisure, and family, and testing these theoretical insights within the material context of old age. While also stressing the variability of older people's access to public roles in the

⁵⁹ Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-60*; Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family in England, 1918-1950*.

labour market and local community in practice, I primarily explore older people's symbolic evocation of their working histories and ageing bodies during socialising. As chapter three shows, for the elderly both retirement and physical ailments were proof of past achievements as much as the source of practical difficulties in the present. Thus, the narrative function of retirement and psychological ageing belie reductive accounts of old age in the mid-century that were formulated through pensions schemes and medical check-ups; although, as this chapter shows, personal identity was always entwined with the projects of social, medical, and psychological scientists, especially with techniques of interviewing and observation.

Chapters three and four also interrogate the boundaries of the homes of older Britons — a key category and measurement within contemporary social research — by asking who spent time there together, whether they were able to leave, and how social research intervened in the space. In so doing, these chapters establish connections between domestic life and roles that were enacted in the public world (especially as research participants and employees) and illustrate the particular emotional power of the household for elderly married couples and the bereaved. Gesturing back to the public projects of welfare for the old, this analysis offers another perspective on what was at stake for the inhabitants of residential homes, and in initiatives designed to reform institutional life. Sociologists have commonly argued that in the twentieth century older people's retirement from the workforce, decreasing financial and social power, and especially their admission to residential institutions, constituted a social death — experienced as segregation, irrelevance, and invisibility — that occurred in advance of death and lessened its social disruption.⁶⁰ Undermining the wholesale application of this

⁶⁰ Michael Mulkay, 'Social Death in Britain', in *The Sociology of Death*, David Clark, ed., Oxford, 1993, pp.31-49.

theory to mid-century Britain, chapter four demonstrates older Britons' presence and influence in local communities during their later lives, as well as posthumously through the rituals and material organisation of households and, in particular, the symbolism of photographs and the belongings of the dead. I examine conversations between elderly married couples, and the memories evoked by widows and widowers, in order to rehabilitate the depth and power of spousal devotion within our histories of old age and of romance.

Finally, chapters five and six move beyond the publically-rehearsed concerns of social science research and welfare practitioners in order to chart some of the unexplored terrain that lies within historical sources addressing old age — the silences that haunted Roberts' early history of welfare policy and provision. In chapter five, I analyse Mass Observation questionnaires about grooming and dress alongside advertising and fashion photography images that were published in British *Vogue* magazine. Writing against the assumption that physical ageing has always been a traumatic and alienating experience, I detail the ways in which older men and women connected with elements of mid-century fashion and beauty culture through their everyday habits of personal care, and gained considerable satisfaction from adorning their bodies. Although limited to an upper-class and high-fashion format, *Vogue's* style and beauty advice typified the increasingly visual and commercial nature of popular culture in mid-century Britain, and suggests how older people fared as potential consumers in one of its marketplaces. Further, research participants' descriptions of their preferences in dress and the components of their beauty regimes illustrate the personalised and subjective nature of the ageing process, in which individuals adjusted to physical and cultural change over time, finding many reasons to feel proud of their bodies far into old age.

While chapter five describes the slackening of high-fashion's function as a form of self-expression and social status for older people in the mid-1960s, chapter six suggests that this was matched by the opening of other creative fora — in this case, the possibility of publishing an autobiography or engaging in other forms of life-writing and recollection. The collection of autobiographies that informs my analysis of the intertwining of ageing, memory, and autobiography, charts a changing literary perspective on the meaning of later life and the marketability of older people's memories. The genre of British autobiography broadened out over the 1960s and 1970s to address the psychological process of moving through the life cycle (for instance in the evocative prose employed by Storm Jameson in her 1969 publications) and memories of working-class childhood during the early-twentieth century, especially in the output of the community publishers QueenSpark and Centerprise in the 1970s. Through these developments in the production and style of life writing, a diverse group of older Britons gained access to a public forum for discussions of the ageing process. Their texts offered their contemporaries a literary and biographical framework for thinking about the emotional and philosophical elements of growing old, and provide us with glimpses of the true complexity of individuals' emotional responses to reaching old age. These chapters both depart from established characterisations of the aged as culturally irrelevant in the Western world, to offer particulars about older people's access to aspects of popular culture that could function as tools for apprehending and fashioning the self, in the manner of fashion, literature, and story-telling. Thus, these chapters help us to complicate the notion of patterns of ageing; indeed, throughout this thesis, accounts of old age are couched in personal history and experiences. Yet by exploring individualised responses to a range of cultural forms, I identify about how older Britons forged connections with

particular strands of cultural life, and I suggest the changing nature of their exclusion from that world, especially through expressions of consumer culture that became increasingly visual, commercial, and youth-centric over the twentieth century.

Despite their frequent orientation towards England, I view my sources as part of a conversation that spanned Britain and influenced much of the Western world.⁶¹ Wealthy nations such as America and Australia shared British interest in the implications of longer life expectancy, the rise of social science as a way of understanding a nation, the expansion of welfare services, and the cultural significance of home and family, albeit in different contexts.⁶² In particular, American sociological theories of ageing, particularly those generated by the Chicago School, informed British literature on old age and institutional life, while the images of older men and women that were published in high-fashion periodical *Vogue* were transposed between its British and American editions. However, while a number of my sources referenced the policy, research culture, fashion, or lifestyle favoured in America or Europe, the overwhelming pattern was a focus on explaining a British story (as in Gorer's research on death) or its localised variants, perhaps in London, Manchester, or Oxfordshire, for example in Townsend's study of old people in Bethnal Green.

Within each of the three sections that make up this thesis, a set of chapters is paired to critically engage with an ostensible dichotomy within the ageing process: policy and practice, life and death, body and mind. My work extends and complicates our history and theory of ageing by tracing the complex interaction of these areas: I explore how policies were

⁶¹ Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, pp.444-6.

⁶² Harris and McDonald, 'Post-Fordism, the Welfare State and the Personal Social Services: A Comparison of Australia and Britain'.

adopted, resisted, and subverted in welfare services for the old; demonstrate the power and presence of older people in local communities in later life and after death; and stress the convergence of life histories and ageing bodies in identity-formation. By emphasising these relationships, the structure of this thesis reinforces the central theoretical intervention of my research: that ageing was understood as a lifelong and personal process and should not be viewed as a static social category bounded by chronological age, even if this measurement was employed within the practices of mid-century expertise. Ultimately, the structure and scope of this thesis maps the breadth of interests that shaped Britons' understandings and experiences of growing older, and demonstrates that historians must look beyond government policy and medical practice to understand this mid-century 'age of emotion'.

Section I: The expertise of ageing

Chapter one

National contexts for old age: social research and the welfare state

In 1963 a country doctor, Herbert Miller, wrote a ‘socio-medical’ study of the elderly in his practice in the West Midlands. His book was published by the National Corporation for the Care of Older People, which had been set up in 1947, using wartime donations and money from Lord Nuffield’s charitable foundation, as a funding body for voluntary organisations that assisted the elderly.¹ His research responded to a set of concerns about the delivery of health and welfare services to older people living in rural areas, where both population and infrastructure were sparse.² As *Public Administration* noted in their review of the book, the first half of *The Ageing Countryman* described the ‘countryside and community’ of Miller’s practice while the second half was written for the ‘medical man’, operating as a textbook about the medical afflictions of old age.³ In an appendix, Miller reprinted the four-page questionnaire he had used to gather his data. One page of this schedule, which assessed the ‘features of ageing’ among his sample, is reproduced below (Figure 1). By ticking a series of

¹ Robin Means and Randall Smith, *From Poor Law to Community Care: The Development of Welfare Services for Elderly People 1939-1971*, 2nd edn, Bristol, 1998, p.99.

² See National Old People's Welfare Committee, *Welfare Problems of Old People*, London, 1950, p.41; National Old People's Welfare Committee, *The Welfare of Old People in Rural Areas*, London, 1951.

³ 'Book Notes', *Public Administration*, 41, 4, 1963, p.432.

boxes, Miller had established the vital points about the individuals in his study which would relate their experience of ageing to conversations on the national stage between social scientists, psychologists, medical practitioners, and welfare administrators.

FEATURES OF AGEING											
Mobility	Unlimited		Limited*							*	
	Goes out	Confined to house	Confined to room	Confined to bed							
Feet	No complaint of pain		Complaint of pain*								*
	No treatment required		Chirobody required		Surgery required						
			Not rec'd	Rec'd	Not rec'd	Rec'd					
Varicose Veins	Absent		Present				Vertigo		No	Yes*	*
	Without symptoms		With symptoms		Without ulcer		With ulcer				
									No	Yes*	*
Falls											
Vision (with glasses if worn)	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor or Blind		Hearing (with aid if used)		Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor or Stone Deaf
Glasses	Not needed		Needed								*Source
			Not owned	Owned*							
Hearing aid	Not needed		Needed								*Source and type
			Not owned	Owned*							
State of Teeth	Good	Fair	Bad	False Teeth		Not Needed		Needed			
							Not owned	Owned			
Micturition	Normal		Frequency					Occasional incontinence			
			Diurnal	Nocturnal ()							
Memory	Good	Fair*	Poor*	Very Poor*							*
Emotional adjustment to old age	Good*		Average	Bad*							*
Mental state	No abnormal features		Abnormal features* requiring								
			No Supervision		Intermittent Supervision		Constant Supervision				
Personality	Robust		Adequate	Inadequate							
Sleep	Good		Disturbed*							*	

Figure 1: 'Features of ageing' questionnaire. Herbert Crossley Miller and National Corporation for the Care of Old People, *The Ageing Countryman; a Socio-Medical Report on Old Age in a Country Practice*, London, 1963, p.151.

Miller's check-box questionnaire typified the intersecting methodologies of mid-century experts on old age. First, he attempted to record 'calculable' information about his subjects that could 'render people's narratives as markers of disembodied social aggregates', in this

case representing the state of the ageing population in rural Britain.⁴ Second, he asked a series of questions designed to describe the lives of his sample in the round, including the physiological, mental, and emotional aspects of old age. Miller's categories of inquiry were part of the legacy of twentieth-century developments in fields like the medical, social, and psychological sciences, which all claimed to have expertise in the lives of older Britons. Over the period addressed in this thesis, the state became more concerned about understanding and regulating citizens' inner lives and emotions, older individuals became the focal point of research and social policy, and old people experienced increasingly close and regular contact with the state.⁵ Miller's set of interests made his research subjects and their private lives visible and 'translatable' to the practitioners and theorists working in these interlinked projects.⁶

Miller's approach to characterising the experience of ageing might seem rational, and perhaps admirably thorough, but the inclusion of certain facets of this experience and the exclusion of others illustrates the circumscription of his expert inquiries. The popularity of particular discourses about old age meant that researchers' interactions with research subjects were shaped by a set of pre-existing and historically-specific concerns, rather than by a universal and uncontested cultural notion of the characteristics of ageing or only by the responses they received. Miller's set of boxes also record the mid-century interrelationship of medical diagnoses, emotional experiences of old age, and its management by health and welfare services. Box one, which established older people's ability to leave their house, room, or bed, was also a measurement of their loneliness and social isolation. Box two

⁴ Nikolas S. Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood*, Cambridge Studies in the History of Psychology, Cambridge, 1996, pp.57-60; Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method*, p.x.

⁵ David Vincent, *Poor Citizens: The State and the Poor in Twentieth-Century Britain*, London, 1991, p.5.

⁶ Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood*, p.77.

inquired into a body part that had particular symbolic value for expert understanding of old age: the strength of old people's feet — similar to the quality of their sight and hearing — quantified the extent of their self-reliance and mobility and therefore the state of their self-esteem. The admission of such a physical complaint triggered a set of inquiries about medical and social services, in this case chiropody and surgery. Thus individuals experiencing a bounded list of 'problems' of old age were funnelled into further areas of expert intervention, ranging from medical treatment to the visiting services offered by voluntary organisations. A set of questions at the bottom of the page ranked each interviewee's emotional adjustment to old age, mental state, and personality. These questions focused expert and state attention on personal dimensions of the ageing process. Yet Miller's potential answers revealed the limitations to expert discussions of emotional and psychological experiences. His check-box options were designed to collate statistically significant information rather than to detail the experience of ageing and therefore grouped individual experiences into broad and unhelpful categories such as 'good', 'bad' or 'average' emotional adjustment to old age, and 'normal' or 'abnormal' mental health.

Miller's checklist might stand as an example of the process through which historians have identified the twentieth century as an age of expertise, which reached its zenith in postwar social interventions led by the state and emerging welfare professions. In a central narrative of twentieth-century history, scholars have described the growing prestige of organised professional groups and their interest in influencing everyday behaviours and experiences.⁷ The power of mid-century experts to shape the experiences of an age cohort has been most fully explored for childhood and youth, when behaviour was believed to be pliable and

⁷ For example in Becky Conekin, Frank Mort, and Chris Waters, eds, *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945-1964*, London and New York, 1999; Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood*.

institutional life, especially school, was most difficult to avoid. In Britain and internationally, historians have charted the development of the infant welfare movement and its efforts to educate nineteenth- and twentieth-century mothers in ‘correct’, scientifically-informed habits of maternal care.⁸ Mathew Thomson’s current research adds to the existing literature on John Bowlby’s attachment theory (first developed in a World Health Organization report on the mental health of homeless children in postwar Europe) and the subsequent emphasis on maternal bonding in the fields of child development, social work, psychology, and psychiatry.⁹ Carolyn Steedman has sensitively explored the role of the school-room task of writing life histories and the government-sponsored ‘orange juice and milk and dinners at school’ in mid-century patterns of identity formation among youth.¹⁰ These texts have suggested the extent to which psychological theorists, social reformers, and state welfare services aimed to reshape some of the fundamental behaviours and responses that made up Britons’ emotional lives, such as the affective connections forged between mothers and their infant children, and have shown their significance in the lives of individuals. Childhood has offered these scholars a case study that is fascinating because this period of life was uniquely shaped by the structure of institutions in the twentieth century, especially medical care and schooling, and because young Britons were perhaps distinctively pliant due to their comparative lack of outside experience. Yet for these same reasons, the influence of

⁸ Linda Bryder and Royal New Zealand Plunket Society, *A Voice for Mothers: The Plunket Society and Infant Welfare, 1907-2000*, Auckland, 2003; Valerie A. Fildes, Lara Marks, and Hilary Marland, *Women and Children First: International Maternal and Infant Welfare, 1870-1945*, London, 1992; Lara Marks, *Metropolitan Maternity: Maternal and Infant Welfare Services in Early Twentieth Century London*, Wellcome Institute Series in the History of Medicine, Amsterdam, 1996.

⁹ Jeremy Holmes and John Bowlby, *John Bowlby and Attachment Theory, Makers of Modern Psychotherapy*, London, 1993; Mathew Thomson, 'Bowlbyism, the Landscape of the Child, and the Post-War Settlement', in *Landscape of the Child in Post-War Britain*, forthcoming. With thanks to Mathew Thomson for sending me his work in progress.

¹⁰ Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, London, 1986, p.122; Carolyn Steedman, 'State-Sponsored Autobiography', in *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945-1964*, Becky Conekin, Frank Mort, and Chris Waters, eds, London and New York, 1999, pp.41-54.

expertise on childhood and youth cannot be our model for its workings in adulthood, when the influence of institutions became more diffuse and their claims were more likely to be undermined by previous life experiences. This chapter considers the interplay of ageing, expertise, and emotional experience in a similar set of registers — ranging from intellectual theories to personal experiences via the operations of welfare administration and popular culture — but at the other end of the life cycle, when the workings of memory, self-identity, and life history frequently confounded the recommendations made by experts.

Contrary to other historians of old age, I argue that the professionals and officials who worked within the expanding field of expertise about ageing constructed a vision of emotional experience in later life. Mid-century commentators, ranging from Miller in his study of geriatric medicine to the politicians who debated senior bus passes in parliament, agreed that old people worried about their domestic environment, were depressed by the state of their bodies, were neglected by their relatives and neighbours, and felt lonely and isolated. This chapter shows that these beliefs about old age were produced by the methods of early- and mid-century social research, which investigated old age through the pre-existing lenses of built environments, physical decline, and intergenerational social and financial exchanges, leaving other dimensions of emotional life out of the picture. In making this argument, my study departs from the existing historiography of old age which has typically used literature and philosophical traditions rooted in the ancient world to grapple with the emotional dimensions of ageing.¹¹ Instead of analysing their contribution to identification, Thomas Cole has asserted that the establishment of gerontology and geriatrics at

¹¹ For example Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America*, pp.3-31; Heath, *Aging by the Book: The Emergence of Midlife in Victorian Britain*; Helen Small, *The Long Life*, Oxford, 2007; Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, pp.31-43.

the beginning of the twentieth century destroyed the notion of ageing as an experience that required moral guidance and made it a ‘scientific and technical problem’ to be managed.¹² Cole concluded that scientists caused ‘profound cultural confusion’ by forgetting that ageing ‘is biographical as well as biological, that old age is an experience to be lived meaningfully and not only a problem of health and disease’.¹³ Cole’s argument epitomises historians’ treatment of social science and welfare. These fields have been too often judged on their own terms, as objective methods for discovering and solving the discrete problems of old age. Further, Cole’s distinction between the scientific and technical management of ageing and how it was understood is false; social science, welfare, and psychology provided a framework for the interpretation of emotional responses and the organisation of personal biographies, just in a different way to literature and philosophy. Mid-century methods of inquiry generated a vision of the internal dimensions of ageing and projected it on a national scale. This chapter details the construction and composition of that vision and traces its influence on emerging forms of state welfare and policy making. This is a story about why Miller chose to ask about particular features of ageing — such as painful feet and good emotional adjustment — in his 1963 questionnaire, and what he thought the answers would reveal about his ageing countrymen.

Ageing, emotions, and twentieth-century experts

Forms of expertise that were ascendant in mid-century Britain such as social science, psychology, and professionalised medicine, established criteria and methods for understanding and organising social life that made private realms of experience significant

¹² Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America*, pp.191-211.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.211.

factors within public and state activity. While mid-century social scientific research, such as Arnold Wilson and George Mackay's 1941 review of pensions, almost always advocated increased social planning and investment to solve the issues it highlighted and therefore had much in common with left-wing political thought, its methods for understanding and altering the social world garnered considerable authority across the political spectrum and created a new field of state activity.¹⁴ Unlike the scholars who have celebrated the better understanding and more humane treatment of the elderly that emerged as a result, this chapter does not aim to memorialise leaders of the field or judge their successes and failures. Nor does it tell the tale of party politics. Instead, this chapter explains increased public attention to old age and its emotional dimensions through the developing methods and concerns of the social, psychological, and political sciences. I argue that actors in these fields created a new system for apprehending and responding to ageing over the mid-twentieth century which influenced the place of old age in public debate, state activity, and private life, across the boundaries of party politics and intellectual disciplines. The emotional experiences of ageing were closer to the heart of public life than historians have realised.

Pat Thane has established the originality and influence of both mid-century social research publications, which have provided source material and subject matter for most historians of old age, and the expansion of welfare services for the elderly.¹⁵ She has also described the successes and failures of these expert interventions, pointing to the pension's alleviation of dire need and the health benefits delivered by the National Health Service on one hand, and consistent refusals to raise the pension to the level of subsistence living or to invest in

¹⁴ Arnold Talbot Wilson and George Stewart Mackay, *Old Age Pensions: An Historical and Critical Study*, London, 1941, pp.207-18.

¹⁵ Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*.

institutions and social services that cater for the elderly at the rate of investment in those directed towards children on the other.¹⁶ The function of party politics in the evolution of these systems of care for the elderly has been complex. The Labour Party responded enthusiastically to the 1942 Beveridge report which set the terms of the postwar welfare state and, after the 1945 election, implemented a version of William Beveridge's redistributive pension scheme which was funded by the Exchequer.¹⁷ In contrast, the Conservative governments of 1951-1964 favoured low and targeted payments and gradually shifted the cost from the Exchequer to the scheme's contributors.¹⁸ Yet the parties agreed that care of the elderly was a governmental responsibility and that spending should be limited. From the mid-1950s, both supported community care programs that were designed to keep the elderly living at home for as long as possible; a stance that aligned with contemporary social research and controlled the expenditure of state institutions.¹⁹ The 1964 Labour government increased the amount that was paid as a flat-rate pension but did not change its structure to create a more redistributive scheme or link pension payments to average earnings or to the cost of living.²⁰ Aspects of these debates will be considered in this chapter and the next, but I suggest that the political parties' agreement on new field of state activity — in this case, care for the elderly and their emotional needs — and a set of techniques for the assessment and intervention in this area of life, deserves as much critical attention as Labour and Conservative politicians' different plans for carrying this out.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp.273, 355-60, 454.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.368.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.372.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.453.

²⁰ Ibid., p.377.

At the end of the nineteenth century, social surveys demonstrated the expanding claims researchers were making about their ability to represent the state of national life through statistical and observational methods. Moreover, social survey techniques made age increasingly important as a category of social analysis. Charles Booth's 1892 study of pauperism in old age applied statistical methods to demonstrate Britons' increasing poverty over the life cycle and to argue that 'the case of the aged poor demands special attention'.²¹ Booth established the aged as a social category that required special treatment within liberal economic and social structures, arguing that collective pensions would offer the 'security of position which will strengthen rather than weaken the play of individuality on which progress and prosperity depend'.²² His pioneering household surveys of the *Life and Labour of the People in London*, which ran into 13 volumes by 1902, offered the first set of comprehensive statistics describing conditions of life in London.²³ This study combined traditional methods of social research including interviewing informed observers (such as school board visitors) with new modes of analysis. Famously, Booth calculated the level of income necessary for subsistence living (the poverty line) and the numbers of working-class families who lived below it (around 30 per cent) and presented his information in a map of London, with the city's streets colour-coded to signify degrees of poverty.²⁴ Booth's surveys established a set of questions about poverty and the built environment that would shape social researchers' approach to old age for many decades.

²¹ Booth, *Pauperism; a Picture: And Endowment of Old Age; an Argument*. See also Booth, *The Aged Poor in England and Wales*.

²² Booth, *Pauperism; a Picture: And Endowment of Old Age; an Argument*, p.241.

²³ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*, 9 vols, *Poverty*, London and New York, 1902; London School of Economics and Political Science and H. Llewellyn Smith, *The New Survey of London Life & Labour*, 9 vols, vol. 1, London, 1930, p.1.

²⁴ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*, 9 vols, vol. 2, *Poverty*, London and New York, 1902, pp.25-31.

The *Life and Labour of the People in London* survey changed political and intellectual culture in Britain by quantifying the experiences of a large working-class population for the first time and suggesting — contrary to what Booth had expected to discover — that their poverty and suffering exceeded the most pessimistic contemporary estimates. Social researchers would apply his methods to towns and cities around Britain for another half-century. Most immediately Seebohm Rowntree employed the concept of a poverty line in a social survey of York, where he identified similar levels of hardship and therefore undermined the popular criticism that Booth's surveys had identified a problem that was particular to the capital.²⁵ Rowntree developed the theory that the social problem of poverty was structured by the working-class life cycle.²⁶ Young people could save a little money in their initial working years but their wages failed to accommodate the needs of a family beyond the support of a few children. Once adult children began to contribute wages to the household economy this desperate need eased, only to return when the ageing parents were themselves unable to secure steady employment. The statistical analysis presented in these studies and subsequent social surveys unsettled earlier portrayals of poor individuals as 'masters of their fate' and suggested that poverty was the outcome of a series of problems that governments could conceivably compensate for including the death or illness of a wage-earner, old age, unemployment, and low wages.²⁷

In 1908 the Liberal government introduced a means-tested pension of five shillings for Britons who were aged over 70 and met a series of requirements, indicating their acceptance of new forms of social responsibility that included support for the elderly. These pensions

²⁵ B. Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, London, 1901, p.298.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.136-7.

²⁷ A. L. Bowley and Alexander Robert Burnett-Hurst, *Livelihood and Poverty: A Study in the Economic Conditions of Working-Class Households in Northampton, Warrington, Stanley and Reading*, London, 1915, p.47.

provided below-subsistence level support for ‘the very old, the very poor, and the very respectable’.²⁸ This set of concerns — the minimum needs of the oldest, poorest, and most frail — dominated Edwardian and interwar discourse around ageing and established a conceptual framework whose legacy remains strong today.²⁹ During the following decades, interwar social surveys focused on household poverty and unemployment and expanded the coverage of social research, surveying manufacturing towns such as Northampton and Reading, the metropolitan country of Merseyside, the London housing estates of Becontree and Dagenham, and the city of Bristol, and using increasingly sophisticated statistical and sampling techniques.³⁰ While the elderly poor garnered concern and pensions were factored into working-class household economies, the plight of the old was not a structuring concern equivalent to the place of unemployment or poverty in this research.³¹

Psychology gained intellectual and popular sway during the early-twentieth century and began to direct expert attention towards the emotional experiences of ageing individuals. From the 1920s social and medical studies of old age were influenced by psychology in figuring older individuals’ interior lives within their studies as intrinsic to the ‘problems’ of ill health, poverty, or retirement in later life, and their potential political solutions.³² Thomson

²⁸ Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, p.225.

²⁹ See Johnson, ‘Parallel Histories of Retirement in Modern Britain’, p.215.

³⁰ The first study to use random sampling rather than visiting every household in an area was Bowley and Burnett-Hurst, *Livelihood and Poverty: A Study in the Economic Conditions of Working-Class Households in Northampton, Warrington, Stanley and Reading*. See also D. Caradog Jones and University of Liverpool, *The Social Survey of Merseyside*, 3 vols, Liverpool, 1934; Herbert Tout and University of Bristol Social Survey, *The Standard of Living in Bristol: A Preliminary Report of the Work of the University of Bristol Social Survey*, Bristol, 1938; Terence Young and Becontree Social Survey Committee, *Becontree and Dagenham: A Report Made for the Pilgrim Trust*, London, 1934.

³¹ For example A. L. Bowley and Margaret H. Hogg, *Has Poverty Diminished?: A Sequel to ‘Livelihood and Poverty’*, *Studies in Economics and Political Science*, London, 1925, p.26. See chapter three for a consideration of the influence of economic depression and unemployment on this literature.

³² London School of Economics and Political Science and H. Llewellyn Smith, *The New Survey of London Life & Labour*, 9 vols, vol. 3, London, 1930, p.366; Political and Economic Planning, *The Exit from Industry*, London, 1935, pp.6-9; Leonard Llewelyn Bulkeley Williams, *Middle Age and Old Age*, *Oxford Medical Publications*, London and New York, 1925, pp.284-5.

has traced the spread of practical and popular forms of psychology and the habit of thinking about the world in ‘psychological terms’ throughout British society after the First World War.³³ He has also emphasised the limited resources that were available to experts hoping to shape the behaviour and attitudes of individuals, and therefore the agency that was exercised by Britons as they adapted psychological theories within popular pastimes and private lives.³⁴ This different dimension to the expert treatment of old age was signalled by American psychologist G. Stanley Hall’s 1922 publication *Senescence*. More famous for his psychological studies of childhood and adolescence, in his final study Hall set out to chart the individualised experience of ageing and to establish the meaning of old age.³⁵ In his 1925 publication *Middle and Old Age*, British physician Leonard Williams shared many of Hall’s questions as he attempted to describe the physical, mental, and spiritual habits of longevity, or as he formulated it, ‘the best means of arriving at Old Age’.³⁶ The new focus on the nature and meaning of ageing, and the application of the up-to-date technologies of psychology and medicine to researchers’ questions about it, signalled a new status for old people as subjects whose private experiences were interesting in their own right.

As Nikolas Rose has theorised, the psychological sciences provided a language for expert discussion and management of the internal lives of individuals.³⁷ In the 1920s and 1930s physical wellbeing was reinterpreted as theories of mental hygiene and psychology redefined the causes of social phenomena such as crime, industrial accidents, and suffering in old age.

³³ Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain*.

³⁴ Ibid., pp.110-1. See also Matt Houlbrook, 'Commodifying the Self Within: Ghosts, Labels and the Crook Lifestory in Interwar Britain', *Journal of Modern History*, forthcoming June 2013; Chris Waters, 'Sexology', in *Palgrave Advances in the Modern History of Sexuality*, Harry Cocks and Matt Houlbrook, eds, Basingstoke, 2006, p.59. With thanks to Matt for sending me his article.

³⁵ G. Stanley Hall, *Senescence, the Last Half of Life*, New York, 1922.

³⁶ Williams, *Middle Age and Old Age*, p.vi.

³⁷ Nikolas S. Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*, London, 1990; Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood*.

The problems the state might address were newly located in the ‘psychological realm of intimacy’ and experts from a range of fields designed public institutions that could address ‘maladjustment’ and promote ‘health, contentment, and efficiency’.³⁸ The language of psychology, which was adopted by experts in the fields of government, education, health, and administration, suggested that public and private life were inseparable, connecting ‘social tranquillity and institutional efficiency with personal contentment’.³⁹ Although its reach was more limited than its most enthusiastic practitioners supposed, by foregrounding individual and emotional experiences, psychology drove an ideological shift, for example by encouraging social researchers to ask how the ‘problems’ of old age might affect older people’s happiness and dignity. A 1938 Fabian Society tract on *Our Ageing Population* imagined that an age-specific mental and emotional pattern ‘will affect — indeed, is already affecting — all fields of activity, be they cultural or economic’ including increased demand for beauty products and the leisure activities ostensibly enjoyed by older people such as reading, listening to the radio, watching television, gardening, and dog breeding.⁴⁰ In his second social survey of York, published in 1941, Rowntree described the particular emotional texture of poverty in old age,

poverty means something different to those who sink below the line in old age. They *know* they will spend the rest of their days below it — pinching, scraping, often cold, often ailing — just waiting for the end; with hardly anything to spend on those little luxuries which would ease their lot and which they would so much enjoy. The minimum standard allows very little beyond bare necessities, and these old people are living far below it. They are, indeed, the poorest people in the city. Of course, they *do* get an occasional ounce of tobacco, or a glass of beer, but only by suffering a little more from cold or under-nourishment. A poor, drab ending to life!⁴¹

³⁸ Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood*, p.72.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Davies and Fabian Society, *Our Ageing Population*, pp.3, 7.

⁴¹ B. Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty and Progress: A Second Social Survey of York*, London, 1941, p.99.

In this excerpt Rowntree discussed many of the same concerns that had shaped his first survey of York in 1901.⁴² He was still interested in older people's financial position in relation to the poverty 'line' and in what constituted a 'minimum standard' of life as distinct from its material 'luxuries'. Further, his study was another attempt to measure the economic realities of working-class life for an expert and elite audience, who might be responsible for altering public policy in response. However, this passage also demonstrated Rowntree's increased awareness of old people as a distinct social group with particular emotional needs and experiences. He insisted that cold, sickness, hunger, and 'scraping' poverty meant 'something different' — something harder to accept — when they constituted the 'ending to life'.

During the Second World War these different strands of thought were brought together in public campaigns for the humane treatment of old Britons that were waged by experts who claimed new forms of professional authority. Air attacks on civilians in the context of total war created an intense concern with morale, which strengthened interest in the 'psychiatric register' and public opinion.⁴³ Moreover, old people emerged as a very visible problem during the war as a result of emergency medical procedures, which meant that 140,000 people were discharged from hospital in the two days following the declaration of war with Germany to make way for civilian bombing victims.⁴⁴ Voluntary groups worried about how the elderly infirm could care for themselves at home while officials were concerned about their presence in bomb shelters.⁴⁵ Wartime concern with emotional and psychic

⁴² Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*.

⁴³ Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*, p.23.

⁴⁴ Means and Smith, *From Poor Law to Community Care: The Development of Welfare Services for Elderly People 1939-1971*, p.21.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.25, 3, 13.

management was matched by new evidence for successful government intervention, for example rationing and scientific knowledge was understood to have increased the nutritional value of the average diet in a time of national food shortage.⁴⁶ The National Old People's Welfare Committee was formed in 1940 in order to advocate for better provision for elderly evacuees, to arrange visiting services for the isolated and struggling, and to collate and communicate information about wartime provision for the old.⁴⁷ The Committee was the first national advocate for the broadly defined interests of the aged, a shift that the organisation saw as important and made some effort to point out as they differentiated themselves from their regional predecessors, such as the Liverpool Personal Service Society committee for care of the old, established in 1928.⁴⁸ Most of the Committee's wartime activity focused on the day-to-day needs of the elderly but they also began to advocate for services for the old within postwar reconstruction.⁴⁹ The organisation spread, developing committees slowly from 1940-1946 and more quickly afterwards. It had 70 local committees in 1944 and in 1952 the Committee's Progress Report recorded 12 regional, 49 county, and 831 local Old People's Welfare Committees.⁵⁰ Local committees were primarily concerned to collate and disseminate information about provisions for old people, to advocate for their needs, and to coordinate the organisations which offered social services. Similarly, the National Corporation for the Care of Old People was set up in 1947 with funding from the wartime Lord Mayor's Air Raid Distress Fund and the Nuffield Foundation, in order to address hardships in housing and health, and to coordinate and provide grants to voluntary

⁴⁶ Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History*, p.146.

⁴⁷ The organisation changed its name to the National Old People's Welfare Council in 1955. National Corporation for the Care of Old People, *Old Age in the Modern World: Report of the Third Congress of the International Association of Gerontology London 1954*, Edinburgh, 1955, p.69; Pratt, *Gray Agendas: Interest Groups and Public Pensions in Canada, Britain, and the United States*, p.128.

⁴⁸ Roberts, *Our Future Selves*, p.27.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.38-9.

⁵⁰ Means and Smith, *From Poor Law to Community Care: The Development of Welfare Services for Elderly People 1939-1971*, p.70.

organisations working with elderly people.⁵¹ These nationwide associations presented themselves as voices of expertise and developed a clear agenda for change which revolved around a carefully defined set of needs in old age, working to construct old age as a social category and problem.

The intersection of mid-century interest in the workings of psychology and the broadening social responsibility of governments influenced institutions across the fields of health, housing, welfare, and punishment to consider the internal lives of individuals. From the 1940s pioneers of old age psychiatry such as David Henderson and Aubrey Lewis argued for greater attention to older people's personal and social histories, made connections between their medical and social problems, and encouraged longitudinal studies of intellectual and emotional changes over the life span.⁵² This work contributed to the development of old age psychiatry, which diagnosed potentially treatable mental illnesses in older patients thereby disproving the received wisdom that confusion and declining mental abilities were part of normal ageing.⁵³ Matthew Hollow has shown how the design and building of small flats for elderly tenants was part of a trend among architects, engineers, and civil servants, who considered the individual and subjective needs of different groups of tenants from the 1940s onwards.⁵⁴ Abigail Wills' work on the influence of psychological theory in residential institutions for juvenile delinquents, which directed their reform efforts towards therapeutic benefits to the individual rather than adjustment to societal norms, has demonstrated that the same interests shaped the state's re-education of unruly young men, who were granted

⁵¹ Ibid., pp.98-100; Pratt, *Gray Agendas: Interest Groups and Public Pensions in Canada, Britain, and the United States*, p.129.

⁵² Hilton, 'The Origins of Old Age Psychiatry in Britain in the 1940s', pp.267-89.

⁵³ Ibid., p.426.

⁵⁴ Matthew Hollow, 'Housing Needs: Power, Subjectivity and Public Housing in England, 1920-1970', Doctor of Philosophy thesis, University of Oxford, 2010, pp.134, 8-9.

more freedom and privacy and faced less severe disciplinary measures after the 1950s.⁵⁵ Through its intelligence and personality tests, psychology also offered tools for the assessment and re-education of colonial subjects, both abroad and when they immigrated to Britain.⁵⁶ The use of mid-twentieth-century sciences of the self to intervene in inner lives through the practices of hospital, state housing, detention facility, and both colonial and postcolonial administrators constituted a new pattern of social authority and subjectivity that, as Frank Mort has suggested of changing forms of knowledge and communication, has been underutilised by twentieth-century historians seeking to define the characteristics of their period.⁵⁷

Social research, psychology, and arguments for social democracy worked together to generate a new set of social values and sense of the self and citizen, which Thomson has termed 'a kind of secular, human-centred spirituality'.⁵⁸ Governments and professional groups harnessed this language to claim responsibility and credit for managing the emotional and psychic dimensions of ageing. While central government primarily served older people's needs through pensions and Supplementary Assistance payments, their provision of medical services through the National Health Service, the building of residential homes by local authorities, and the wide range of services offered by voluntary organisations were presented as a national system of care for the old, reflecting the flow of funding between the public, private, and voluntary sectors, as well as their shared aims. As Aneurin Bevan, the Minister

⁵⁵ Abigail Wills, 'Delinquency, Masculinity and Citizenship in England 1950-1970', *Past & Present*, 187, 1, 2005, p.177.

⁵⁶ Jordanna Bailkin, 'The Postcolonial Family? West African Children, Private-Fostering, and the British State', *Journal of Modern History*, 81, 1, 2009, p.98; Erik Linstrum, 'The Politics of Psychology in the British Empire, 1898-1960', *Past & Present*, 215, 1, 2012, pp.195-233.

⁵⁷ Frank Mort, 'Intellectual Pluralism and the Future of British History', *History Workshop Journal*, 72, 1, 2011, pp.212-21.

⁵⁸ Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain*, p.45.

of Health, declared in anticipation of the launch of the National Health Service on 5 July 1948, the nation would accept responsibility for social services and actively invite complaints that needed to be addressed.⁵⁹ In the postwar political world, Bevan proclaimed, the ‘care of the old was not a family or individual problem but a social problem’.⁶⁰ At the 1948 National Old People’s Welfare Committee conference in London, George Buchannan, who was Minister of Pensions until July 1948 and then Chairman of the National Assistance Board, described the ethical stance he attributed to such efforts when he described popular support for pensions and hailed such services for the old as ‘the embodiment of human understanding and decency’.⁶¹ His speech was partly a sales pitch for a redistributive economic policy, but it also highlighted how far the techniques of mid-century research and political planning were understood as a set of social values. While these values may have been voiced opportunistically by political representatives, they were also shared by the voluntary and professional workers who filled the panels and audiences of the National Old People’s Welfare Committee’s conference.

As this suggests, National Old People’s Welfare Committee annual conferences provided one of the spaces where politicians, health and welfare professionals, and the administrators of voluntary agencies discussed what could be achieved by interventionist government and established the image of a democratic citizenry, who were imagined to deserve and expect a certain standard of living throughout the life cycle.⁶² Attendees routinely placed emotional experience at the heart of their conversations. Speaking at the 1946 conference, Marjory

⁵⁹ National Old People’s Welfare Committee, *Working Together for Old People’s Welfare*, London, 1948, p.6.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ National Old People’s Welfare Committee, *Problems and Progress in Old People’s Welfare*, London, 1949, pp.5-6.

⁶² For example in National Old People’s Welfare Committee, *Old People’s Welfare: A Guide to Practical Work for the Welfare of Old People*, London, 1945; National Old People’s Welfare Committee, *Report of the Conference on ‘the Care of Old People’*, London, 1947; National Old People’s Welfare Committee, *Working Together for Old People’s Welfare*.

Warren, who was publically advocating the creation of the medical speciality of geriatrics at the time, argued that services for the elderly should go far beyond medical treatment, they should keep older Britons ‘not merely alive, but also important, useful, healthy and happy, and with as much enjoyment of mind and body as was physically possible to them’.⁶³ Warren’s assumption of progress was repeated throughout the Committee’s handbooks for welfare work with the elderly and in postwar studies of old age as it was lived out in the welfare state.⁶⁴ Home helps would cook, clean, and shop; they would also provide sociability and conversation and support self-esteem by enabling older people to live in their own homes.⁶⁵ Hot meals, delivered to the elderly door-to-door or in luncheon clubs, were understood to deliver emotional and social goods that were as important as their nutritional value.⁶⁶ Social visiting and clubs were organised by volunteers to combat elderly Britons’ perceived loneliness or boredom.⁶⁷ In the same period, politicians described pensioners’ loneliness in parliament to argue for initiatives ranging from old people’s clubs and improved National Insurance, to relief from television licensing fees, tobacco duty, and full-price bus fares.⁶⁸ Over the mid-twentieth century these conversations expanded the notion of a good old age to include independence, mental stimulation, companionship, opportunities for self-expression, and dignity.

⁶³ National Old People's Welfare Committee, *Report of the Conference on 'the Care of Old People'*, pp.19-20.

⁶⁴ For example in Pat Barr and National Old People's Welfare Council, *The Elderly: Handbook on Care and Services*, London, 1968.

⁶⁵ For example as imagined in National Old People's Welfare Committee, *Old People's Welfare: A Guide to Practical Work for the Welfare of Old People*, pp.11-2.

⁶⁶ Trevor Henry Howell, *Our Advancing Years; an Essay on Modern Problems of Old Age*, London, 1953, pp.81-2; National Old People's Welfare Committee, *Old People's Welfare: A Guide to Practical Work for the Welfare of Old People*, pp.13-4.

⁶⁷ National Old People's Welfare Committee, *Old People's Welfare: A Guide to Practical Work for the Welfare of Old People*, pp.6-7, 15; Roberts, *Our Future Selves*, pp.115, 23-25.

⁶⁸ Parliamentary debates, *Hansard*, House of Commons, vol 382 cols 601-602 (29 July 1942); vol 671 col 528 (6 February 1963); vol 570 cols 1412-1413 (23 May 1959); vol 553 col 900 (5 June 1956); vol 717 col 192 (26 July 1965).

These aims were supported and encouraged by the publication of an increasing level of detail about older Britons' private lives and feelings over the mid-twentieth century, especially in the burgeoning field of sociology. While the London School of Economics had established a sociology department in 1907, the course privileged statistics and economics and 'the development of sociology as a discrete discipline was overshadowed by the longer, more powerful intellectual traditions of philosophy and social anthropology' elsewhere.⁶⁹ In the postwar years, social research shifted from being mainly a private pursuit to one funded through trusts and began to find a 'more formal, academically mediated, footing'.⁷⁰ In the decades immediately following the war, 'the social end of the social sciences' began to 'flourish', supported by the Clapham Report's recommendation of greater funding for social science research, the Home Office's financing of social work training, the Robbins Report's expansion of university-based social science faculties, and the creation of the Social Science Research Council in 1965, to carry out, support, and publicise research in the field.⁷¹ As Michael Savage has argued, the expansion of social science aligned with a mid-century rejection of 'highbrow culture' and knowledge and 'an increasing enthusiasm for a different kind of intellectuality, one bound up with science, technique, and skill'.⁷² For example, during the 1950s sociology courses were established in the new 'plate-glass' universities which 'championed' the social sciences as 'the most appropriate specialist disciplines for modern universities'.⁷³

⁶⁹ Julie Charlesworth and Janet Fink, 'Historians and Social-Science Research Data: The Peter Townsend Collection', *History Workshop Journal*, 51, 2001, p.208; A. H. Halsey, *A History of Sociology in Britain: Science, Literature, and Society*, Oxford, 2004, p.vi.

⁷⁰ Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method*, p.101.

⁷¹ Halsey, *A History of Sociology in Britain: Science, Literature, and Society*, p.13.

⁷² Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method*, p.51.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.128.

As part of this shift, social research methods altered as the practice of informed ‘observation’ was challenged by the greater legitimacy of ‘direct’ accounts from subjects, gathered through questionnaires and interviews.⁷⁴ This shift in form had productive effects on the way in which social problems were constructed and understood, making emotions and subjectivity into central concerns. For sociologists interested in the “‘hidden” psychological states’ of their respondents, the ‘probing face-to-face interview, as borrowed from the practice of psychotherapy’ promised to reveal a subject’s inner life and emphasised the integrity of the individual subject within new forms of democratic citizenship.⁷⁵ In a continuation of the process described by James Vernon, sociological theory highlighted the complex relationships and expectations that supported normal social life, thus revealing the social as a system that required analysis and categorisation, and could be managed by health and welfare workers.⁷⁶ Interviewing methods were increasingly employed by social researchers, who criticised the narrower conclusions offered by statistical evidence that was not informed by a ‘wide knowledge’ of society and ‘direct and continuous acquaintance’ with research subjects.⁷⁷ The same techniques were taught to professional welfare workers in new training schemes and syllabi.

The 1947 Younghusband Report, for example, presented the argument for training in social work and further academic research into the operations of its professional practices such as

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.94.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.96.

⁷⁶ Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History*, p.274. For example in J. H. Sheldon and Nuffield Foundation, *The Social Medicine of Old Age: Report of an Inquiry in Wolverhampton*, London, 1948.

⁷⁷ For example Dorothy Cole and J. E. G. Utting, *The Economic Circumstances of Old People, Occasional Papers on Social Administration*, Welwyn, 1962, pp.37-41; Sheldon and Nuffield Foundation, *The Social Medicine of Old Age: Report of an Inquiry in Wolverhampton*, p.5; Peter Townsend and Institute of Community Studies, *The Family Life of Old People: An Inquiry in East London, Reports of the Institute of Community Studies*, London, 1957, pp.9-10.

case work and group work.⁷⁸ Looking back, the report's author Eileen Younghusband described the postwar influence of economics, anthropology, demography, biology, and medicine on social work training and argued that 'the major contributions of general and usable knowledge came from psychology and sociology'.⁷⁹ Bowlby's clinical study of the mental health of homeless children in post-war Europe *Maternal Care and Mental Health*, which was discussed early in this chapter for its widespread influence on beliefs about childrearing and maternal bonding, demonstrated how social science theory might be made quantifiable and therefore be more easily translated into professional action.⁸⁰ Psychoanalytically-oriented casework spread during the 1950s and anthropological studies highlighted the effect of different cultural values and behaviour on patterns of family and social life.⁸¹ The newly established administrative structure for widespread social work training, especially the provision of student grants and training councils, supported an 'explosion' of training in the 1960s, when the number of students completing degrees in social work increased almost fivefold.⁸² By the end of the decade, the National Council of Social Services considered that even those who wanted to volunteer their time to help the elderly needed to be trained to understand their 'principal needs'.⁸³

As this discussion suggests, the social and psychological sciences established a common vocabulary and set of goals among the web of experts in medicine, government, housing,

⁷⁸ Eileen Louise Younghusband and Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, *Report on the Employment and Training of Social Workers*, Edinburgh, 1947.

⁷⁹ Eileen Louise Younghusband, *The Newest Profession: A Short History of Social Work*, Sutton, 1981, p.28.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp.29-30.

⁸² Barbara N. Rodgers and June Stevenson, *A New Portrait of Social Work: A Study of the Social Services in a Northern Town from Younghusband to Seebohm*, London, 1973, p.14; Younghusband, *The Newest Profession: A Short History of Social Work*, p.33.

⁸³ Pat Barr and National Old People's Welfare Council, *The Elderly: Handbook on Care and Services*, p.79.

business, voluntary work, and social work who aimed to shape the way older people lived.⁸⁴ Yet, despite the significance of psychology and emotions to these projects, I argue that many dimensions of the personal process of ageing lay outside their remit. If we wish to discuss the successes and failures of mid-century social and political reforms, we must first establish what terms their architects would have used to answer that question. Therefore, in what follows I lay out the central motifs which interlocked their different projects. By tracing the development of concerns that recurred in public discussions and social research projects — which consistently focused on the home, the ageing body, and loneliness — I historicise mid-century understandings of emotional experience in old age and show how they were the legacy of a series of developments in theory and method.

The built environment

Beginning with the pioneering studies undertaken by Booth and Rowntree, the social survey tradition established the neighbourhood, street, and household as units that could measure social problems. Just as statistics could ‘transform the attributes of the population into a form where they could enter into the calculations of rulers’, the visibility and measurability of houses were central to Booth’s project to create a ‘moral topography’ of poverty and a clear basis for political action.⁸⁵ Booth’s investigators measured poverty street-by-street as they interviewed people in their London households and classified the level of poverty found in each area. The culmination of their assessments was Booth’s maps of London, which categorised each street and by its level of poverty in a visual display of degrees of hardship.

⁸⁴ Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood*, p.77.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.73-4.

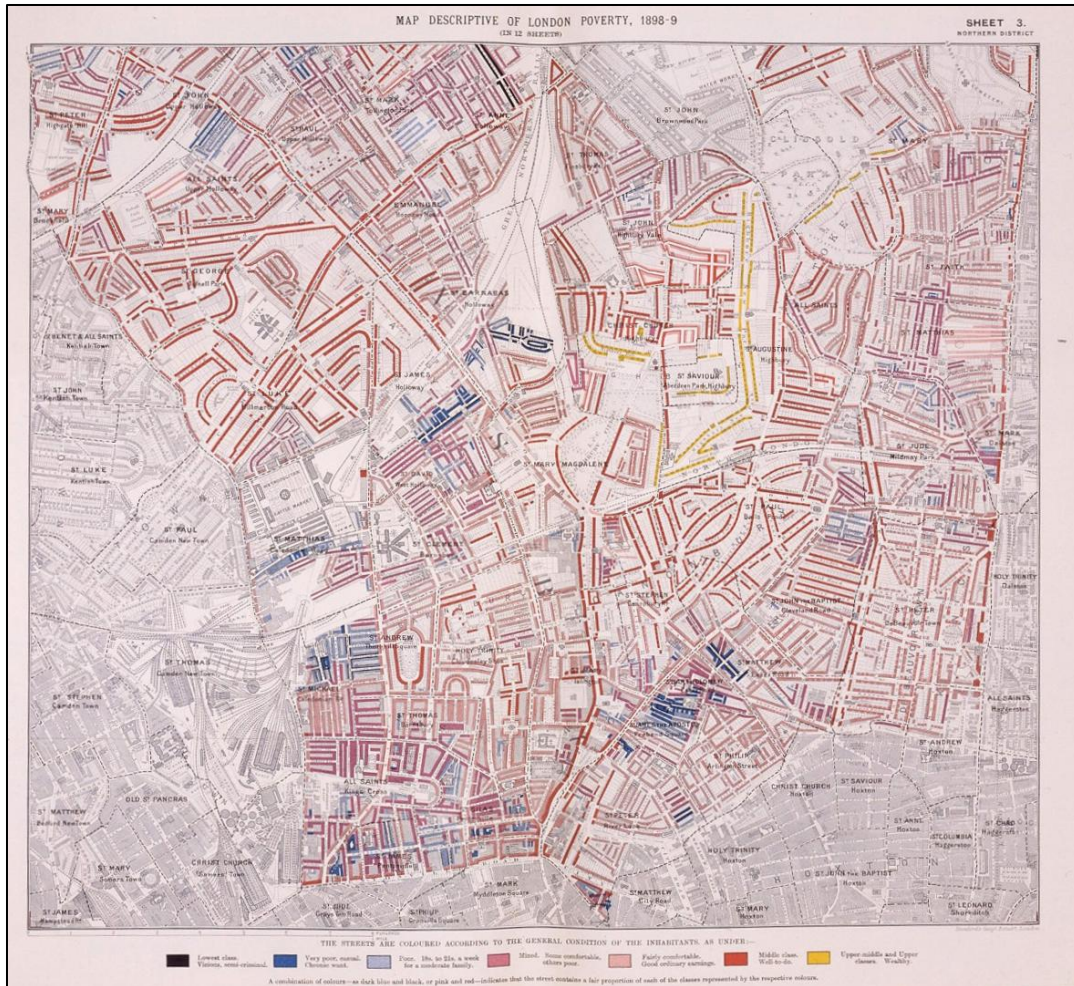


Figure 2: Charles Booth's famous map of London which famously quantified the city's poverty street-by-street and in visual form. Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*, 9 vols, Vol. 1, *Poverty*, London and New York, 1902.

Urban streets set the scene for discussions of poverty and opened windows on to its effects on private lives; the state of the homes and neighbourhoods of London revealed the moral qualities of the city's inhabitants. For Rowntree, the high walls, narrow streets, and overcrowding in slum neighbourhoods of York bred a 'jaded and spiritless' population which he described using the language of character and moral fibre rather than individual psychology.⁸⁶ By measuring home and neighbourhood, turn-of-the-century social investigators established the tradition that the built environment could translate intangible

⁸⁶ Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, pp.152-4, 77.

aspects of life into data, an approach that would underpin twentieth-century researchers' attempts to communicate with policy-makers, and inform popular discussions of old age. Subsequent social researchers approached built environments armed with a new set of statistical methods and environmental concerns. For instance, A. L. Bowley and Alexander Robert Burnett-Hurst sought to catalogue poverty through families' occupation of space, which they measured by the rent they paid, the number of rooms they used, and the heights of their ground floors.⁸⁷ The presence of unacceptably cramped, dark, and damp houses — an impression established through this accumulated mass of measurements — asserted the 'real volume of poverty' against the naysayers who judged earlier descriptions of such conditions 'the fruit of an overheated imagination'.⁸⁸ The inclusion of these spatial details was never solely of technical significance though; crowded, dispiriting conditions and a lack of fresh air always signalled the decay of morals and of people's 'spirits'. Accordingly, the 1930 *New Survey of London Life and Labour* judged that the 'moral, educational, and hygienic aspects of the London housing problem' were national concerns far greater than the economic problem of solving them.⁸⁹

Interwar commentators reflected the conceptual shift from Victorian liberalism to greater social planning, which was expressed by the establishment of the social research group Political and Economic Planning in 1931 in response to the perceived governmental failure to formulate a coherent national response to economic depression, and within the

⁸⁷ Bowley and Burnett-Hurst, *Livelihood and Poverty: A Study in the Economic Conditions of Working-Class Households in Northampton, Warrington, Stanley and Reading*, pp.188-9.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.46.

⁸⁹ London School of Economics and Political Science and Smith, *The New Survey of London Life & Labour*, 1, p.143.

organisation's publications on both retirement and welfare services.⁹⁰ In line with new expectations of state activity, social researchers matched their imagery of dilapidated and unacceptable living conditions with arguments about what the homes inhabited by particular groups of Britons should be like; voluntary organisations, local authorities, and the state should prove their commitment to improved experiences of ageing in bricks and mortar. In 1935, Political and Economic Planning claimed that the happiness of retired people depended on 'the comfort and pleasantness of their homes' which should be 'small, inexpensive and easily run' houses with spaces for age-appropriate leisure activities, envisaged to belong in '[g]arden plots, allotments, old people's clubs, and rest rooms'.⁹¹ The issue was taken up by groups of professionals (especially in the burgeoning field of occupational therapy) and charitable housing associations, who advocated for greater attention to old people's housing needs, claiming it was unfair that out of 2.5 million houses built since World War One, only one per cent had been designed for older people, who numbered about 10 per cent of the population.⁹² While their argument did not gain political traction in a time when homebuilding was focused on ex-soldiers' needs, it offered an updated reading of the built environment by entwining understandings of old age with the provision of comfortable domestic environments.

After the Second World War, elusive visions of the emotional wellbeing, tranquillity, and connection to modern life that welfare and voluntary services should deliver were made concrete in precise and recurring descriptions of appropriate housing for the elderly. The

⁹⁰ R. C. Whiting, 'Political and Economic Planning (Act. 1931–1978)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Available at: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/theme/95962> (4 August 2012).

⁹¹ Political and Economic Planning, *The Exit from Industry*, p.15.

⁹² The statistic was cited by the Parliamentary Secretary in 1938. Old people were understood to be synonymous with those who could access pensions (women aged over 60 and men aged over 65). For example William Warrender Mackenzie Amulree, *Adding Life to Years*, London, 1951, p.62; National Old People's Welfare Committee, *Old People's Welfare: A Guide to Practical Work for the Welfare of Old People*, p.24.

1947 Nuffield Foundation report *Old People*, which was chaired by Seebohm Rowntree, offered such a vision.⁹³ In accordance with Lord Nuffield's terms, the Foundation had funded earlier projects that emphasised the welfare of the elderly such as the Nuffield Research Unit into Problems of Ageing at Cambridge (established in 1946) and the National Corporation for the Care of Old People, but this influential Report — which sold 3,000 copies in 24 hours, was reprinted in large sections in newspapers, and was debated in both houses of Commons and Lords — did the most to raise the profile of the charitable Foundation and secure the status of old age as its primary research concern.⁹⁴ According to the Foundation, the ideal house for an older person was small, in their local area and close to shops, a library, churches, and recreation facilities, in a quiet location but positioned to offer a view of the comings and goings of neighbours, well-heated (preferably by a 'homely' open-grate fire), and with a level garden featuring seating in a sunny corner.⁹⁵ As well as highlighting the work to be done for the elderly, housing plans for old people's bungalows presented a set of model behaviours and emotional priorities in old age (Figure 3). The ageing population would remain socially engaged by reading and attending church services rather than by frequenting pubs, they would be interested in the activities of the young but would mostly view these from their kitchen windows, and their warm, easily manageable houses would support a contented, self-reliant home life.

⁹³ Nuffield Foundation Survey Committee on the Problems of Ageing and the Care of Old People and B. Seebohm Rowntree, *Old People: Report of a Survey Committee on the Problems of Ageing and the Care of Old People*, London, 1947.

⁹⁴ Stephen Katz, *Disciplining Old Age: The Formation of Gerontological Knowledge, Knowledge, Disciplinary and Beyond*, Charlottesville and London, 1996, p.114.

⁹⁵ Nuffield Foundation Survey Committee on the Problems of Ageing and the Care of Old People and Rowntree, *Old People: Report of a Survey Committee on the Problems of Ageing and the Care of Old People*, pp.40-3.

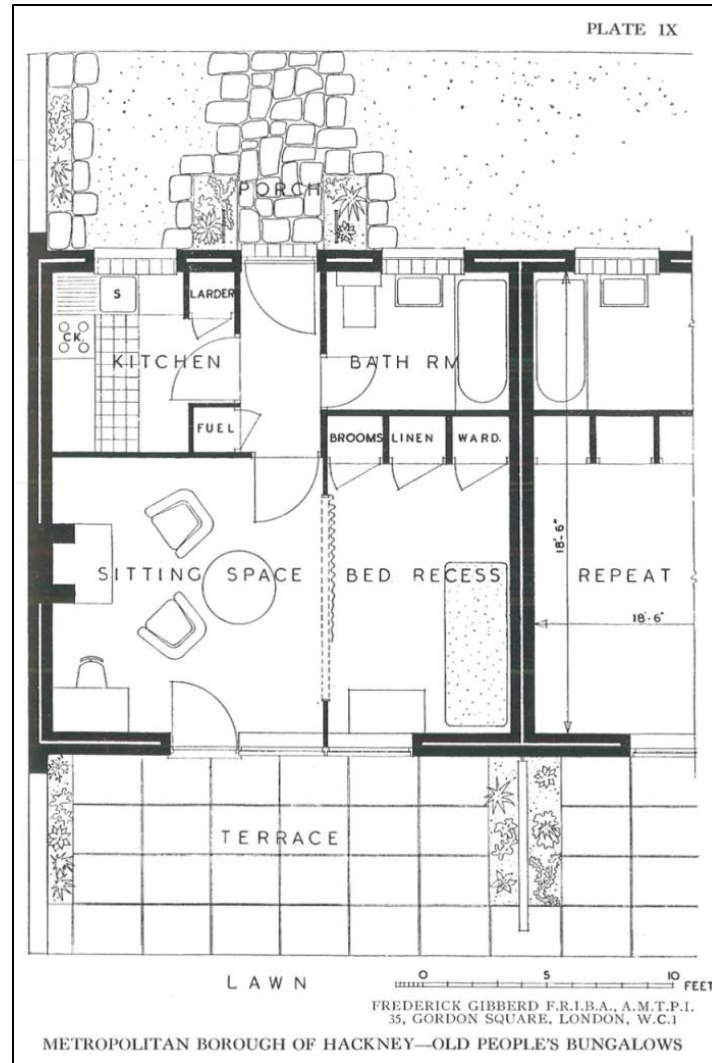


Figure 3: 'Old people's bungalows' plan. Happiness and comfort in old age were symbolised by a small, modern, single-story bungalow that was specially designed for older inhabitants. National Old People's Welfare Committee, *Age Is Opportunity; a New Guide to Practical Work for the Welfare of Old People*, London, 1949, after p.56.

Social surveys favourably contrasted an old age lived in such a 'neat bungalow' with that spent in the poverty and dirt of an old-style 'tumbledown cottage'.⁹⁶ The home was a durable symbol of older Britons' quality of life which proved its flexibility as researchers' concerns shifted from poverty and morality to domestic ease. Having appeared in social research and social reform literature throughout the twentieth century, the household

⁹⁶ G. F. Adams, Eric Arthur Cheeseman, and Northern Ireland Hospitals Authority, *Old People in Northern Ireland: A Report to the Northern Ireland Hospitals Authority on the Medical Social Problems of Old Age*, Belfast, 1951. after 30

became a particularly powerful symbol of the improvements mid-century experts had wrought in later life.

The ageing body

Similarly to the measurement and design of the built environment, medical tests provided quantitative evidence for the state of the ageing population from the mid-1930s onwards. Rowntree and Booth had measured poverty through the needs of the body that must be met by purchasing food, clothing, warmth, and shelter, framing physical suffering ‘not primarily as an individual, physiological problem (bodily infirmity) but as a sign of social disorder that requires collective (legislative) action’.⁹⁷ Practiced in Britain from 1935, geriatric medicine assessed the physiological well-being of older people and the possibility of their recovery and set much higher standards for a healthy old age.⁹⁸ On this basis, social research expertise intersected with medical diagnoses in the medical texts authored between 1944 and 1960 by the physicians Trevor Howell, Joseph Sheldon, G. F. Adams, Eric Cheeseman, William Amulree, Will Hobson, John Pemberton, and Kenneth Hazell.⁹⁹ For example, in his *Practical Points in Geriatrics*, Howell stressed the importance of monitoring ageing bodies in everyday behaviours and routines to understand a person’s overall condition in mind, body, and soul. He wrote that doctors should notice alterations to an older patient’s appetite and pay

⁹⁷ Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-1864*, p.57.

⁹⁸ Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, p.437.

⁹⁹ Adams, Cheeseman, and Northern Ireland Hospitals Authority, *Old People in Northern Ireland: A Report to the Northern Ireland Hospitals Authority on the Medical Social Problems of Old Age*; Amulree, *Adding Life to Years*; Hazell, *Social and Medical Problems of the Elderly*; Will Hobson and John Pemberton, *The Health of the Elderly at Home: A Medical, Social and Dietary Study of Elderly People Living at Home in Sheffield*, London, 1955; Trevor H. Howell, *Old Age; Some Practical Points in Geriatrics*, London, 1944; Sheldon and Nuffield Foundation, *The Social Medicine of Old Age: Report of an Inquiry in Wolverhampton*.

attention to their shuffling gait or sagging posture as clues to serious health problems.¹⁰⁰ The same diagnostic gaze was turned on the ageing nation. Using interview schedules such as that designed by Herbert Miller and reproduced at the beginning of this chapter, social scientists ticked boxes to record whether older men and women were active or infirm, where they had pain, and whether they were able to complete their own household chores. These categories judged ageing bodies within a horizontal stratum, and the statistics they produced symbolised the older generation and the end of the life cycle on a national scale, taking little account of the importance of personal history to older people's feelings about their bodies.

The assessment of ageing bodies merged with expert interest in the home and domestic life in studies that were tightly focused on a set of daily domestic tasks. Sociologists were increasingly concerned to know how often their subjects left their home and whether they had difficulty keeping it, or themselves, clean and comfortable. To describe the physical condition and everyday lives of his sample, Sheldon, a British physician with a deep interest in old people who would be appointed president of the International Association of Gerontology in 1954, calculated the percentage of elderly in his survey who were confined to their bed, house, or district, who had difficulty with stairs or queues, and who fell over because of vertigo or because they had difficulty seeing in the dark.¹⁰¹ Records of these discrete tasks were used by physicians to produce what Sheldon called 'a comprehensive picture of the present pattern of old age in society'.¹⁰² Writing in the postwar model that championed social intervention, they intended to improve the experience of old age through state and professional services. Hence, Sheldon presented a wealth of statistics on the

¹⁰⁰ Howell, *Old Age; Some Practical Points in Geriatrics*, p.47.

¹⁰¹ Sheldon and Nuffield Foundation, *The Social Medicine of Old Age: Report of an Inquiry in Wolverhampton*, pp.13-4, 48.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.3.

archetypal physical limitations of old age and their panaceas: for example, 60 per cent of a sample of 116 people depended on false teeth and one third wore unsuitable spectacles.¹⁰³ He advocated chiropody and spectacles as the interventions that would bring the greatest relief to the largest number of elderly Britons.¹⁰⁴ The use of medical tests made certain aspects of physiological ageing visible to doctors, social commentators, and policy-makers, and catalysed physical and material responses to a problem that was understood to be social in nature.

Correctly used, these medical aids were presented as the answers to intertwined physiological, social, and emotional problems. Speaking at the National Old People's Committee conference in October 1950, F. N. Samma described how older people who lived alone had difficulty caring for their feet and therefore suffered from painful ingrown toenails, which made walking difficult or impossible.¹⁰⁵ She asserted that this 'crippling' effect of age caused many old people to 'give up' on life and become a 'burden' on the state.¹⁰⁶ In contrast, at a small cost to local authorities or voluntary organisations, a session of chiropody would keep older men and women 'on their own two feet' and support their physical and emotional independence, avoiding the cost of residential care.¹⁰⁷ In addition, staying mobile increased older people's social interactions and guarded against loneliness. Similarly useful, spectacles and hearing aids allowed them to keep up the appearance of their home and grooming, and to align with the social norms of their community.¹⁰⁸ Mid-century experts connected the physiological effects of ageing to its negative emotional dimensions

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp.46, 8.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.194.

¹⁰⁵ National Old People's Welfare Committee, *Welfare Problems of Old People*, pp.34-5.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.35.

¹⁰⁷ Roberts, *Our Future Selves*, p.102.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

and argued that both sets of problems could be solved through their professional activity, which would be administered by a combination of state, voluntary, and commercial organisations.

Retirement, family life, and loneliness

As governments accepted increasing responsibility for older people's material and emotional needs, the state of their households and bodies took on particular significance in debates over the mid-century political and economic system. In particular, new techniques in demographics which predicted the future size and make-up of the population made Britons' longer life expectancy, which had been increasing since the 1870s largely due to falling infant and childhood mortality, seem to be an urgent problem, creating mid-century concern over the ability of the British state to support the 'ageing population' in coming years.¹⁰⁹ Academics and social commentators almost always opened their studies of ageing with predictions about the large and rapidly escalating numbers of old people who would inhabit Britain in the future, generating dramatic statistics and an image of an ageing state where young workers were 'liable to be suffocated or overwhelmed by an anonymous host' of financially dependent old people.¹¹⁰ The debate intensified and became alarmist over the interwar years and was popularized in the writings of Grace Leybourne and Enid Charles. Newspaper editors and academics assumed that an ageing society would become less

¹⁰⁹ Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood*, p.37; Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, pp.333-41.

¹¹⁰ Leopold Rosenmayr and Eva Köckeis, 'Propositions for a Sociological Theory of Ageing and the Family', *International Social Science Journal*, 15, 3, 1963, p.411.

creative and productive and increasingly inflexible.¹¹¹ These arguments were rebutted by David Glass and John Maynard Keynes, yet their thoughts had less influence than the ‘prophets of doom’ whose predictions were useful for a range of reform campaigns: ‘for social and economic planning; for family allowances; for statisticians and demographers seeking advancement for their profession and improved demographic data with which to work’.¹¹² The government published a White Paper on *The Current Trend of Population* in 1942, which was far less panicked than public and academic debate had been, and Beveridge quoted its softened predictions in his Report on Social Insurance to warn of the predicted rising costs of pensions and the dangers of encouraging early retirement.¹¹³ Yet in popular and academic discourse ‘the size, physical quality, and youthfulness of the population were identified in the collective imagination with national pride and greatness’.¹¹⁴ After World War Two, the most extreme manifestations of population panic subsided but the issue remained a ‘matter of quite major political concern’ until the 1960s.¹¹⁵ As it would do again in the late-twentieth century, the prospect of an ‘ageing population’ generated a series of anxieties about British cultural and economic life and the future of the nation.¹¹⁶

The pitch of mid-century considerations of work, retirement, and personal life in old age was inflected by these concerns. Older workers were said to struggle with new industrial technologies and faster-paced mass production so that postwar labour shortages raised

¹¹¹ Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood*, p.39; Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, pp.337-8.

¹¹² Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, pp.339-40.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.342-3.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.341.

¹¹⁵ Pat Thane, 'Population Politics in Post-War British Culture', in *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945-1964*, Becky Conekin, Frank Mort, and Chris Waters, eds, London and New York, 1999, p.115.

¹¹⁶ Davies and Fabian Society, *Our Ageing Population*.

questions about the physiological and psychological effects of ageing with fresh urgency.¹¹⁷ In the context of labour shortages, academic and governmental publications framed retirement as a problem and encouraged older workers to stay in employment, despite simultaneously worrying about the effect of an ageing population on the economy in terms that assumed older employees were less intelligent and less energetic.¹¹⁸ Following on from its findings that older people's physical and mental abilities were little understood, the Nuffield Foundation funded a series of studies in industrial and social psychology which reframed the typical capabilities of the old.¹¹⁹ According to industrial psychologists, older workers offered 'a steadiness, loyalty, and calm influence' which was good for production and industrial relations.¹²⁰ In a complementary activity, voluntary organisations opened social clubs and sent visitors to combat the psychological effects of boredom and loneliness in retirement. By 1970, Nesta Roberts estimated there were 9,000 clubs for the elderly in Britain and defined these and voluntary visiting as two of the four services that had 'cardinal importance in the lives of old people'.¹²¹ The assumption that retirement was a psychological challenge was institutionalised with the splitting of the Pre-Retirement Association from the National Old People's Welfare Council in 1963 (it was initially a study group considering how individuals could best prepare for retirement) and the introduction of pre-retirement courses for middle-aged workers.¹²²

In their discussion of the psychology of retirement, professional groups such as industrial psychologists, voluntary workers, and political representatives employed the mid-century

¹¹⁷ Lionel Zelick Cosin, *The Need for Emotional Adjustments in the Elderly*, London, 1950, p.4; Political and Economic Planning, *The Exit from Industry*, p.5.

¹¹⁸ Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, pp.344-5.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p.345. For example A. T. Welford, *Skill and Age: An Experimental Approach*, London, 1951.

¹²⁰ National Old People's Welfare Committee, *The Care of Old People*, London, 1952, p.55.

¹²¹ Roberts, *Our Future Selves*, pp.131, 15.

¹²² Ibid., pp.94-6.

language of social and emotional need to argue that older people should stay in employment and that businesses should value older workers. At the 1949 National Old People's Welfare Committee conference, the need for older people to stay in employment was the main topic of discussion and successive speakers dwelt on the economic implications of the growing numbers of pensioners and the psychological benefits of staying at work. The verdict seemed unanimous: old people should not retire but 'feel that they were wanted and needed and had a contribution to make to the prosperity and general well-being of the community'.¹²³ Yet when these commentators considered the clash of interests between young workers looking for promotion and financial reward and older people who wished to stay in employment for as long as possible, they concluded that ageing workers should accept positions of decreasing pay and responsibility over time, revealing their prejudice against old age.¹²⁴ The science of self-assessment suggested that the social and economic conditions of retirement were a personal test for each older worker, shifting responsibility from society and employer to the individual.¹²⁵

A similar set of anxieties about the economic and social costs that would be generated by an ageing population focused expert attention on familial relationships and systems of care for aged relatives. Mid-century social researchers, politicians, and health and welfare professionals typically reported the increasing numbers of elderly living alone within a narrative that dramatised the break-down of the family unit because of industrialisation and urbanisation, and sometimes because of the interventions of the welfare state, placing an

¹²³ National Association for the Care of Old People, *The Interests of the Aged*, London, 1950, p.29.

¹²⁴ Howell, *Our Advancing Years; an Essay on Modern Problems of Old Age*, p.16; National Association for the Care of Old People, *The Interests of the Aged*, pp.20-1; Political and Economic Planning, *The Exit from Industry*, p.6.

¹²⁵ Howell, *Our Advancing Years; an Essay on Modern Problems of Old Age*, pp.68-9.

ever-greater strain on social services.¹²⁶ Researchers' interest in the dynamics of family life intersected with the existing techniques of investigation into domestic environments and tasks that have been discussed in this chapter. For example, general practitioner Joseph Sheldon and social researcher Peter Townsend measured older people's place in the community and assessed their emotional wellbeing by asking how many years they had lived in their houses, which relatives they lived with, and how many miles separated their houses from those of children and relatives, therefore establishing the spatial and domestic patterns of family life.¹²⁷ Their adapted techniques for measuring the social life of households and neighbourhoods revealed that although pensions allowed older people to live independently, most remained enmeshed in close-knit familial systems of care and attention.¹²⁸ On this reading, the pension had improved the emotional life of families by allowing older people to avoid becoming a burden on their children (a fear that was frequently confessed by older research subjects) without disrupting the bonds of love and obligation which motivated activities of care and which, both Sheldon and Townsend insisted, did more to support the elderly than the state could dream of funding. Their evidence strengthened the case for social housing and community-based services such as meals on wheels and home helps, which they maintained should be designed around common familial systems of separate households living in close proximity and should make it easier for older people to move into small flats in the same neighbourhood as their children.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ E. W. Burgess, *Aging in Western Societies*, Chicago, 1960, pp.ix-x, 20; Townsend and Institute of Community Studies, *The Family Life of Old People: An Inquiry in East London*, pp.3-5.

¹²⁷ Sheldon and Nuffield Foundation, *The Social Medicine of Old Age: Report of an Inquiry in Wolverhampton*, pp.127-8; Townsend and Institute of Community Studies, *The Family Life of Old People: An Inquiry in East London*, p.27.

¹²⁸ Sheldon and Nuffield Foundation, *The Social Medicine of Old Age: Report of an Inquiry in Wolverhampton*; Townsend and Institute of Community Studies, *The Family Life of Old People: An Inquiry in East London*.

¹²⁹ Young, Willmott, Titmuss, and Institute of Community Studies, *Family and Kinship in East London*, p.xii.

These studies fed into debates over the proper limits of welfare interventions and what they might cost Britain in its social life and traditions. Reigning in expectations about what the welfare state could achieve, medical doctors positioned the state's care for its elderly in the long-established moral hierarchy of British liberalism, arguing that 'the right order of rallying to their aid must always remain: — first the family, then the good neighbour, and only thirdly the state'.¹³⁰ Politicians, researchers, and welfare workers badgered families to enact their full financial, social, and emotional obligations to ageing relatives and neighbours.¹³¹ Yet, at least in their publications and presentations in the public realm, these commentators typically advocated a new direction for state, voluntary, and professional services rather than a return to traditional liberalism. In identifying limits to state activity, they continued to profess their faith in social research findings that could be used to tailor the activities of experts to the informal social worlds of the elderly. For many participants in this debate, understanding the emotions of the ageing population — particularly their loneliness — signalled where the boundaries of social intervention should lie. As displayed in the illustrations published alongside social science and advocacy literature on old age, both the domestic realm and public spaces were depicted as lonely and isolating in the absence of interventions by health and welfare workers (Figure 4 and Figure 5). This formulation critiqued both domestic solitude and communal arenas such as parks, where old men were judged to have 'nothing to do, nowhere to go'. According to this imagery, social contact was properly supplied through community services such as the Poplar 'Grandfather's Club' and not through more unstructured means of whiling away the day.

¹³⁰ National Old People's Welfare Committee, *Welfare Problems of Old People*, p.6.

¹³¹ As discussed by Townsend and Institute of Community Studies, *The Family Life of Old People: An Inquiry in East London*, pp.3-5.



Figure 4: *Elderly Housebound* front cover. Although this older woman appeared to be physically comfortable, the singularity of her figure and the emotional reserve suggested by the gaze she levelled on the outside world communicated the prolonged misery of the elderly 'housebound'. Douglas R. Snellgrove, *Elderly Housebound: A Report on Elderly People Who Are Incapacitated*, Luton, 1963, front cover and frontispiece.



VII. Games-room of Grandfathers' Club, Poplar. This club, attached to Trinity Congregational Church, provides a daily hot meal and opportunities of social intercourse for lonely old men in the neighbourhood



VIII. Loneliness: nothing to do, nowhere to go

Figure 5: 'Loneliness: nothing to do, nowhere to go'. According to this pair of photographs, playing cards in a church social club cured the loneliness of working-class older men in a way that a local park did not. Nuffield Foundation Survey Committee on the Problems of Ageing and the Care of Old People and B. Seebohm Rowntree, *Old People: Report of a Survey Committee on the Problems of Ageing and the Care of Old People*, London, 1947, after p.76.

Just as it was portrayed in these photographs, loneliness in old age was imagined and organised around in specific ways: it could be alleviated by social contact with others (particularly in clubs or through voluntary visiting) and it could be identified when older people stopped attempting to meet behavioural norms. According to physician William Amulree, in his 1951 publication *Adding Life to Years*, loneliness was associated with a range of anti-social behaviours:

Loneliness is one of the most dreaded accompaniments of old age. Old friends die, relatives move to other parts of the country and the old people find that they are becoming more and more left by themselves. It is difficult, perhaps, to find new friends and the easiest course is to remain at home and think about the past. This can lead to a degree of unhappiness that is dreadful to witness, and to a physical and mental decay and disintegration which leads to the rapid onset of a really senile state, when all self-respect is lost. Old people then become dirty in their habits and careless of their personal appearance and comfort. They will make no attempt to take proper meals, and mentally they soon become hostile and suspicious.¹³²

Social commentary often focused on such external manifestations of loneliness and argued that older people should not be allowed to choose reclusiveness or to let their standards of cleanliness, contentment, and self-control slip. Sheldon and Townsend's discovery that the worst loneliness was caused by private tragedies, such as losing contact with grandchildren or most often the death of a spouse or child, eluded this domestic methodology and revealed its limitations for understanding the emotional texture of old age.¹³³

The association of old age and loneliness was made clear in Jeremy Tunstall's 1966 study *Old and Alone*, which considered the case of socially isolated old people — defined as those who lived alone or felt lonely — who he identified through the 'risk groups' of the single, recently widowed, and housebound elderly.¹³⁴ To explore the situation of the lonely, Tunstall focused on individual case studies and included an appendix of his interview reports to keep sight of 'the old person as a whole'.¹³⁵ However, his efforts in this respect were undermined by the introduction of each subject through a reductive description of their home and person. These opening vignettes illustrate how the material ciphers for emotional experiences in old age were made to stand-in for 'the old person as a whole', producing a

¹³² Amulree, *Adding Life to Years*, p.24.

¹³³ Townsend and Institute of Community Studies, *The Family Life of Old People: An Inquiry in East London*, pp.166-78.

¹³⁴ Jeremy Tunstall, *Old and Alone: A Sociological Study of Old People*, London, 1966, pp.8-9.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.10.

depressing picture of their personal life and feelings. For instance, Tunstall introduced his research subject Mr Thomas as follows,

He is a bald old man with a small fringe of grey hair, who does not look his eighty years, although he talks slowly and tends to repeat himself. His recent memory is poor and he is extremely pessimistic. His home is in a very bad state; the Victorian grate is filthy yet with a fire burning in it. A coat of dust covers the furniture. His sitting room is lit by one dim unshaded light bulb in the ceiling. Both legs of his trousers have tears in the thighs. The only clean things in the sitting-room are the curtains — recently supplied by his daughter; she lives across the street but Mr. Thomas says he has to 'be careful' in his relations with her and his son. His house on the outside looks dirty and unwashed. He lives on a main street about a mile from the centre of Oldham.¹³⁶

The 80 year old man's dusty light bulbs and ripped trousers suggested a dreary and lonely old age and connoted his inability to live independently. Particular aspects of his household gave more detail: the clean curtains established the extent of Mr Thomas' contact with his daughter and his position on the main street indicated his ability to access to local events and social life. The passage displayed Tunstall's observational skills and his ability to process the multiple data that ostensibly revealed the nature of old age, yet only the parts of Mr Thomas' experience that aligned with his social scientific techniques and interests were visible.

Although it read like an intimate and free-ranging portrait of his subject, Tunstall's description of Mr Thomas' life and home was an amalgam of the stories he procured using a schedule of questions which centred on the concerns that have been traced in this chapter, such as a page of questions about his subject's domestic routine (Figure 6).

¹³⁶ Ibid., p.23.

TO ALL
17) Here are some things that quite a few people over 65 have difficulty in doing without help.

IF DIFFICULTY

Do you or would you have difficulty in :	No difficulty	Difficulty	Can you do it on your own, even with diff?		Do you usually have someone to help you with it? (Who?)
			Yes	No	
(1) Going out of doors on own					
(2) Going up and down stairs on your own					
(3) Getting about house on your own					
(4) Getting in and out of bed					
(5) Washing or bathing yourself					
(6) Dressing yourself and putting on your shoes					
(7) Cutting own toenails					

Figure 6: Household difficulties for the old. Jeremy Tunstall, *Old and Alone: A Sociological Study of Old People*, London, 1966, p.321

Both this set of questions and Tunstall’s clipped, social scientific writing style created an image of a narrowly bounded and slow-moving old age filled with minor struggles. The reader accompanied each of Tunstall’s research subjects around their houses and neighbourhoods in this way, pausing with them to draw breath and contemplate the physical limitations of old age:

Mr Thomas can get out of doors, but he can only walk slowly and has to stop frequently. He stands at the top of the street quite often. He has difficulty with climbing stairs and at present is sleeping on the ground floor — he has a bed in the front room. He admits he is short winded ... Cutting his toe-nails takes him a long time; when cutting them he is afraid of having a dizzy bout.¹³⁷

At the same time that Tunstall traced Mr Thomas’ domestic routines in order to identify potential points of state or voluntary intervention — as he attempted to leave the house,

¹³⁷ Ibid., p.24.

navigate stairs, dress, or bathe himself — he simultaneously depicted old age as a cycle of household drudgery and difficulty, feeding into a powerful stereotype of the monotonous emotional landscape of later life.

Despite the narrative power exercised by expert authors, these interview and questionnaire techniques gave greater voice to older people's views and understanding of their lives than what had gone before. In particular, the use of interviews and questionnaires created more spaces for the testimony of research subjects who dismissed or subverted the arguments of social researchers and their vision of old age within the welfare state. For example, a number of Tunstall's subjects described state services as marginal and optional add-ons to their lives, not as central to their health and happiness in the way social surveys and government publications had been suggesting they were since the mid-1940s. Although Mr Thomas aligned with some of Tunstall and the state's expectations about old age, for instance in his preference for the domestic and commercial leisure activities of reading, listening to the radio, watching television, and smoking, elsewhere he subverted their assumptions.¹³⁸ In contrast to administrators' assumptions that there was a service to meet any problem, Mr Thomas was ambivalent or unenthusiastic about meals on wheels (he might let hot food go to waste), home helps (he would like one, but nothing would be done to organise this), and old people's clubs (he argued with the interviewer's insistence that affordable clubs existed, where tea was served instead of alcohol).¹³⁹ While social researchers interpreted older men and women's difficulty seeing the dust that coated their furniture or their slow and painful progress up stairs as physical limitations that invited the intervention

¹³⁸ Elsewhere, television was described as a way of staying 'up to date' and as a form of therapy for older people as it kept them in contact with the outside world. Douglas R. Snellgrove, *Elderly Housebound: A Report on Elderly People Who Are Incapacitated*, Luton, 1963, p.43.

¹³⁹ Tunstall, *Old and Alone: A Sociological Study of Old People*, pp.24-7.

of welfare services, the individuals in their studies sometimes resisted such a straight-forward connection between domestic and public life — a point they struggled to get across in interviews that were structured around those very needs and services.¹⁴⁰

In fact, many older men and women trusted their own instincts about how to run their lives and care for themselves — for instance choosing to bathe their swollen feet in vinegar instead of visiting a chiropodist or to read with a magnifying glass instead of requesting spectacles — and were proud of their independence, which they understood as not ‘bothering’ others rather than as enlisting the services of professionals to support them at home.¹⁴¹ In shifting older individuals closer to the centre of their studies, sociologists began to draw attention to the extent to which their subjects’ identities did not always fit with the intellectual and political structures of psychology and the welfare state, or with the vision of old age proclaimed by social researchers themselves. This material sat awkwardly within the literature of social science and social policy that was the primary site for public discussions of old age. For instance, Tunstall noted that no social service had a high coverage, listing them in descending order of success, and bemoaned the slow uptake of welfare services even by the socially isolated and housebound, whom researchers expected to be most eager for help and social contact.¹⁴² Yet, instead of questioning the ubiquitous assumption that older people’s needs were best served by social services, he argued for the rationalisation and professionalisation of these services in order to increase their scope and reach.¹⁴³ He also anticipated the changes that would occur in health and welfare services after 1970 by calling for greater marketing, consumer choice, and flexibility, and by suggesting the role which the

¹⁴⁰ Snellgrove, *Elderly Housebound: A Report on Elderly People Who Are Incapacitated*, p.19.

¹⁴¹ Tunstall, *Old and Alone: A Sociological Study of Old People*, pp.212-3.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p.207.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp.271, 91-93.

mass media and business could play in the provision of social services — these ideas were the seeds of a new cultural conception of old age care.¹⁴⁴

Conclusion

I have shown how the methodological developments and core concerns that shaped mid-century discussions of old age in academic, political, and public life brought new dimensions of later life into view and helped to create a more humane setting for it, at least in the view of contemporaries. The development of new fields of expertise in and over old age in this period first called the notion of the emotional needs of the elderly into being, and then directed a greater degree of public attention towards older individuals and their private lives than ever before. This chapter argues that we need to pay heed to the considerable mid-century interest in emotional and psychological life in order to better understand the terms of public and political debate and, in particular, the development of a system of care for the elderly in the period after the Second World War. By focusing exclusively on the party politics and policy developments that lay behind mid-century developments in health and welfare services for the old, historians have omitted the broad ideological shifts that were affected by the methods of the psychological and social sciences in particular, and what that meant for the experiences of individuals. To outline this intellectual framework, the chapter charts the central patterns of analysis that framed social, psychological, and medical research into old age and the dissemination of findings in mid-century professional, political, and public forums. The centrality of domestic settings, medical diagnoses, and family life to the social and psychological sciences reflected the hegemonic position of the family in British

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pp.295-8.

national culture, shaped the apprehension of old age in the period, and has left us with a particular impression of its internal characteristics. At the same time, the interviews and questionnaires that informed these mid-century research projects generated a new style of data which featured older people's voices and afforded them greater intellectual authority. Chapters three and four of this thesis will explore this material further in order to tease out the interaction of individual research participants with the priorities and methods of social research; chapters five and six experiment with visual and literary sources that takes us beyond this set of concerns. Therefore, this first chapter introduces key themes that this thesis will address from a range of perspectives in order to explore how mid-century expert knowledge and intervention in home and family life, physiological ageing, and work and retirement intertwined with the emotional priorities of older individuals and their engagement with other sectors of public culture.

From the 1960s, a series of academic and governmental studies revealed the haphazard organisation of welfare services for the elderly and the small percentage of old people they reached.¹⁴⁵ Civil servants and voluntary organisations hoped that logically structured social services with greater numbers of better trained workers would fold increasing numbers of elderly into the official system of care. Social researchers identified fewer instances of ignorance about these services over the years but by the end of the 1960s many older people continued to see such interventions as irrelevant to their lives and gave many reasons for

¹⁴⁵ Great Britain Central Office of Information Social Survey Division, Amelia I. Harris, and National Association for the Care of Old People, *Meals on Wheels for Old People*, London, 1961; Brian Scammells, *The Administration of Health and Welfare Services: A Study of the Provision of Care to Elderly People, Studies in Social Administration*, Manchester, 1971; Kathleen M. Slack, *Councils, Committees, and Concern for the Old: A Study of the Provision, Extent, and Co-Ordination of Certain Services for the Old People in the County of London, Occasional Papers on Social Administration*, Welwyn, 1960, p.13; Snellgrove, *Elderly Housebound: A Report on Elderly People Who Are Incapacitated*, pp.56-7; Means and Smith, *From Poor Law to Community Care: The Development of Welfare Services for Elderly People 1939-1971*.

choosing not to access them, some did not want to catch the bus to reach local authority services and others felt ‘no faith’ in professionals seeking to help them.¹⁴⁶ Written in response to a ‘grim and sombre’ visit to an old people’s institution and his realisation of the state’s lack of systematic knowledge about such homes, Townsend’s 1962 survey of residential homes pointed out the limitations of the welfare state most dramatically.¹⁴⁷ His findings of little improvement in the buildings and staff practices of Victorian workhouses undermined politicians’ and social researchers’ claims about the dramatic alterations they had affected in care for older people over the twentieth century.¹⁴⁸ In contrast, Townsend posited that the welfare of the aged had ‘low priority’ in British society, the needs of the aged sick were ‘grossly neglected’, and that between 1910 and 1946 there had been a ‘conspiracy of silence’ on the subject, more deathly than in the Victorian era.¹⁴⁹

Townsend reminded more celebratory authors that new rhetoric and legislation did not automatically equate to changed experiences for older people around the country. Instead, he highlighted the slow pace of change in the behaviours and expectations of both old people and social workers in residential homes, as well as the consequences of limited funding and staff. Townsend wrote that,

New meanings that may be given to the terms ‘public responsibility’, ‘tolerance’, ‘respect’, ‘need’ and ‘understanding’ have to be taught not only to the new generation going through a country’s schools and universities but also to the older generations who were brought up to treat these terms very differently. Social

¹⁴⁶ Scammells, *The Administration of Health and Welfare Services: A Study of the Provision of Care to Elderly People*, pp.64-5.

¹⁴⁷ Peter Townsend, *The Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales*, London, 1962, pp.3, 7.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p.17.

reforms are only as good as the individuals who put them into practise or as the means they are given to put them into practise.¹⁵⁰

Townsend drew attention to the sea change that had occurred in expert and professional understandings of the emotional priorities of the aged and encapsulated the new version of the personal needs of the elderly in his list of popular terms such as tolerance, respect, and understanding. However, he also pointed to the many institutional practices and individual attitudes that needed to change to implement this understanding of care for the aged in residential homes. The next chapter of this thesis interrogates the everyday operations of residential homes — institutions that gained special social and political significance amid mid-century anxieties about British home and family life — to assess how far new philosophies of emotional and psychological need altered the behaviour of front-line workers in the welfare state, voluntary organisations, and private businesses, and the self-identity of the older Britons they cared for.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p.228.

Chapter two

Old age policy in practice: the residential home

Lilian Chamberlain gained a Certificate in Residential Social Work from Middlesex Polytechnic in 1973.¹ Part of a broader apparatus of professional training and accreditation first introduced specifically for care of the elderly by the National Old People's Welfare Committee in 1950, this course convinced Lilian that the attitudes towards caring for the aged she had picked up working first as a clerk and later as matron of the George Moore Lodge care home were wrong.² For six years she had 'drifted along on the tide, believing as many others did, that old people needed to be cosseted and "cared for"' to make up for years of degradation in the 'dreaded workhouse'.³ Lilian described how formal study converted her to 'a more progressive and less institutional type of care for the elderly' and made her part of a widespread 'awakening to the importance of the emotional needs of residents', an individual process that we can see paralleled in the shifting policies and practices of the British state.⁴ Lilian wrote that afterwards she saw 'the future more clearly' and resolved to play her part in implementing change by becoming head of a home.⁵ Eight years later, now head of the Oak Tree home on the outskirts of London, Lilian put her

¹ Lilian Chamberlain, *Mrs C in Residence*, Edinburgh, 1997, p.6.

² Roberts, *Our Future Selves*, pp.31-3, 8-9.

³ Chamberlain, *Mrs C in Residence*, pp.6-7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁵ *Ibid.*

beliefs in to action by shifting the institution's focus from physical care to residents' 'emotional or psychological' needs.⁶

Taking Lilian Chamberlain's conversion as its starting point, this chapter argues that postwar residential home administrators, workers, and residents changed their interactions as result of being taught that emotional and psychological needs were vital objects of social intervention. Although not everyone was convinced by the argument that the state had the responsibility to identify and address emotional suffering, the proposition was widely acknowledged and stirred both debate and alterations to institutional practices. Thus the daily running of residential homes offers a case study of the changing ideologies and practices of welfare provision in mid-twentieth-century Britain. The formation of the welfare state has already been analysed extensively by historians working on a range of sub-fields and using various approaches. Political historians have described the expansion of the franchise and fears of class unrest; intellectual historians have explained the significance of social researchers' 'discovery' of poverty and social problems on a national scale over the first half of the twentieth century; economic and social historians have explored the legacies left by the failures of orthodox economic policy in the 1920s and 1930s, and by postwar economic growth and its subsequent raised expectations about living standards.⁷ While grappling with the factors that informed mid-century ideologies of egalitarianism and welfarism, historians have not often asked why and how Britons' inner lives became relevant to welfare practices. In one notable exception to this pattern, Nikolas Rose has argued that British governance and selfhood were reconfigured under the influence of the psychological

⁶ Ibid., pp.52, 4.

⁷ For example Roger E. Blackhouse and Tamotsu Nishizawa, *No Wealth but Life: Welfare Economics and the Welfare State in Britain, 1880-1945*, New York and Cambridge, 2010; Nicholas Deakin, *The Politics of Welfare: Continuities and Change*, 2nd edn, New York and London, 1994; Jose Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State 1870-1940: An Intellectual Framework for British Social Policy', *Past & Present*, 135, 1992, pp.116-41.

sciences over this period.⁸ Similarly to Rose, I argue that the mid-century welfare state was shaped by increasing attention to Britons' emotional and psychological lives as much as their material and physiological needs, resulting in a proliferation of social services designed to deliver companionship, dignity, self-realisation, and contentment. However while Rose has been concerned with the intellectual structures that guided twentieth-century private life and social interactions, I engage with the experiences of Britons who participated in social research and who accessed welfare services. This allows me to locate individuals within the social systems and institutional environments that were meant to put mid-century policy into practice, beginning with the interactions of individuals within Peter Townsend's *The Last Refuge* study inside mid-century residential homes.

My argument speaks to the work of British historians who have connected the histories of emotional life and the welfare state in insightful studies addressing class, generation, party politics, love, sexuality, marriage, home life, and popular forms of psychology.⁹ Historians of emotion and scholars of twentieth-century politics and welfare, I suggest, need to work together to encourage scholarly recognition of the complex ways in which areas of public life and parliamentary proceedings have responded to ideas about emotion, as much as domestic and familial relationships have.¹⁰ This focus requires a new model for understanding the activities the state undertook in the interests of old people, and a different approach to

⁸Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*; Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood*.

⁹ Francis, 'Tears, Tantrums, and Bared Teeth: The Emotional Economy of Three Conservative Prime Ministers, 1951-1963', pp.354-87; Claire Langhamer, 'The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40, 2, 2005, pp.341-62; Claire Langhamer, 'Adultery in Post-War England', *History Workshop Journal*, 62, 1, 2006, pp.86-115; Langhamer, 'Love and Courtship in Mid-Twentieth-Century England', pp.173-96; Claire Langhamer, 'Love, Selfhood and Authenticity in Post-War Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, 9, 2, 2012, pp.277-97; Frank Mort, 'Social and Symbolic Fathers and Sons in Postwar Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, 38, 3, 1999, pp.353-84; Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*; Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain*.

¹⁰ Francis, 'Tears, Tantrums, and Bared Teeth: The Emotional Economy of Three Conservative Prime Ministers, 1951-1963'.

writing its history. Instead of charting the evolution of state policy, this chapter argues that the beliefs and behaviour of the individuals who provided frontline services effectively became that welfare state for their elderly clients.¹¹ Rather than acting as a monolithic and centralised force, mid-century welfare was deployed and understood through myriad daily encounters; records of the interactions and behaviour of individuals mark out how welfare services influenced the identities and emotional lives of ageing Britons.

Lilian's course was her first sustained encounter with mid-twentieth-century popular iterations of sociology and psychology and their influence on theories of citizenship, social services, old age, and professional practices within the welfare state. Her formal training signposted that care for the elderly required specialist knowledge and convinced her to align her practice with these theories by organising staff meetings, art classes, and reading groups, and encouraging residents to become self-reliant.¹² Lilian mapped her experience onto broader shifts in legislation, training, and practice in self-consciously progressive narratives of occupational improvement. In 1973 she published an assessment of the needs of a resident, Miss Green, in *Residential Social Work*, which constructed her subject's unmet emotional needs by applying sociological and psychological theories to the case.¹³ Lilian's record of this professional interaction claimed the utility of these new approaches. Her attention to the older woman's inner life precipitated Miss Green's move from a residential home to a nearby flat in sheltered accommodation, where she was happy to live in 'a home of my own' again.¹⁴ Lilian's autobiography (which was published in 1997) marvelled at past

¹¹ See Michael Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*, Publications of Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 1980.

¹² Chamberlain, *Mrs C in Residence*, pp.10, 75.

¹³ Lilian Chamberlain, 'Needs Assessment in a Residential Establishment', *Residential Social Work*, 13, 10, 1973.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.529.

practices and the great changes she had been part of since she first worked as a residential home clerk in the summer of 1967. The publication of *Mrs C in Residence* assumed a community of readers who were also interested in the memories of social workers and their description of the gulf that divided older and newer professional identities and practice.¹⁵

Lilian identified deep and abiding shifts in philosophies of care for the aged and yet the drama of her story resided equally in the contested status of these new ideas. Despite the claims to a New Jerusalem that were made by politicians and the leading practitioners within the welfare state, the poor law system was not swept away. In Lilian's description, George Moore Lodge, with its wide tiled corridors, 'impersonal' lounges, and rows of silent residents seated around the walls, women in one room and men in another, felt like a 1960s version of the workhouse.¹⁶ Throughout the 1970s she feuded with staff at the Oak Tree home who felt that their primary responsibility was to treat the medical problems of old age, as though their institution was a hospital.¹⁷ In Lilian's narrative, the 'awakening' of educated residential home workers to the emotional and psychological dimensions of care mapped on to her completion of a programme of study in 1973. As I argue below, by this time social researchers, old age welfare advocacy groups, and government ministries had been advancing attention to individuality, independence, and privacy in care for the aged for at least thirty years. Yet Lilian worked in institutions that sustained competing understandings of old age, its inner dimensions, and what constituted legitimate policy responses to these changing philosophies. Her account revealed the incomplete and fractured nature of the welfarist

¹⁵ See also Ruth Evans, *Happy Families: Recollections of a Career in Social Work*, London, 1977. *Happy Families* was reviewed in the *Tribune* (21 October 1977) and *Catholic Herald* (3 August 1977) as a chance to reflect on postwar changes in social work.

¹⁶ Chamberlain, *Mrs C in Residence*, pp.2-3, 6-7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.54.

project and the ‘lag’ between new forms of knowledge and older institutional practices. This chapter makes sense of Lilian’s story by charting the diverse institutional cultures she encountered over the course of her career and the professional hierarchies and routines she worked within.

In tracing the trajectories of Lilian’s account outwards into the practices and structures of residential care for the elderly in mid-century Britain, I establish two important and largely uncharted chronologies of welfarism which existed in tension throughout the postwar period. On the one hand, emotional and psychological needs were validated as subjects of intellectual inquiry and social intervention, which established a new basis for the provision of welfare. However, frontline practices did not match this rapid ideological change. Instead, institutions continued to operate according to the conservative rhythm of nineteenth-century built environments and entrenched professional identities, routines, and hiring practices. Despite enthusiastic rhetoric from all political parties, welfare services for the aged did not receive the significant funding and searching attention that might have remade them in the image of psychologically-sensitive theories of welfare politics. The chronology of welfarist intellectual and policy developments needs to be overlain with the conservative forces of existing institutional ideals, environments, and routines, and the administrative problems caused by limited budgets and governments’ reliance on the private and voluntary sectors to deliver much of the care for the elderly they promised. What follows is the story of the gaps and the contestations that occurred when postwar ideologies of social democracy took on an uneven institutional life in residential homes for the elderly.

In teasing out this argument, I take a case study approach, focusing on the research material gathered by Townsend and his research team during their observations and interviews in residential homes and local authority welfare offices across England and Wales during 1958 and 1959. Mid-way through the 1950s Townsend visited what he called a ‘grim and sombre’ ex-workhouse and reported his shock at the conditions of life inside.¹⁸ He argued that this institution was not run according to the social values claimed by proponents of postwar welfare services, such as the insistence on homely and egalitarian settings for old age described in the first chapter of this thesis. Evoking the political and intellectual authority of social scientific research, Townsend pointed out that there was no systematic knowledge of the implementation of new legislation for care of the aged nearly ten years after the Labour government had declared the workhouse doomed.¹⁹ Therefore, he aimed to ascertain what residential accommodation existed for the elderly, to describe residents’ lives, to discover why older people entered institutions, and to assess the system and suggest alternative models of care.²⁰ *The Last Refuge* study was funded by the Nuffield Foundation and was carried out by Townsend with his research officer Robert Pinker as well as Brian Rees, Ruth Townsend and June Vernon, who all conducted interviews, with Rees helping to organise the administration and statistical analysis of the survey and Vernon acting as the project’s secretary.²¹ During 1958 and 1959, *The Last Refuge* research team surveyed the 146 local authorities in England and Wales and interviewed 65 chief welfare officers. They randomly selected and visited 173 homes from lists of all local authority, privately-run, and voluntary institutions. At each home, members of the research team interviewed the matron or

¹⁸ Townsend, *The Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales*, pp.4-6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.7-8.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.8.

²¹ *The Last Refuge* interview and observation notes did not include their authors’ names therefore I frequently refer to the views of the research team rather than of individuals.

warden and residents who had entered the home over the subsequent four months, and toured the home to observe its built environment and institutional practices. The study did not consider Scotland, which had a larger number of residential institutions relative to its population and planned to expand this system further rather than developing community care services.²²

Townsend framed the project within the traditions of British social research that were described in the first chapter of this thesis. He admired the empiricism of Henry Mayhew, Charles Booth, and Seebohm Rowntree, and those social surveys of poverty carried out between 1914 to 1939, which he identified with a British practice of rich data analysis and ‘gathering information direct from people’ in contrast to American sociologists’ theorising of social systems.²³ Townsend was also inspired by the British anthropological practice of personal investigation through ‘participant observation’ and interviewing, in which scholars immersed themselves in the communities they studied and were responsible for collecting data — as well as analysing and publishing it.²⁴ This approach had been pioneered within

²² Townsend, *The Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales*, p.4. For studies of the situation in Scotland see Amelia I. Harris, Rosemary Clausen, National Corporation for the Care of Old People, and Great Britain Scottish Home and Health Department, *Social Welfare for the Elderly: A Study in Thirteen Local Authority Areas in England, Wales and Scotland*, London, 1968; I. M. Richardson, *Age and Need: A Study of Older People in North-East Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1964.

²³ Townsend, *The Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales*, pp.14-5. For examples such of localized and empirical studies of poverty see: Bowley and Burnett-Hurst, *Livelihood and Poverty: A Study in the Economic Conditions of Working-Class Households in Northampton, Warrington, Stanley and Reading*; Bowley and Hogg, *Has Poverty Diminished?: A Sequel to 'Livelihood and Poverty'*; Jones and University of Liverpool, *The Social Survey of Merseyside*; London School of Economics and Political Science and H. Llewellyn Smith, *The New Survey of London Life & Labour*, 9 vols, London, 1930; Tout and University of Bristol Social Survey, *The Standard of Living in Bristol: A Preliminary Report of the Work of the University of Bristol Social Survey*; Young and Becontree Social Survey Committee, *Becontree and Dagenham: A Report Made for the Pilgrim Trust*.

²⁴ Townsend, *The Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales*, p.15. See also Peter Mandler, 'Margaret Mead Amongst the Natives of Great Britain', *Past & Present*, 204, 1, 2009, pp.195-233; Mandler, 'Being His Own Rabbit: Geoffrey Gorer and English Culture', pp.192-208.

Britain in Mass Observation's collation of a 'science of ourselves' after 1937.²⁵ Townsend believed that the future of sociology lay in reconciling these two approaches so that 'statistical and survey techniques can be married to the complex but often inexplicit techniques of personal observation and description', as he attempted in *The Last Refuge*.²⁶

Townsend's research was framed by, and contributed to, debates between the main political parties. He described how that 'shocking' first visit to a residential institution shook the faith he had felt as an 'aware, young and hopeful' believer in the postwar project of 'building a bright new social Jerusalem and the Welfare State'.²⁷ Subsequently, he advocated research in 'the life of the poorest and most handicapped members of society' and established his special interest in the fields of old age, disability, and health inequality — arguing that the welfare state had not ended poverty and that much more should be done for disadvantaged Britons.²⁸ Despite serving on various committees within the Labour party between 1958 and 1980, his commitment to 'distributional justice for all, not welfare for a few' made him a prominent critic of both political parties. This included his participation in the 'The poor get poorer under Labour' campaign by the Child Poverty Action Group, which has been cited as one reason Labour lost the 1970 election.²⁹ This is not a story of how Townsend's political views won out — they did not and such an approach is both reductive and unproductive.

²⁵ Tom Harrison, Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings, 'Anthropology at Home,' *The New Statesman and Nation*, 30 January 1937, p.155. For an account of the establishment of Mass Observation see Angus Calder, Dorothy Sheridan, Tom Harrison, and Mass-Observation Archive, *Speak for Yourself: A Mass-Observation Anthology, 1937-1949*, Oxford, 1985.

²⁶ Townsend, *The Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales*, p.15.

²⁷ Peter Townsend Interviewed By Paul Thompson, 'Reflections on Becoming a Researcher', p.91.

²⁸ Robert Holman, *Champions for Children: The Lives of Modern Child Care Pioneers*, Bristol, 2001, p.133; Alan Walker, 'Professor Peter Townsend: Campaigner for Social Justice Who Co-Founded the Child Poverty Action Group', *Independent*, (Online), 13 June 2009, Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/professor-peter-townsend-campaigner-for-social-justice-who-cofounded-the-child-poverty-action-group-1704169.html#> (25 September 2012).

²⁹ Holman, *Champions for Children: The Lives of Modern Child Care Pioneers*; Walker, 'Professor Peter Townsend: Campaigner for Social Justice Who Co-Founded the Child Poverty Action Group'.

Instead, I argue that the ethics he identified within the fields of social research and intervention — especially the value of individuals and their private experiences — gained cross-party political currency in the mid-century. This chapter demonstrates that these values could not be ignored, even by those who disagreed.

I consider the experience of living in residential care as a limit case that reveals some of the most vital supports to emotional and social life in old age through their absence. In 1951 just less than ten per 1,000 people of pensionable age lived in residential homes, this proportion had risen to 14 per 1,000 by 1961, and to 20 per 1,000 by 1976.³⁰ Townsend wrote that his interviews with the residents of residential homes revealed a population of people for whom normal social and familial structures had broken down. The older men and women he spoke to had never had close relationships, or had lost contact with their loved ones through death, separation, or infirmity.³¹ Residents were likely to be aged over 80 and to have been single or childless all their lives. Some had exhibited unusual family behaviour by deserting their families, living in a common law marriage after the death of a spouse, or living away from their families for long periods of time.³² Townsend contrasted the frequent isolation of this minority population with the ‘marvellously complicated network of family relationships’ of those old people he had interviewed in their own homes, and described studying the residents of institutions as ‘looking at the commonest relationships of society through the wrong end of the telescope, through the eyes of people who had not experienced them’.³³

³⁰ Roberts, *Our Future Selves*, p.142.

³¹ Townsend, *The Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales*, p.152.

³² *Ibid.*, pp.152-3, 61.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp.154, 6-7.

Social welfare systems had also failed many. Townsend recorded instances of homelessness before entering an institution and discussed older people's difficulties competing with young families for council flats, calculating that just over one quarter of his interviewees had lost their homes before entering an institution.³⁴ Residential homes' waiting lists and competition for their beds further skewed their population towards the desperate cases of older, poorer, more infirm, and more isolated individuals. Concern for this population dominated political debate over old age and policies targeting older Britons, and therefore exerted disproportionate influence over the national imagination and state treatment of the elderly in ways that need to be better understood. In addition, by considering the experience of institutionalised elderly I address some of the harshest aspects of the ageing process as one piece of a pattern of experience in old age that was inflected by marital status, gender, and class. Looking at social bonds through the 'wrong end of the telescope', to use Townsend's formulation of studying old people in institutions, throws the emotional significance of markers of normal experience, such as home and family, into sharp relief, providing a rich and comparative exploration of the emotional tensions of growing older.

A new vision for residential care

In line with the development of the new fields of expertise outlined in the first chapter of this thesis, the postwar Labour Government implemented a new system of residential care and advocated a fresh set of guiding ethics. Labour's vision for residential care was partly based on the 1947 *Old People: Report of a Survey Committee on the Problems of Ageing and the Care of Old People*, led by Seebohm Rowntree and funded by the Nuffield Foundation, which insisted

³⁴ Ibid., p.166.

that both residential homes and their constituent rooms should be as small, individualised, and private as possible.³⁵ Describing the 1948 National Assistance Act, Aneurin Bevan, the Minister of Health, announced '[t]he workhouse is to go' and described a utopian vision of residential homes that was characteristic of the New Jerusalem.³⁶ In the language of the time, the workhouse was to be replaced by 'sunshine hotels' that would each cater for 25 to 30 older people who were unable to look after themselves.³⁷ The 1948 Act provided legislative framework for the changes by prescribing that local authorities should provide residential housing for old people who needed it due to financial difficulty, ill health, or social isolation. In its annual report for 1948 to 1949, the Ministry of Health declared that 'local authorities are busy planning and operating small, comfortable Homes, where old people, many of them lonely, can live pleasantly and with dignity'.³⁸ In July 1948 local authorities owned and managed 63 small residential Homes. Under the new guiding principles a further 1,121 homes of this style were opened by the end of 1960, offering accommodation for 39,000 people.³⁹

In order to approach the mid-century ideal of a homely atmosphere, Rowntree's Nuffield Foundation report recommended hanging curtains to divide shared rooms, the creation of small, intimate, brightly decorated and informally arranged areas for socialising, and a timetable of occupational and recreational activities in the community.⁴⁰ Both the built

³⁵ Nuffield Foundation Survey Committee on the Problems of Ageing and the Care of Old People and Rowntree, *Old People: Report of a Survey Committee on the Problems of Ageing and the Care of Old People*; Julia Johnson, Sheena Rolph, and Randall Smith, *Residential Care Transformed: Revisiting 'the Last Refuge'*, Basingstoke and New York, 2010, p.38.

³⁶ Johnson, Rolph, and Smith, *Residential Care Transformed: Revisiting 'the Last Refuge'*, p.24.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.26.

³⁸ Townsend, *The Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales*, p.32.

³⁹ Johnson, Rolph, and Smith, *Residential Care Transformed: Revisiting 'the Last Refuge'*, p.38.

⁴⁰ Nuffield Foundation Survey Committee on the Problems of Ageing and the Care of Old People and Rowntree, *Old People: Report of a Survey Committee on the Problems of Ageing and the Care of Old People*, pp.58-60, 150.

environment and the routines of eating and sleeping should ‘destroy’ institutional ‘symmetry and extreme tidiness’.⁴¹ Given privacy, companionship, and a ‘sense of usefulness’, Rowntree posited that a home’s residents would become ‘brighter and happier’. These specifics were repeated in advocacy and advice literature such as the National Old People’s Welfare Committee’s 1949 *Guide to Practical Work for the Welfare of Old People* which recommended that residential homes ‘resemble a private home and not an institution’ through some untidiness, many ‘cherished’ belongings, small tables, bright colours and flowers in dining rooms, private sleeping spaces, a garden, and a minimum of rules.⁴² These new guidelines for institutional care relied on theories of the psychological significance of home and work that were explored in the first chapter of this thesis. There was only occasional recognition that hanging a curtain did not achieve the seclusion of a private house and that attractive decorations did not alter the fact that residents no longer had the freedom to choose the settings, routines, and companions they lived with.⁴³

Although its researchers presented the institutions they condemned as straight-forwardly ‘shocking’ or unethical, here I aim to place the concerns and methods of *The Last Refuge* in its intellectual and cultural context — the ideas that were established through the preoccupations and methods of the mid-century academic, advocacy, and policy work discussed in chapter one — to better explain why Townsend’s view conflicted with those expressed by many of the civil servants and welfare workers he met, and what influence his viewpoint achieved. *The Last Refuge* was carried out in a period when older people’s emotional and psychological needs were afforded greater importance in governance and

⁴¹ Ibid., p.60.

⁴² National Old People's Welfare Committee, *Age Is Opportunity; a New Guide to Practical Work for the Welfare of Old People*, London, 1949, pp.66, 74-6.

⁴³ For example in Roberts, *Our Future Selves*, p.135.

voluntary work; in line with other experts in welfare and medicine, Townsend insisted that residents in aged care had a right to privacy, dignity, independence, and individual expression — the mid-century social values which institutions were newly bound to protect. In this, he repeated the ‘classic’ account for those setting out to establish social services for the elderly, which had been delivered to the 1955 International Gerontological Congress by 80-year-old Margaret Fry, who emphasised the importance of older people’s unique biographies and continued access to decision-making or ‘self-determination’.⁴⁴ However, Townsend’s study concluded, these basic entitlements were trampled on in the great majority of institutions.

As well as informing his vision of how care for the old should work, the social and psychological sciences provided Townsend with categories, theories, and language that made the suffering of the institutionalised elderly visible and relevant to social research and the state. For example, Townsend drew on American anti-institutional publications such as Erving Goffman’s theorising of the psychological damage done by ‘block treatment’ in ‘total institutions’ presented in *Asylums* (1961).⁴⁵ Sociological and psychological terminology and turns of phrase added gravity to Townsend’s conclusion that the residents of old aged care homes experienced loss of occupation, isolation from family, friends and community, a ‘tenuousness of new relationships’, loneliness, loss of privacy and identity, and the ‘collapse of powers of self-determination’.⁴⁶ After visiting a large ex-public assistance institution in Liverpool, the report written by Peter Townsend, Ruth Townsend and Pinker reflected that,

the real issue of improvements in the social service is one of social values. If one really believes that there are some groups of people in society who both don't want

⁴⁴ National Corporation for the Care of Old People, *Old Age in the Modern World: Report of the Third Congress of the International Association of Gerontology London 1954*, pp.4-9; Roberts, *Our Future Selves*, p.69.

⁴⁵ Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*, New York, 1961.

⁴⁶ Townsend, *The Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales*, pp.369-70.

good living conditions and don't really deserve them, then the most terrible cruelties can result. The only way of getting out of this is to apply one standard only — What would I expect if I was obliged to spend my old age here?⁴⁷

In this passage, the researchers made their belief in egalitarianism clear by insisting that mid-century experts should not see themselves as separate from their research subjects, but should ask only 'what would I expect?' Townsend had assumed that his mid-century reading audience would have the same response he did to the question, and would demand the personal and social goods that constituted social justice. His research into the running of residential homes revealed otherwise. Thus, *The Last Refuge* did not require its readers only to ask that simple question but aimed to shift their expectations of old age and state activity instead.

The published study aligned with the anti-institutional literature of the 1960s and 1970s, which included sociological studies of institutional life and official inquiry reports that followed allegations about the poor living conditions in long-term hospitals.⁴⁸ *The Last Refuge* asserted that it was neither necessary nor moral to care for older people in institutions; therefore undermining the philosophical basis for policies that encouraged the establishment and improvement of residential homes. Townsend suggested that older people most often entered homes for social reasons, such as loneliness and isolation, rather than because of their physical debility and posited that communal life did 'not adequately meet the physical, psychological and social needs' of the elderly.⁴⁹ Instead, he asserted, older people should be cared for in the community with the support of the welfare policies he recommended to

⁴⁷ Interview with the superintendent of a welfare home in Leicester, 22 February 1959, Home interviews, SN 4750 Last Refuge 1958-1959, in the Peter Townsend collection, National Social Policy and Social Change Archive, held at Albert Sloman Library (ASL), Colchester, University of Essex, available digitally through UK Data Archives (UKDA), <http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-4750-1>.

⁴⁸ Johnson, Rolph, and Smith, *Residential Care Transformed: Revisiting 'the Last Refuge'*, p.11.

⁴⁹ Townsend, *The Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales*, p.222.

keep older Britons more active, financially stable, socially integrated, and able to live independently in private council homes.⁵⁰ Townsend advocated the expansion of those voluntary and state services that enabled older people to live in their homes by providing meals on wheels, social visitors, home helps for domestic chores and bathing, and financial support and occasional holidays for relatives who took on the burden of their care.

Politicians, medical doctors, and welfare administrators had argued that institutional care had potentially damaging psychological effects since the late-1940s, but Townsend was first to gather a broad and representative set of data in order to ‘prove’ the theory.⁵¹ The study also revealed serious problems in the implementation of the mid-century system of residential care; most politically damaging for Labour, that many old age home residents felt they inhabited a workhouse because there had been so few improvements in staff attitude or the built environment over long periods of time.⁵² Townsend has been credited with informing subsequent community care policies and increasing the pace at which large institutional buildings were demolished and replaced by sheltered housing or smaller, purpose-built residential homes, but he did not remake the system.⁵³ There has been a steady increase in the number of elderly living in homes since Townsend’s visits in the late 1950s; in 2005-2006 councils in England spent nearly twice as much on residential care as they spent on the home care services that Townsend recommended — despite successive governments’ commitment to the de-institutionalisation of welfare services in other areas.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp.192-3.

⁵¹ See National Association for the Care of Old People, *The Interests of the Aged*; National Old People's Welfare Committee, *Welfare Problems of Old People*.

⁵² Townsend, *The Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales*, p.6.

⁵³ Johnson, Rolph, and Smith, *Residential Care Transformed: Revisiting 'the Last Refuge'*, p.11.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Townsend and his *Last Refuge* project have received well-deserved attention in histories of sociology, residential institutions, and old age, which celebrate his path-breaking contribution to the social sciences (in 1963 he became the first professor of sociology at the University of Essex) and his work for the subjects of his research, as well as critiquing the dehumanising institutional practices that his research revealed.⁵⁵ Taking its cue from the recent historicising of social science methods by Michael Savage, I treat the research project more critically by interrogating its practices and data rather than simply rehearsing its conclusions.⁵⁶ Social researchers drove as well as documented social change — a function that historians have not yet identified as part of *The Last Refuge's* legacy. When Townsend invited the residents of old age homes to tell him their stories he both supported political arguments that older people and their inner lives should be the concern of experts and welfare practitioners and put this philosophy into action, typically creating a dramatic break in the working culture of a residential home. Yet the reconstruction of Townsend's research methods that follows reveals that such mechanisms of formal change affected mid-century care for the aged unevenly within a field of existing institutional environments, routines, and professional practices that slowed and subverted the changes he wanted to see. The daily interactions that made up life in a residential home display the ragged edges of mid-century claims to egalitarianism and respect for the feelings of individuals.

⁵⁵ Holman, *Champions for Children: The Lives of Modern Child Care Pioneers*, pp.127-56; Julia Johnson, Sheena Rolph, and Randall Smith, 'Revisiting "the Last Refuge": Present Day Methodological Challenges', in *Critical Perspectives on Ageing Societies*, Miriam Bernard and Thomas Scharf, eds, Bristol, 2007, pp.89-104; Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method*, p.129; Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*.

⁵⁶ Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method*.

The development of institutional care

As I have argued, psychology had earned both prestige and popularity in mid-century British culture and the social sciences were expanding their educational and professional reach; both disciplines had reshaped expert opinion on old age in their image.⁵⁷ However, as Lilian Chamberlain's account and the findings of *The Last Refuge* confirmed, they had not remade professional practices within the welfare state. As well as portraying the new visions of citizenship and standards of living that drove the expansion of the welfare state, we must also account for barriers that stood in the way of the implementation of its ethos. In this case, new ways of thinking about care for the elderly were subverted by the legacies of Poor Law and Public Assistance building projects and professional practices, and by the disaggregation of state activity within a mixed economy model of residential care that included homes operating for private profit or out of religious conviction as well as under local authority administration.

The mid-century rethinking of welfare and old age took place in a material and social landscape marked by the long history of the Poor Law and the workhouse, which had offered last-resort lodgings and food at the cost of the separation of families, as well as calculated affronts to inhabitants' pride and self-sufficiency.⁵⁸ Elderly Britons had frequently been forced into the workhouse after being excluded from full-time paid labour, especially if they did not have children who were able to support them.⁵⁹ Stephen Hussey has demonstrated that the working-class elderly dreaded the workhouse for the hardships it inflicted through labour, a meagre diet, the confiscation of personal clothes and possessions,

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp.112-30; Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain*.

⁵⁸ Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, pp.165-6.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.291.

and undignified communal living in order to discourage applications to charity. More uniquely, he has usefully considered how the workhouse destroyed valued social roles such as domestic work and childcare and symbolised the end of the self-reliance that was essential to working-class respectability.⁶⁰

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, evidence of endemic poverty amid Britain's increased prosperity cast doubt over the laissez-faire ideology that underpinned the Poor Law system.⁶¹ Alternative theories of social good ranging from Marxism to municipal socialism influenced local authority provision of public services such as sewers and street lighting and national initiatives in health and education.⁶² These questions about social welfare became more urgent during the economic turmoil of the interwar period and the great depression, when many believed that capitalism had failed.⁶³ Among the responses to critiques of the workhouse, a series of Acts from 1925, especially the Local Government Act of 1929, formally ended poor relief and introduced more specifically-targeted 'Public Assistance' to be provided under legislation such as the Public Health Act and the Education Act.⁶⁴ Townsend emphasised the multiple lines of subsequent institutional development as residential homes 'emerged in direct line of descent from the English workhouse', geriatric hospitals and hospitals for the chronically sick were adapted from workhouse infirmaries,

⁶⁰ Stephen Hussey, "'An Inheritance of Fear': Older Women in the Twentieth-Century Countryside", in *Women and Ageing in British Society since 1500*, Lynn Botelho and Pat Thane, eds, Harlow, 2001, pp.187, 96-98.

⁶¹ Blackhouse and Nishizawa, *No Wealth but Life: Welfare Economics and the Welfare State in Britain, 1880-1945*, p.1.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Means and Smith, *From Poor Law to Community Care: The Development of Welfare Services for Elderly People 1939-1971*, p.18.

and mental hospitals ‘created originally as country asylums independent of both hospitals and workhouses’ were eventually included in the National Health Service.⁶⁵

The establishment of the National Health Service meant that regional hospital boards accepted responsibility for institutions from across these varied philosophies and practices of care, including voluntary and municipal hospitals and former Poor Law institutions, which had enjoyed differential access to specialists and medical training.⁶⁶ Such advantages had been monopolised by voluntary hospitals caring for the acute sick, while public hospitals had treated the great majority of the aged infirm, chronically ill, and mental health patients in a ‘neglected backwater of hospital provision’.⁶⁷ Bringing these institutions under a single health system focused attention on such discrepancies and ‘the miserable amenities and staffing standards’ in some institutions and, combined with rising standards of living, supported demands for better and more egalitarian standards of treatment.⁶⁸ In 1962 Townsend wrote that such calls emerged slowly over a decade or more as experts searched for the principles of newly articulated social needs, such as human rights, ‘greater privacy and respect for individuals’.⁶⁹ When Townsend asked him to suggest improvements to his outdated institution, the warden of a home for 65 residents who lived in a ‘quaint mid-Victorian monstrosity’ in East Croydon, suggested the council ‘pull the place down’.⁷⁰ Similarly, Peter Townsend, Ruth Townsend and Pinker wrote that a ‘forbidding’ former

⁶⁵ Peter Townsend and Sheila Benson, Chapter two: History and present population of institutions for the old, p.1. File 9, SN 4758 Old People in Long-stay Institutions 1965-1970, in the Peter Townsend collection, ASL.

⁶⁶ Townsend, *The Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales*, pp.377-8.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.378.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Interview with the warden of a welfare home in East Croydon, 17 September 1959, The Last Refuge collection, UKDA.

Public Assistance institution which housed 685 residents ‘ought to be razed to the ground’.⁷¹

Their violent imagery indicated the immense gap that many Britons perceived between old and new ideals, which was not bridgeable by mere renovation or redecoration.

Yet reimagining residential care was not the same as erasing the workhouse, retraining staff, or shifting the mentalities of people who lived and worked in residential homes. Shortages of building supplies and limited budgets disallowed many large-scale building projects in the postwar period. Townsend wrote that the ‘optimism’ of 1948 gradually turned to ‘resignation’: few older institutions were closed, immediate plans for ‘modernisation and conversion’ were delayed by ‘shortage of funds and pressure on accommodation’; in the meantime, authorities were reluctant to spend money on existing buildings that were scheduled for eventual abandonment.⁷² Accordingly, overall numbers changed slowly. In 1949 around 40,000 residents of local authority homes lived in such large and outdated buildings; in 1960 such institutions housed 35,000.⁷³ In 1965 the Ministry of Health estimated that 27,000 people still lived in 200 former workhouses, in buildings that exemplified the dehumanising treatment of older people which sociologists, psychologists, and policy-makers despised.⁷⁴ John Adams dated the ‘last years of the workhouse’ to 1965 with the closure of Luxborough Lodge, the former St Marylebone Workhouse and a landmark in central London, but pointed out that he could have nominated 1985, the year that the Camberwell Reception Centre, the final incarnation of the Gordon Road

⁷¹ Interview with the warden of a local authority home in London, 25 February 1959; Interview with the manager of a local authority home in Liverpool, 27 April 1959, The Last Refuge collection, UKDA.

⁷² Townsend, *The Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales*, pp.34-5.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.35.

⁷⁴ Johnson, Rolph, and Smith, *Residential Care Transformed: Revisiting 'the Last Refuge'*, pp.25-6.

Workhouse, closed.⁷⁵ Adams has highlighted that workhouses' 'sturdy walls' ensured they remained both 'an essential resource for the new National Health System and a constant reminder of the past that had been renounced' for decades.⁷⁶

Moreover, as Lilian Chamberlain would later learn to her frustration, welfare workers had typically trained and gained their work experience in prewar institutions.⁷⁷ The National Old People's Welfare Committee introduced a six-month training course for residential home staff from September 1950 with enthusiastic support from the Ministry of Health.⁷⁸ Yet many local authorities and residential home workers opposed the course. For example, the London County Council wanted to train their own staff and doubted they needed the full complement of skills covered in a six (later reduced to four) month course.⁷⁹ By December 1958 only 200 trainees had been through the scheme.⁸⁰ A National Council of Social Services study revealed that 80 per cent of staff in residential homes still lacked such formal education in 1967.⁸¹ In line with John Bowlby's psychological 'attachment' theories which popularised a model of fragile but vital psychic development in childhood, social work educators, administrators, and practitioners argued there was much more at stake in residential care for children.⁸² The Central Training Council in Child Care sponsored a full-time training course for residential work with children in 1949 and had taught 3,000 students

⁷⁵ John Adams, 'The Last Years of the Workhouse, 1930-1965', in *Oral History, Health and Welfare*, Joanna Bornat, ed., London, 2000, p.99.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.98.

⁷⁷ Townsend, *The Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales*, p.88.

⁷⁸ Means and Smith, *From Poor Law to Community Care: The Development of Welfare Services for Elderly People 1939-1971*, p.196.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.198.

⁸¹ Roberts, *Our Future Selves*, pp.86-7.

⁸² For example, National Council of Social Service, *Caring for People: Staffing Residential Homes: The Reports of the Committee of Enquiry Set up by the National Council of Social Service, National Institute for Social Work Training Series*, London, 1967, pp.27-8.

by 1967.⁸³ In contrast, the year-long Certificate in Residential Social Work in Homes for Adults was first awarded to twenty-two students by the Council for Training in Social Work in 1970.⁸⁴ Townsend's interviews with council welfare officers showed that administrators were no more eager to employ graduates than non-graduates to work in homes. Welfare officers regarded formally-trained applicants with caution and frequently preferred to employ people with work experience gained in other institutions.⁸⁵ Academic qualifications were associated with youth in contrast to maturity, and an interest in theory rather than practice.⁸⁶ Thus official qualifications exposed workers to the new theories of social work — including their implicit stance that welfare work was a professional industry that required formal education and standards of care — but did not grant higher pay or status in the workforce.⁸⁷

The fields of sociology and psychology provided a new professional code for welfare services but probation workers, guidance counsellors, childcare workers, and others grouped under the banner of welfare, argued for different definitions of social work and what constituted an education in it.⁸⁸ The difficulties of uniting these disparate professional groups under a system of training and employment that delimited and defined the essential philosophies and methods of a new field delayed the advent of university courses for social workers and sustained a 'deep and widespread uncertainty concerning their identity, function

⁸³ *ibid.*; Rodgers and Stevenson, *A New Portrait of Social Work: A Study of the Social Services in a Northern Town from Younghusband to Seeborn*, pp.19-21.

⁸⁴ National Council of Social Service, *Caring for People: Staffing Residential Homes: The Reports of the Committee of Enquiry Set up by the National Council of Social Service*; Rodgers and Stevenson, *A New Portrait of Social Work: A Study of the Social Services in a Northern Town from Younghusband to Seeborn*, pp.19-21.

⁸⁵ Interview with the director of welfare services for South Shields, 7 November 1958, The Last Refuge collection, UKDA.

⁸⁶ Interview with the deputy welfare services officer for Stoke-on-Trent, 15 April 1959, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

⁸⁷ Roberts, *Our Future Selves*, p.87.

⁸⁸ Rodgers and Stevenson, *A New Portrait of Social Work: A Study of the Social Services in a Northern Town from Younghusband to Seeborn*, pp.1-2.

and professional status'.⁸⁹ Welfare professionals studied and worked under separate and narrowly-focused training courses and different government departments for most of the postwar period — until a number of universities introduced two-year courses giving a basic training in social work within colleges of further education or in extra-mural departments in the 1960s, and the 1970 Local Authority Social Services Act required local authorities to establish unified social services departments.⁹⁰

Therefore the attitudes and practice of residential home staff — as well as their frequent resistance to new models of care — were learned on the job. After 1948, residential homes were administered by health departments, for whom medical needs were likely to trump welfare concerns in competitions for funding and status. During his research for *The Last Refuge* in the late-1950s, Townsend noted that many matrons and staff had been trained as nurses or understood their professional identity and priorities according to the scripts of health care. Townsend wrote of the staff of ex-workhouses:

Whether they possessed [nursing] qualifications or not most of them wore impressive dark blue, red or green uniforms with starched cuffs, collars and caps and highly polished black shoes (in two instances, boots). They were keenly aware of professional ethics and discipline. They tended to clasp their hands in front of their bodies when on their rounds and to regard any whisper of complaint almost as a personal affront. This meant that although they were often unflagging in their pursuit of order and cleanliness they also gave an impression of unapproachability.⁹¹

Under these circumstances, it was unlikely that many staff would follow Townsend in distinguishing between the welfare needs of residents and the medical treatment of hospital 'patients'.⁹² Moreover, residential care for the elderly occupied a lowly position in the

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.14.

⁹¹ Townsend, *The Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales*, pp.87-8.

⁹² Ibid., p.88.

hierarchy of medicine. Charge nurses interviewed by Townsend in geriatric wards in a National Health Service psychiatric hospital recalled that medical students labelled theirs ‘the punishment ward’ and resented being placed in a field that was not ‘real nursing’.⁹³ Townsend considered that some of the aloofness and reliance on medical ideals he witnessed was a tactic for coping with the gap between workers’ professional ideals and what was possible for them to achieve given the lack of funding, training, and professional pride within their field.⁹⁴ He identified the primacy of these same medical ideals of efficiency, cleanliness, and hierarchy across long-stay institutions such as geriatric wards, mental hospitals, and residential homes after further research in the mid-1960s.⁹⁵

In addition, residential care was provided in a mixed economy through the public, private, and voluntary sectors, where government policies were filtered through administrators’ interests in private profit or their religious vocation. In January 1960, 1,573 local authority institutions and 2,071 voluntary and private institutions had registered with their local authorities.⁹⁶ Overall, around two-thirds of beds were provided in local authority institutions and a further quarter in homes run by voluntary and religious associations, while smaller privately-run homes provided the remaining proportion.⁹⁷ *The Last Refuge* paid great attention to the different built environments, ethics, and treatment that older people encountered in each of these sectors — including chapters on the conditions in each type of home. Local authority welfare officers revealed they had little direct influence over the day-

⁹³ Peter Townsend and Sheila Benson, notes on ward interviews, pp.14, 20-21. File 3, Old People in Long-stay Institutions 1965-1970, in the Peter Townsend collection, ASL.

⁹⁴ Peter Townsend and Sheila Benson, Chapter 7: Social relations in institutions, February 1967, pp.20-21. File 14, Old People in Long-stay Institutions, 1965-1970, in the Peter Townsend collection, ASL.

⁹⁵ Peter Townsend and Sheila Benson, Chapter 7: Social relations in institutions, February 1967, pp.13-19. File 14, Old People in Long-stay Institutions, 1965-1970, in the Peter Townsend collection, ASL.

⁹⁶ Townsend, *The Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales*, p.40.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

to-day operations of these disparate institutions. The constant pressures of demand for beds and understaffing meant that it was uncommon for councils to refuse or revoke a home's registration and their subsequent formal relations were 'often extremely slender'.⁹⁸ For most homes, local authority inspections were infrequent, 'perfunctory', and 'amounted to little more than a casual conversation over a cup of tea'.⁹⁹

These varied institutions assessed the place of emotional and psychological need within residential care differently. Voluntary and religious homes, especially those that had occupied the same building for long periods of time, continued to operate under cultures of charitable relief, moral policing, and gratitude, subverting the mid-century reinterpretation of residential care as a right of citizenship. This manifested in signs that requested donations and the controlled front gate of a religious home in London.¹⁰⁰ One resident of this home judged that little but terminology had changed since his father died in the Saint Pancras workhouse: "They don't call it that now, they call it a "Home". They put a strip of lino down the middle of the corridor, a few covers on the chairs, and tell us it's different — well, it ain't, it's still the workhouse — I know!"¹⁰¹ However, the same man stridently negated social researchers' conclusions about how this made residents feel, stating 'I'm real happy here, they couldn't be kinder — you feel you want to help them' and demonstrating his gratitude by watching the home's door from 6.15 in the morning until 5.45 each night. The institutional logics of mass-production and routine overlapped with the social authority afforded to the matrons of many large homes. Here, the priorities of efficiency and

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp.205, 174.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.174.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with the mother superior of a Little Sisters of the Poor home in London, 30 September 1959, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA

¹⁰¹ Interview with the mother superior of a Little Sisters of the Poor home in London, 30 September 1959, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA

hierarchy shaped the daily timetables of residents' lives. For example, a number were woken at half past five in the morning because staff believed it was vital to get everyone out of bed, washed, and dressed in time for the entire population to breakfast together.¹⁰²

In contrast, *The Last Refuge* researchers' strong feelings about residents' independence and opportunities for self-expression led them to compliment a degree of mess and disarray, a different approach from that taken in social scientific accounts of older people living in their own homes. *The Last Refuge* research notes on a Little Sisters of the Poor home in Cheshire (which was run by a Catholic women's institute whose members vowed to care for the impoverished elderly) commented approvingly that the male residents smoked in their beds and said of their lounge, 'Lots of rubbish and dust in this room — very pleasant.'¹⁰³ In the women's infirmary ward the researcher admired bunches of tulips and a pet budgie flying around the room, comparing this relative chaos to the repressive order of council institutions, 'Imagine this in a Local Authority Home!' This feeling encouraged positive reactions to the practice of converting large private homes into residential institutions (often ex-stately homes), which was especially common in the postwar period when local authorities were required to extend their provision of residential care but lacked the funds to begin new building projects.¹⁰⁴ These houses frequently showcased beautiful grounds, unique furniture, and impressive views, which counterbalanced their unsuitability for the technologies of modern health care such as lifts, stair rails, and adjustable beds. Their features aligned with researchers' belief in the emotional and psychological satisfactions of

¹⁰² Interview with the superintendent of home in Pontefract, West Riding, 13 May 1959, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹⁰³ Interview with the Sister Superior and her Assistant Sister Superior of a Little Sisters of the Poor home in Birkenhead, Cheshire, 21 May 1959, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹⁰⁴ Sixty out of 131 homes Townsend visited had been converted in this way.

individuality, privacy, and material comfort — three central definitions of home. The matron of a home in Liverpool encouraged residents to furnish their own rooms ‘so they make it a home within a home’ and just such a site of self-expression and personal comfort.¹⁰⁵ After Townsend and another researcher visited this home, their notes recorded, ‘[i]t was really delightful to walk into a room and imagine that a human being could really live in it’, setting out the way their conception of human nature was wedded to domestic environments and the expression of selfhood.¹⁰⁶ The description of a private home in Surrey cited the possessive phrasing used by a woman ‘sitting proudly surrounded by “my own things”’ as evidence for these theories.¹⁰⁷

Away from the influence of local authority policy, there was plenty of room for personal interpretation of the duties of residential care. Nuns and religious volunteers viewed their residents’ emotional and psychological needs through the register of their faith rather than through the framework of the sociologically- and psychologically-informed notion of selfhood which Mathew Thomson likened to a humanist spirituality.¹⁰⁸ At one of 13 homes run by the Methodist Church, the matron considered her residents’ ‘greatest pleasure’ was their shared religious faith and organised a service every evening, keeping this to fifteen minutes so residents could also enjoy watching television.¹⁰⁹ Religious homes were the most likely to offer a place for their residents until their deaths, rather than admitting them to hospital when their health seriously deteriorated. The sister superior of one of the voluntary

¹⁰⁵ Interview with the matron of a home in Aigburth, Liverpool, 28 April 1959, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with the matron of a home in Aigburth, Liverpool, 28 April 1959, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with the matron of a private home in Addlestone, Surrey, 18 March 1957, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹⁰⁸ Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain*, p.45.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with the matron of a Methodist home in Aigburth, Liverpool, 28 April 1959, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

homes run by the Little Sisters of the Poor made the claim that older people came to the home ‘to prepare for death’, a position that was not held outside religious institutions.¹¹⁰ Their practices came closer to researchers’ ethos of respect for individual residents than the logic of order in many large institutions, which resulted in the dead being hidden in bathrooms, collected by undertakers during the night, and never spoken of again.¹¹¹ The owners of small and privately-run homes, which were often tacked on to family homes in an effort to balance their household budgets, also frequently astounded researchers with their interpretation of the ethics of care. One such matron revealed her disinterest in the mid-century ideal of independence within residential life when she boasted to Ruth Townsend of her ability to control events in the home by acting as the ‘deciding factor’ in when the women in her care went to bed and got up, when they bathed and changed their clothes, and whether their rooms were sufficiently clean.¹¹²

The social categories of class, physical fitness, and mental health further divided the experience of old age care. Social researchers and Ministry of Health pamphlets advocated smaller and purpose-built homes as more likely to support attention to individual needs and happiness, because of their size, staff to resident ratio, and comfortable, home-like atmosphere. The county borough of Preston implemented a list of requirements for admission to smaller homes authored by its medical officer of health, whose first criterion was ‘social abilities’, a category that could be interpreted according to measures of health or

¹¹⁰ Interview with the sister superior and assistant sister superior a Little Sisters of the Poor home in Birkenhead, Cheshire, 21 May 1959, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹¹¹ Interview with the warden and matron of a local authority home in Gloucester, 7 March 1959; Interview with the manager and supervisory manager of a former Public Assistance Institution in London, 27 April 1959; Interview with the secretary of the home management committee and the matron of a home in Hansworth, Birmingham, 17 June 1959, the Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹¹² Interview with the owner of a small private home in Beckenham, Ashurst, no date., The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA

class. The medical officer specified, 'We can't take the sort of person who wants to put his feet up on the fireplace and spit in the fire'.¹¹³ Instead, older people who had worked in the professions or exhibited what were consistently termed 'nice' manners were added to waiting lists for less institutional and more pleasant homes.¹¹⁴ In these settings, residents were likely to receive individualised attention and were given more opportunities to participate in activities that displayed their individuality to staff and to each other. For example, in a home in Wolverhampton, only the residents living in the 'smaller and nicer blocks' were encouraged to celebrate each other's birthdays.¹¹⁵ Townsend found that there were proportionately more middle-class residents living in postwar, purpose-built homes, especially in areas where a large proportion of the total population lived in the ex-workhouses that were judged the least appropriate for 'nice' residents.¹¹⁶

Applicants deemed to be lower class, physically infirm, or what was repeatedly labelled 'confused', were sent to large institutions where the built environment and communal lifestyle compromised their freedom and privacy. Mid-century psychiatrists judged mental health problems and especially 'senility' part of the ageing process.¹¹⁷ Accordingly, social scientists and welfare administrators had no language for mental health problems and frequently intermingled what they saw as 'confusion' with other unfavourable characteristics of ageing, such as poverty and debility. The county welfare officer for the East Riding described the usefulness of large institutions in accommodating the '[h]ard core of low-grade

¹¹³ Interview with the medical officer of health for Preston, 20 April 1959, Welfare Officers interviews, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹¹⁴ Rounds made with a welfare officer for Tooley Street, London, 24 June 1958, Pilot three, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹¹⁵ Interview with the matron and superintendent of a home in Wolverhampton, 15 and 16 June 1959, Home Interviews, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹¹⁶ Townsend, *The Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales*, p.120.

¹¹⁷ Hilton, 'The Clinical Psychiatry of Late Life in Britain from 1950 to 1970: An Overview'.

people' which included 'the mentally defective and dirty people' as well as those with physical limitations.¹¹⁸ A great number of officials and staff agreed that lower-class elderly would be 'quite happy in infirmaries' or that they liked 'to be huddled together', a line of argument that denied the requirements of selfhood such as privacy and self-determination to a large portion of the population they served.¹¹⁹ Twinned arguments — that large homes could better care for the infirm and ill-adjusted because they could afford more sophisticated equipment and that their residents would feel 'out of place' in smaller homes — continually enforced each other.

The ideals of egalitarianism and respect for the inner lives of all individuals encountered significant resistance and subversion in mid-century residential homes so that older people's access to comfort, privacy, self-expression, and dignity depended on their social class, physical and mental health, and placement in a particular local authority, voluntary, or private institution. The ethos of social democracy and the attempt to improve the emotional lives of all citizens were compromised by the everyday practices of the workers and organisations that were supposed to deliver these social goods and by the persistent inequalities of wealth and access to resources that postwar welfare politics proved unable to eradicate.

¹¹⁸ Interview with the county welfare officer for the East Riding, 13 May 1959, Welfare Officers interviews, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹¹⁹ Interview with the matron of a private home in Tunbridge Wells, 2 March 1959; interview with the proprietor of a home in Worthing, Sussex, 8 April 1959; interview with the county welfare officer for Monmouthshire, 8 December 1958, Home Interviews, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

The influence of social research

Townsend's interviews and observations reveal dynamic, frequently angry, encounters between those who articulated emotional and psychological need and the routine practices of institutions. In *The Last Refuge* Townsend described how aspects of the built environment and staff practices combined to undermine residents' privacy and dignity, particularly in the residential home that he claimed had first shocked him in to pursuing the project:

As I walked round the building and discussed the daily routines it seemed the staff took the attitude that the old people had surrendered any claims to privacy. The residents were washed and dressed and conveniently arranged in chairs and beds — almost as if they were made ready for a daily inspection. An attendant was always present in the bathroom, irrespective of old people's capacity to bath themselves. The lavatories could not be locked and there were large spaces at the top and bottom of the doors. The matron swung open one door and unfortunately revealed a blind old woman installed on the w.c. She made no apology. In a dormitory she turned back the sheets covering one woman to show a deformed leg — again without apology or explanation.¹²⁰

This series of observations appeared to report Townsend's natural movement through the public spaces of the home and into areas for bathing and sleeping, but was actually a statement of argument within an ongoing debate about the nature of care for the elderly. With each line, Townsend stated his commitment to the doctrines of modern selfhood and welfare politics: to privacy, to individuality, to self-sufficiency, to dignity, to 'apology or explanation'. A series of scenes posed these values in opposition to the traditional institutional and medical priorities of routine, order, and hierarchy, which civil servants and welfare worker suggested could deliver care more efficiently and to a great number of elderly residents.

¹²⁰ Townsend, *The Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales*, p.5.

Townsend also took photographs to ‘recall’ and ‘give point’ to the damaging psychological effects of this institutional culture.¹²¹ For example he composed portraits of life in a local authority home in London and a former Public Assistance institution in Norfolk, which intruded on a sleeping resident through a set of bars, and looked over the shoulder of another to trace the slumped bodies of men who sat dozing in a communal day room where no food and little entertainment was on offer (Figure 7). The latter was published in *The Last Refuge* among a set of images that dramatized the dichotomy Townsend perceived between new and outdated visions of institutional life. Through the strong visual signifiers of bare dormitories, steel bars, and drooping bodies, Townsend visually expressed the lack of privacy, freedom, and purpose he saw in traditional models of care.

¹²¹ The quotation describes Townsend’s defence of the photographs he unsuccessfully submitted for inclusion in *The Family Life of Old People*, letter from Peter Townsend to Cecil A. Franklin, 11 March 1957, SN 4723 The Family Life of Old People 1865-1955, Box 35, File B9: photographs, in the Peter Townsend collection, ASL.



Figure 7 and Figure 8: Peter Townsend's photographs of institutional life. The researcher constructed damning images of institutional life which showcased staff control and intrusion, and the resulting apathy on display. Images, the Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

Townsend harnessed the historically-specific significance of built environments in his published images depicting the long corridors, imposing entrances, and cold stone floors of some institutions and the cosy domestic interiors on offer in others (Figure 9 and Figure 10). Drawing on a material schema that researchers had used to make social life visible in buildings for decades, Townsend did not need to populate institutional settings to evoke their psychological effects.¹²² In the first of two images shown below, the long corridor of a former workhouse communicated the discomfort, lack of choices, and isolation experienced in large and traditional institutions. By contrast, the photograph taken of a bedroom in a voluntary home was tightly framed to create a feeling of privacy and to focus on the trappings of domesticity, rest, and relaxation that were central to new philosophies of

¹²² The street, household, and its rooms had been employed in shifting ways to communicate facts about social and psychological life since the beginning of the twentieth century, for example in Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*; Sheldon and Nuffield Foundation, *The Social Medicine of Old Age: Report of an Inquiry in Wolverhampton*; Townsend and Institute of Community Studies, *The Family Life of Old People: An Inquiry in East London*.

residential care and widely-shared postwar aspirations.¹²³ Researchers' positive evaluations of smaller and mostly purpose-built institutions were based on the values of 'homeliness' captured in Townsend's photograph, which was intended to provide both physical and psychic comfort.¹²⁴ Of course, *The Last Refuge* ultimately argued that such a room was second best to a home of one's own.



Figure 9: 'Corridor in a former workhouse'. This photograph was composed to appear threatening and out of place in the postwar welfare state, Townsend, *The Last Refuge*, after p.241.

¹²³ Langhamer, 'The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain'.

¹²⁴ As discussed in *ibid.*, p.344.



Figure 10: 'Bed-sitting-room for one in a Home managed by a voluntary association'. By contrast, this image communicated the contentment on offer in egalitarian and domestic environments, Townsend, *The Last Refuge*, after p.241.

Townsend created and published images to illustrate his argument that there were two forms of care for the elderly in Britain which had profoundly different psychological effects: outdated and hierarchical institutionalism denied the inner lives of its clients; while smaller, egalitarian homes were sensitive to their emotional needs. His careful construction of photographs to contrast these two models of care — and to argue that the latter example was more humane — demonstrated the active participation of social researchers in ongoing professional debates about welfare through their research methods and publications.

The Last Refuge project's influence over institutional behaviour was revealed when residential home owners and workers performed the psychologically-aware and egalitarian behaviours which social researchers favoured. A married couple who owned a privately-run home in St

Leonards put on a show for their visiting research team when they sat down to the same ‘very unappetising’ midday meal as their residents, demonstrating their egalitarian practices by treating their residents to the same standards of comfort — and the same dish of mashed potato and macaroni cheese — as their own family.¹²⁵ Food had long been accorded social and emotional importance in social research, for example in debates over the minimum nutrition an adult required that also considered the social status of consuming meat, especially for working men.¹²⁶ This family’s mere enactment of correct practice was revealed by their five-year-old daughter who indignantly inquired, ‘Auntie is having lamb chops. Why aren't we having that?’¹²⁷ The researcher concluded that the couple usually served themselves different and more luxurious fare than their residents’ menu.

While some attempts to impress were particularly clumsy, even a flawless performance of professional practice was not sufficient to impress Townsend and his team. True to their interest in internal lives, *The Last Refuge* researchers judged the feelings and intentions of residential home staff as well as their behaviour. In line with celebratory accounts of the enlightened humanism demonstrated by social democracy, *The Last Refuge* researchers expected that workers in residential homes should have chosen their jobs for altruistic and not financial reasons.¹²⁸ Therefore both the professional and moral standing of staff were at

¹²⁵ Interview with the owners of a private home in St. Leonards, 20 March 1959, Home Interviews, Last Refuge Collection, ASL

¹²⁶ Maud Pember Reeves, *Round About a Pound a Week*, London, 1979 (first published 1913); Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918*, New York and Oxford, 1993, pp.32, 55.

¹²⁷ Interview with the owners of a private home in St. Leonards, 20 March 1959, Home Interviews, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹²⁸ Interview with the matron and warden of a local authority home in Walsall, 16 June 1959; interview with the manager of a small local authority home in Barnsley, 14 May 1959; interview with the owner of a private home in Southampton, July; interview with the owner of a private home in Sutton Coldfield, Warwickshire, 7 July; interview with the owner of a home in Chobham, Surrey, 16 February 1959; interview with the owner of a private home in Knaresborough, West Riding, 14 May 1959, Home Interviews, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

stake as they competed with social researchers for the right to define correct and ethical care for the elderly. Yet, at least in their project notes and publications, social researchers always had the last say. Knocking at a resident's door and pausing for permission to enter was usually a sign of a sensitive and humane worker, but the 'hearty, overbearing' clergyman at a private home in Midhurst was reported to do so only to ensure 'that the niceties of tact had been observed'.¹²⁹ A researcher cynically noted that the warden leading a tour of a home in London 'made a lot' of the fact that he called residents by their Christian names and 'kept making a point' of doing so, thus inserting a gap between the warden's words and intentions.¹³⁰ *The Last Refuge* researchers suggested that the language and practices they advocated could be employed tactically and in competition for professional status, which residential home owners, administrators, and staff did not want to cede to the visiting observers.

Mirroring their subjects' lives, research interviews were moulded by public spaces and the intrusions of administrators and staff who listened in. At a private home in Skegness, interviews could not be conducted in residents' rooms due to their 'extreme cold' and had to take place in a downstairs parlour with doors on either side, one of which did not close properly, so that three of five interviewees 'were constantly looking nervously at the door' for spies.¹³¹ Elsewhere, interviewees believed they were being watched or 'harried' by staff on the pretence of serving tea or making beds.¹³² Social researchers' sensitivity to the

¹²⁹ Interview with the Reverend and matron of a home in Midhurst, October 1958, Home Interviews, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹³⁰ Interview with the Warden of a local authority home in London, 25 February 1959, Home Interviews, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹³¹ Interview with the owner a private home in Skegness, Lincolnshire, 18 January 1959, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹³² Interview with the matron of a home in Oldham, 6 May 1959; Interview with the matron of a private home in Tunbridge Wells, 2 March 1959, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

presence of listeners or onlookers suggests their new insistence on authentic first-person reflections and their awareness of conflicting understandings among residential home administrators, staff, and residents.¹³³ Yet the technical difficulties they encountered revealed the willingness and ability of some local authority officials and residential home staff to obstruct the freedom, independence, and individual expression of their residents, and the tenuousness of privacy within institutional life.

Members of *The Last Refuge* research team recorded strong emotional responses when they were implicated in residential home practices they despised. For example, researchers felt awkward and ashamed when staff described older people as if they were not in the room.¹³⁴ Ruth Townsend enabled residents to talk back in her observation notes by quoting a woman's bitter remark when a matron displayed her beautiful embroidery and drew attention to her arthritic hands, 'I'm the monkey at the Zoo'.¹³⁵ Researchers were equally shocked when residents stood as they entered a room, thereby enacting institutional hierarchies that were reminiscent of the workhouse and disrupting the notion that mid-century Britain was built on democratic citizenship and offered egalitarian social services.¹³⁶ On entering a dining room for female residents alongside the home's superintendent and matron and seeing all the women stand up, a *Last Refuge* researcher fled the room feeling so

¹³³David Englander and Rosemary O'Day, *Retrieved Riches: Social Investigation in Britain 1840-1914*, Aldershot, 1995, p.8.

¹³⁴ Interview with the matron of home near Abergavenny, 8 December 1958; interview with the sister superior of a voluntary home in Newbury, Berkshire, 18 February, Home Interviews, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹³⁵ Interview with the owner of a private home in Ashurst, Beckenham, no date, Home Interviews, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹³⁶ Interview with the sister superior of a voluntary home in Newbury, Berkshire, 18 February, Home Interviews, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

upset that they were ‘hardly able to go on with the tour and ask neutral questions’.¹³⁷ Townsend was similarly aghast when the warden of a home in Lancashire lined up his four interviewees on a bench instead of calling them one-by-one.¹³⁸ He insisted, ‘[t]here was nothing I could do about it’. Yet *The Last Refuge* project operated within the same power structures it critiqued and, distressingly, the study frequently became a further source of inconvenience and disempowerment for its subjects.¹³⁹

When they spoke in private, residents described how they reacted to hated institutional practices such as public bathing by screaming and attempting to escape or by staying silent in terrified submission or stoic resignation.¹⁴⁰ Such complaints were dismissed in staff interviews as the habitual ‘grumbling’ of the old.¹⁴¹ In contrast, Townsend’s commitments to measuring emotional and psychological need and gathering first-person evidence meant that *The Last Refuge* researchers viewed their 489 interviews with older people — their opportunity to explore the meanings behind such grumbling — as ‘the most important single task of the research’.¹⁴² Yet *The Last Refuge* research notes subsumed the stories of their interviewees, and in particular the voices of older people, in the key concerns and categories of their project. As in the record of an interview with Gertrude, a 93-year-old resident of a home in Worcestershire whose interview is partly reproduced below,

¹³⁷ Interview with the superintendent and matron of a home in Norfolk, 27 May 1959, Home Interviews, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹³⁸ Interview with the warden of a home in Lancashire, 20 April 1959, Home Interviews, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹³⁹ Interview with the warden of a home in Lancashire, 20 April 1959, Home Interviews, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹⁴⁰ For example, interview with the superintendent of a welfare home in Southend-on-Sea, 18 March 1959; interview with the warden and other staff of a home in London, 8 January, Home Interviews, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹⁴¹ Interview with the warden of a voluntary home in Cheltenham, 6 March 1959; interview with the secretary of the Cornwall County Association for the Blind, and the matron of a home for the blind in Truro, Cornwall, 20 July 1959, Home Interviews, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹⁴² Townsend, *The Last Refuge: A Survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the Aged in England and Wales*, p.11.

researchers took notes on an interview schedule mostly comprised of tick boxes with only small spaces for information outside their remit (Figure 11). The few examples of Gertrude's comments that were written down were phrased as if they were direct quotations but read more like paraphrasing, and could have been a researcher's general impressions. This practice overlaid residents' experiences with the preoccupations of the research project, revealing the mid-century continuation of practices that placed greater trust in a 'cultivated' observer than in the stories relayed by research subjects, and subordinating older people's feelings to a new form of institutional hierarchy.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method*, pp.94-5.

1. INDIVIDUAL DETAILS (a) Age 60-64 1 80-84 5 65-69 2 85-89 6 70-74 3 90-94 7 75-79 4 95+ 8 16.1.1866 ✓ ✓ Cr 90 ~ 110 20 ✓		(c) If no other person in household, had old person a relative in another household in the dwelling? Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 No <input type="checkbox"/> 2	
(b) Sex Male 1 Female <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2		(d) Who provided the midday meal? Self <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 Relative in dwelling 2 Relative elsewhere 3 Friend, landlady, or neighbour 4 Meals on wheels 5 Other <i>I don't remember. I think I got</i> 6 Not known if myself X	
(c) Marital Status Single <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 Widowed 3 } How long? Married 2 Divorced 4 } 0-2 yrs. 6 Separated 5 } 3-5 yrs. 7 6-9 yrs. 8 10+ yrs. 9 Not known X		(ii) If non-private household - (a) was it Old People's Home - Local Authority 1 " - Voluntary 2 " - Private 3 Hospital 4 Common lodging house or reception centre 5 Other <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 6 Not known X Date last in private household if known D M Yr <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	
2. OCCUPATIONAL HISTORY (a) Last occupation ✓ Teaching governors in families (b) If married, widowed or separated woman, husband's last occupation Teacher + Nohst			
3. PREVIOUS RESIDENCE (a) If private household - (a) name of village, town or borough Shropshire Malvern Wells (b) with whom did the old person share the household? Alone Y Alone but in lodgings 0 Unmarried or widowed child(ren) only 1 Married daughter and son-in-law only 2 Married son and daughter-in-law only 3 Widowed daughter and grandchild(ren) <i>sister</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 4 Widowed son and grandchild(ren) 5 Married daughter, son-in-law and grandchild(ren) 6 Married son, daughter-in-law and grandchild(ren) 7 Sister or brother only 8 Others (please specify) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 9 Not known X Those in household <i>with somebody, I think. Niece. I think I got involved.</i> <i>V. O.W. sister</i>			
4. ADMISSION (a) Name and address of Residential Home to which admitted [Redacted] Upton-on-Severn Wares (b) How far is this from last private residence? Under 5 miles <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 5-20 " <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2 over 20 " <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 3 not known X (c) Was the old person accompanied on the day of admission? Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 No <input type="checkbox"/> 2 not known X (d) If yes, by whom? Relative 1 Friend or neighbour 2 Social worker 3 Person unknown <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 4 <i>Somebody who had a say in the affairs of the county.</i>			

Figure 11: A *Last Refuge* questionnaire. This record suggests the channelling of residents' conversation into categories and the lack of space for stories that fell outside researchers' questions. Box 37, file B9: diaries, SN 4750 The Last Refuge 1958-1959, in the Peter Townsend collection, ASL.

Moreover, the first-person evidence gathered by Townsend and his research team suggested that residents claimed emotional needs that ranged from the satisfaction they obtained from material comforts to freedom, companionship, and privacy, and often expressed fulfilment in some areas and want in others — making it difficult to label their feelings about

residential care. A man living in a local authority home in Southend-on-Sea reluctantly confessed, 'When I came here and saw what I'd let myself in for, I cried — and that's an admission for a grown man isn't it?'¹⁴⁴ The researcher reported that this resident was alluding to the built environment and lack of amenities in the home, 'He said that there was not even adequate provision of blankets and no redecoration of any sort had been undertaken.'¹⁴⁵ With such material requirements met, a woman living in a religious home in Boscombe pronounced the head sister 'a dear' and the home 'very comfortable' with 'excellent' food, but lonely.¹⁴⁶ Expressing similar reservations, one female resident of a local authority home in Bury described the home's bedrooms as 'beautiful, with plenty of blankets and sheets' but felt bored and as if she was under surveillance.¹⁴⁷ She wept when she was asked whether she would like to stay and concluded, 'Sometimes I feel I could go out and not come back.'¹⁴⁸ Individuals could feel grateful that some of their desires were met at the same time they resented inattention to others, creating layered emotional responses that defied easy categorisation.

When they got the chance, older Britons regularly rejected *The Last Refuge's* key questions and research methods. Their stories did not make it into the published study, revealing the limits of the project's enactment of democratic citizenship and commitment to honour the voices of its elderly subjects. For example, early in an exchange with Townsend about the

¹⁴⁴ Interview with the superintendent of a welfare home in Southend-On-Sea, 18 March 1959, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with the superintendent of a welfare home in Southend-On-Sea, 18 March 1959, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with the sister in charge of a House of Bethany home in Boscombe, Hants, 2 April 1959, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with the warden of a local authority home in Bury, 6 May 1959, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with the warden of a local authority home in Bury, 6 May 1959, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

residential home she lived in, Emma confidently ‘noted your suggestion as to the kind of report you need’ but — perhaps emboldened by her prior experience in social research as part of the Merrill-Palmer Institute of Human Development and Family Life in Michigan — she asserted that such a ‘routine outline’ ‘would not give a picture of the life as lived in this Home by us’.¹⁴⁹ Emma and her husband had resided in a private home for the aged in Surrey for around 17 months when, in May 1960, she read an article Townsend penned for *The Times* and volunteered to keep a diary for the project.¹⁵⁰ However, instead of the timeline of activities such as getting up, reading the newspaper, and dining requested by Townsend, Emma wrote a detailed account of her life over the month of June 1960 and provided narratives of the couple’s ‘outstanding experiences’ since their admission.¹⁵¹ Her diary entries and essays turned on the emotional significance of social hierarchy and power struggles within the home, especially the couple’s resistance to a matron who was able to use her professional status to great effect in her control of medical supplies and the home’s meal plan. By contrast a second diarist, Arthur, aligned his authorial identity with the routines of his home, where he voluntarily rose at 5.30 each morning to help set tables in the dining room before breakfast.¹⁵² However despite his different take on institutional life, Arthur was no less resistant to the prescriptions of *The Last Refuge* researchers; he wrote general comments across the model diary entry which Pinker intended to be reproduced on a daily

¹⁴⁹ Letter from Emma to Peter Townsend, 30 June 1960, Box 37, folder B9: diaries/ correspondence, in the Peter Townsend collection, ASL.

¹⁵⁰ Letter from Emma to Peter Townsend, 1 June 1960, Box 37, folder B9: diaries/ correspondence, in the Peter Townsend collection, ASL.

¹⁵¹ Letter from Emma to Peter Townsend, 30 June 1960, Box 37, folder B9: diaries/ correspondence, in the Peter Townsend collection, ASL.

¹⁵² ‘My Diary from the 1st of February’, SN 4750 *The Last Refuge* 1958-1959, Box 37, folder B9: diaries/ correspondence, in the Peter Townsend collection, ASL.

basis and penned unsolicited essays on his life which asserted his persona as a cheerful, hardworking, and humorous older man.¹⁵³

Constrained by their focus on improving institutional life, social researchers and policy makers often missed that the emotional experience of living in a home was not contained within its walls but was connected with the outside world and non-institutional dimensions of the ageing process.¹⁵⁴ A widower of 83, who had been admitted to hospital in London, started to 'sob his heart out' during a welfare visit and 'every time he would try to speak he would begin sobbing again'.¹⁵⁵ These notes record that the man was depressed by the hospital's 'regimented routine' but he was also saddened because his property had recently been sold. He cheered up when describing the recent arrival of a great-grandchild. A man living in a home in Salisbury was close to tears as he described thinking of his village and feeling its 'draw', he put out an arm and made 'a tense pulling movement to illustrate this feeling' of longing.¹⁵⁶ Another resident sat at the local roundabout to watch coaches until he saw one coming from his home in the West Country, but 'by the time he has read the name of the proprietor it has gone and he hasn't had time to search for a familiar face'. These scenes of men holding back tears, physically reaching towards their home, or sitting on the street for hours, suggested bittersweet emotional lives that operated outside of institutional culture through memory, imaginative connections to familiar landscapes, and family or community life.

¹⁵³ Model diary entry and 'My Diary from the 1st of February', Box 37, folder B9: diaries/ correspondence, in the Peter Townsend collection, ASL.

¹⁵⁴ Mulkay, 'Social Death in Britain', p.47.

¹⁵⁵ Notes on visits with a London County Council admitting officer for Victoria London, 22 May 1958, Pilot three, in the Peter Townsend collection, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with the superintendent of a home in Salisbury, 2 September 1959, Home Interviews, The Last Refuge Collection, UKDA.

Conclusion

The Last Refuge's attention to emotional and psychological needs was focused through the lenses of mid-century social research practices, welfare politics, and intellectual preoccupations. These frames made particular aspects of emotional life, such as the value of dignity, individuality, and social engagement to older individuals, and the efficacy of certain solutions, for example the practices of democratic citizenship and postwar domesticity, clear to see. Yet they simultaneously cut out of the picture much that was vital to emotional life. Reconstructing the methods by which *The Last Refuge* project explored older people's emotions and psychology allows us to trace the connections and overlap between the seemingly disparate practices of mid-century welfare and discipline, which, as Vernon has shown, were always 'mutually dependent on and constitutive of each other'.¹⁵⁷ As we can see in Townsend's photographic record of his *Last Refuge* research, steel bars co-existed with the idealisation of privacy and domestic comfort in postwar residential homes. This chapter's analysis of the varied delivery of residential care within a mixed economy also adds weight to Vernon's argument that political history and commentary has been based on a false dichotomy of liberalism and welfare politics:

For too long we have accepted the self-legitimizing claims of both social democrats and neoliberals that the welfare state was a totalizing, monolithic structure, when in fact it was never entirely either statist in form or welfarist in orientation. If we cannot historically separate forms of welfare from discipline or the market on the one hand, or the state from other forms of rule on the other, we can no longer ask simply whether we are for or against welfare, for or against the state.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History*, p.275.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.278.

Departing from histories that have judged the progress and achievements of liberalism or welfare politics in this way, this chapter has shown that records of mid-century care for the elderly reveal the entangling of the belief that inner lives should be valued with the determination that they should be controlled, both in institutional routines and on the pages of interview transcripts, as well as in Britain's entwined histories of charity, welfare, and punishment.

The history of old age in mid-century Britain needs to describe and analyse the categories by which contemporaries judged the fate of the aged; this intellectual framework informed policy-making and its popular reception, and shaped the sources we rely on. *The Last Refuge* punctured some of the claims mid-century experts made about the improvements they affected in the lives of the elderly, but the study also demonstrated the great cultural influence of their definitions of social responsibility and emotional life. As Jose Harris has argued, the notion that was fostered during the Second World War that British governments 'should continually "do something" in all spheres, rather than merely buttressing, subsidising and policing autonomous local and private economic and social arrangements' marked a change that would define postwar politics.¹⁵⁹ This chapter and the last explored the simultaneous development of the idea that political and social activity should be concerned to understand and intervene in the emotional lives of British citizens — an equally significant mid-century shift which Townsend took for granted by the time he investigated residential institutions in 1957 and 1958. Yet, as *The Last Refuge* reminds us through its revelation of significant resistance to these ideas and its own inability to escape the social

¹⁵⁹ Jose Harris, 'War and Social History: Britain and the Homefront During the Second World War', *Contemporary European History*, 1, 1992, p.25.

hierarchies of the time, postwar history should not be interpreted as a tale of straight-forward progress.

Instead, this chapter has argued that while the exercising of mid-century expertise in social research and welfare provision did not eradicate inequality or the problems of old age, the methods and values advocated within these fields were considered and adopted by many, in part through the everyday interactions of researchers, institutional workers, and ageing Britons it has described. As has been explored in histories of the institutions of mid-century childhood, organisations and services that targeted the aged also encouraged their clients to reinterpret the basis for their social status and claims to financial or social support by couching these aspects of identity in the inherent value of an individual and his or her emotional responses for the first time.¹⁶⁰ While the resulting interventions were not considered to be successful by the political and academic ideals of their time, they exercised immense influence over the understanding and interpretation of emotional dimensions of ageing in the national imagination and for many older individuals, thereby shaping the context for old age in both private and public settings. The following chapters employ a similar close analysis of the interviews and observations collated by social scientists, in order to further explore the influence of social research in the private and domestic lives of the elderly and test the boundaries of what these sources can tell us about the feelings and priorities of their ageing subjects.

¹⁶⁰ Mort, 'Social and Symbolic Fathers and Sons in Postwar Britain'.

Section II: Private life and identity in old age

Chapter three

Social roles and selfhood: work, health, and retirement

In August 1944 a group of research participants recorded their aims in life for the British anthropological project Mass Observation.¹ One 77-year-old man hoped to publish a book (“Scientific Paradoxes & Problems”).² A 69-year-old widow hoped to write weekly letters to an invalided acquaintance.³ At 68, a recently-married man was interested in propagating vegetarianism, socialism, temperance and a host of ‘other –isms’ and planned to father children.⁴ A 64-year-old woman just wanted to die ‘suddenly’ and ‘without nuisance’ — so long as she could ‘see Hitler get his, before I go’.⁵ These eclectic aims — sometimes ambitious, sometimes mundane — each made sense within their authors’ individual biographies. Importantly, virtually all of the writers assumed they would live an active and engaged later life and contribute to family life, their local communities, and beyond. Hence, none of their plans fitted with the image of dependent, debilitated, and domesticated old age

¹ Mass Observation directive, August 1944: ‘Do you consider you have any “aims in life” clearly enough formulated to put in writing? If so, please say what they are and indicate their relative importance to you. If you haven’t do you think it matters, or not?’

² Mass Observation directive, 2058 reply to August 1944 directive, Mass Observation Archive (MOA.), University of Sussex.

³ Mass Observation directive, 2251/1015 reply to August 1944 directive, MOA.

⁴ Mass Observation directive, 1095 reply to August 1944 directive, MOA.

⁵ Mass Observation directive, 1980 reply to August 1944 directive, MOA.

that was propagated by social research and welfare politics, which has been the focus of this thesis' analysis thus far. In the present chapter, I depart from expert theories about old age to explore older people's accounts of their own lives, and to ask what social roles were claimed by individuals in late life in mid-century Britain and how these public personas and responsibilities contributed to understandings of selfhood.

As these tableaux of old age suggest, personal stories emerged in social research data despite its particular emphasis on the problems of later life, and these serve as the basis for my examination of how older people defined and felt about their own ageing. In its exploration of older people's accounts of their work, retirement, and health in particular, the present chapter revisits key concerns of mid-century academic research and policy-making for the elderly, but asks the new question of what these experiences meant to individuals within private settings and as part of life stories. As the experts diagnosed, these areas of life were fraught with emotional and practical difficulty for many older people. However, as I argue below, the feelings conveyed by their research participants were more varied and complex than researchers allowed. This chapter posits that ageing Britons' emotional responses to material hardship have been understudied and oversimplified by mid-century academics and recent scholarship alike. I use two of the most commonly identified misfortunes of late life — losing a job and losing control of your body — to explore the complex processes of adjustment and coping that characterised old age, as they were expressed in older Britons' conversations with their families, friends, and with mid-century social researchers. For example, retirees asserted on-going contributions to their community, and the continued relevance of their working histories, during these discussions. In particular, ageing bodies were taken to display the scars of past labour in such ways that occasions of illness and

debility were used to reaffirm identity through story-telling and the attentions of family members and health professionals, as often as they were described as social problems. Hence, as I explore below, older people employed a broader definition of work and retirement than was implied in mid-century commentary on old age, narrowly framed as it was by formal employment and economic productivity. Likewise, the physiological process of ageing and the onset of physical debility were given different meanings within personal relations than they were assigned in medical check-ups and treatises on the state of the ageing population. In private settings, ageing Britons were able to claim a greater contribution to family life, local community, and national culture than they were afforded in public discussion.

If there is a pattern running through this data it is the significance of personal biography and narrative in the apprehension of emotional life, an interpretive lens that connected informal social life to methods of social research and acted as the primary conduit for ideas about old age to travel between them. Michael Savage has shown how the popularity of interviewing in the 1950s and 1960s focused sociological knowledge on individuals and their ‘story-like narratives’.⁶ Giving this kind of interview was a different experience to supplying the budgeting and household information which had informed early-twentieth-century social surveys, and listening to one encouraged a different type of analysis.⁷ I use social research material to consider the influence of the preoccupations and processes of social scientific interviewing and the ways these interacted with informal patterns of socialising and self-understanding in old age, especially in stories about the past. For older Britons, talking about the physical, economic, and occupational activities they had pursued was a strategy in

⁶ Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method*, p.165.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.167.

achieving status, and what Alistair Thomson has called the ‘composure’ or the ‘personal coherence’ of a life history.⁸ The venture of uniting public roles and private identity to achieve ‘composure’ was equally a narrative-based task of shaping the ‘unresolved, risky and painful pieces of past and present lives’ according to story-telling conventions, and an emotional project. By talking to others, men and women made their memories into ‘significant pasts’ that might ‘make a more comfortable sense of our life over time, and in which past and current identities are brought more into line’.⁹

The social research project that most informs this chapter is Peter Townsend’s *The Family Life of Old People: An Inquiry in East London*, and especially the 203 interviews with men and women aged over 60 that Townsend carried out between October 1954 and November 1955 as fieldwork. As distinct from *The Last Refuge* records that formed the basis of chapter two, for his *Family Life* project Townsend wrote lengthy interview transcripts (each of his visits lasted for around an hour and a half, and the resulting notes ran to at least half a dozen typed pages) that foregrounded the interactions of his research subjects with their husbands or wives, children, and neighbours, as well as their answers to his key questions — albeit in a paraphrased form. While none of his interview notes were unedited, through the setting of his interviews and their topics of discussion Townsend generated valuable data on private life and relationships in old age. I read these interviews with careful attention to the moments that defied researchers’ expectations: When did interviewees ignore a question or refuse to answer it? When did bystanders intervene in the conversation? And when did social scientists judge their subjects to have gone off topic, repeated themselves, or argued back? This chapter also draws from the writing of older people who participated in Mass

⁸ Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend*, Melbourne and Oxford, 1994, pp.8-11.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.9-10.

Observation, a research project that asked a diverse range of questions, granted its participants the anonymity of letter-writing, and preserved their full, unrevised responses, leaving a rich archive of personal reflection authored by older people that offers useful points of comparison to more structured data. In contrasting this material, this chapter considers the extent to which we can locate the voices of older individuals within mid-century social research projects, and how their methods interacted with informal modes of story-telling and self-fashioning.

Historians of old age have almost uniformly argued that ageing has involved losing social roles that have offered status and personal fulfilment, at least in modern Western societies.¹⁰ Many sociologists writing in the mid- and late-twentieth century described ageing itself in these terms, as a process of ‘social disengagement’ or ‘social death’.¹¹ This chapter problematizes this imagery of isolation and marginalisation in old age and constructs a more nuanced model of the interrelation of the material context and subjective experience of the ageing process. Although the end to employment or the beginning of ill health was experienced as a sudden and disruptive event in the life cycle by some, this chapter describes common patterns of talking about achievements and personal characteristics that were celebrated in an individual’s past, which connected them to the self-identity of ageing Britons in their present.

As many sociologists and historians have observed, physical change — especially the onset of debility or pain — reminds us that while ageing is partly a social experience, it is also a

¹⁰ See Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America*.

¹¹ For example Cumming and Henry, *Growing Old: The Process of Disengagement*; Mulkey, 'Social Death in Britain'.

physiological one.¹² A similar point has been made by historians who have criticised the ‘superficiality’ of cultural histories that have remained in the ‘symbolic realm’ without accounting for the everyday, the material, the corporeal, or the psychic.¹³ It is not sufficient that we understand the ageing body through sources ‘that chart the discursive construction of male and female bodies at the levels of state, church, social reform, science, medicine or law’ only because they are more easily accessible than ‘those that might offer insights into the body as a site of experience, memory or subjectivity’.¹⁴ Indeed, Elaine Scarry and Michael Roper have argued that in some instances linguistic analysis achieves little, because extreme physical pain or fear can be ‘world-destroying’ and make culture, social ties, and language disappear.¹⁵ The consequence of ageing could be the same. Yet for most of the older Britons in this study, personal identity and received cultural understandings held tight in the midst of physical struggle and provided an anchor for the self and its new limitations. Certainly as long as older people lived in their own homes and were capable of communicating with researchers, the corporeal challenges of old age were used to bolster life histories and coherent identities and did not spell their end.

Work and retirement

Path-breaking texts of British history authored by Claire Langhamer and Selina Todd have shown that work and leisure roles must be understood in relation to each other and in the

¹² For example Twigg, 'The Body and Bathing: Help with Personal Care at Home', pp.143-69.

¹³ Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History*, London, 2005, p.289; Kathleen Canning, 'The Body as Method? Reflections on the Place of the Body in Gender History', *Gender & History*, 11, 3, 1999, p.501; Chris Hilliard, 'Colonial Culture and the Province of Cultural History', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 36, 1, 2002 p.3; Roper, 'Slipping out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History', p.62.

¹⁴ Canning, 'The Body as Method? Reflections on the Place of the Body in Gender History', p.501.

¹⁵ Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War*; Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, New York and Oxford, 1985, p.29.

context of the life cycle.¹⁶ This chapter's consideration of old age and retirement adds much to their analysis, which focused on young women in both cases. Langhamer established that leisure had different meanings for British women depending on whether they worked set hours in formal employment or laboured informally within the household and family.¹⁷ Many women experienced both form of work in twentieth-century Britain and shifted their definitions accordingly. Todd's book analysed the connections between paid labour and the social and financial dynamics of family life through the lens of young women's work and wages.¹⁸ Building on these insights, this chapter asks how old age and retirement affected such intertwined work, leisure, and family lives. Retirement offers rich subject matter for this analysis given its new prominence in mid-century Britain — when retirement was a common experience for manual workers for the first time — and the political and economic anxiety that surrounded it. The occasion of retirement disrupted many of the patterns of behaviour and personal relations that were established earlier in life and acted as a catalyst for displays of adaptability by some and personal crisis for others, making it of particular interest to historians of emotion and subjectivity. Such personal experiences have been little considered in histories that have focused on retirement as a political and economic strategy.¹⁹ When historians such as Pat Thane have raised the question of subjectivity they have most often repeated the formulations of mid-century social scientific research, which equated the end to employment with the destruction of social identity, especially for working-class men.²⁰ Yet, as I argue below, there has been a more complex relationship between identity in old

¹⁶ Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-60*; Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family in England, 1918-1950*.

¹⁷ Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-60*, p.133.

¹⁸ Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family in England, 1918-1950*, pp.13-4.

¹⁹ Johnson, 'Parallel Histories of Retirement in Modern Britain', pp.211-25; Macnicol, *The Politics of Retirement in Britain, 1878-1948*; Salter, *100 Years of State Pension: Learning from the Past*.

²⁰ Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, pp.399-403.

age and the social roles of public life, which have been intertwined within the life histories and personal relations of the aged.

Mid-century social, psychological, and political scientists were concerned about the economic cost to the Treasury of supporting pensioners and the psychological effects of retirement on ageing Britons, especially on men. As historians of old age have emphasised, flat-rate pensions schemes were still novel in the mid-century and widespread retirement both formalised a chronological point of entry to old age and propagated a reductive account of its social aspects.²¹ The social research projects under consideration in this chapter were part of a national conversation about the effects of work and retirement on individuals, a literature that was introduced in chapter one of this thesis. For example, Townsend's findings about the way East London families cared for their elderly relatives during his research on *The Family Life of Old People* contributed to debates over the support of older people through financial and social programs, and what it meant that an increasing proportion of the British population would be economically unproductive. Likewise, Mass Observation was interested in the psychological implications of labour in the modern workforce. For instance, the organisation's researchers recorded the behaviours of workers in the industrial North (in Bolton, dubbed 'worktown') and asked its voluntary panel what personal satisfactions they experienced in their jobs.

Although retirement was novel in the mid-century, a detailed and anxious literature on unemployment had already established many reasons that mid-century individuals and governments should be concerned over a new form of 'forced leisure'. Social commentators

²¹ Harper and Thane, 'The Consolidation of "Old Age" as a Phase of Life, 1945-1965', pp.43-61.

were particularly worried about the effects of free time and leisure on large numbers of unemployed men and their families during the depression and this anxiety fed into subsequent discussions of the social and psychological effects of retirement. Over the interwar period in particular, the problems of high unemployment deepened the existing concern over the changing nature of leisure in the early-twentieth century. In the eyes of many commentators, industrialisation polarised work and free time by removing all ‘art’ and skill from manual labour while the newly diverse and exciting forms of entertainment available in mass culture formats like cinema and radio demonstrated the disturbing potential to ‘mass produce’ public opinion.²² Prominent nineteenth-century social critics, such as John Ruskin, Thomas Carlyle, and Matthew Arnold, had talked about leisure to explain their disillusionment with modern life and its erosion of those values they held in highest esteem, such as authenticity, imagination, and morality. At the same time, large numbers of working-class men and women faced periods of unemployment, and commentators including government ministers, members of parliament, trade unions, professional bodies, voluntary organisations, the clergy, academics, writers, journalists, and broadcasters, worried that their unstructured free time might lead to apathy and hopelessness — or even to immoral and criminal behaviour.²³ The ‘stages theory’ which proposed that unemployed workers would pass through the stages of ‘the unbroken’, ‘the resigned’, ‘the distressed’, and ‘the apathetic’ was almost universally accepted in Britain, and seemed to explain the findings of famous social surveys of unemployment, for example in the Austrian textile village of Marienthal in

²² For example in Henry Durant, *The Problem of Leisure*, London, 1938; Andrzej Olechnowicz, 'Unemployed Workers, "Enforced Leisure" and Education for "the Right Use of Leisure" in Britain in the 1930s', *Labour History Review* 70, 1, 2005, p.35.

²³ This problem was emphasised in interwar social surveys such as Jones and University of Liverpool, *The Social Survey of Merseyside*; London School of Economics and Political Science and Smith, *The New Survey of London Life & Labour*; G. Meara, *Juvenile Unemployment in South Wales*, Cardiff, 1936; Olechnowicz, 'Unemployed Workers, "Enforced Leisure" and Education for "the Right Use of Leisure" in Britain in the 1930s', p.27.

1933.²⁴ Wide-ranging concerns about the dangerous effects of 'forced leisure' on community cohesion, rates of mental illness and crime, and political stability, encouraged the National government and voluntary organisations to establish adult education programs that would educate the working classes into the 'right use of leisure'.²⁵ Against the background of this recent history and its literature, retirement appeared to be a risky social and psychological prospect for older individuals and the nation.

The uneven recovery of the British economy after 1933 meant these different anxieties about leisure — as a result of young people who worked a shorter week and pocketed expendable income on one hand and the plight of the unemployed on the other — coexisted. Modern industries such as the production of electrical and domestic appliances, chemicals, construction, and automobiles aided Britain's economic recovery and the expanding service sector increased the number of white collar jobs available.²⁶ Between 1923 and 1938, workers in permanent positions benefitted from both stabilising wages and falling prices, resulting in better living conditions which included greater discretionary spending and more commercial entertainment opportunities.²⁷ At the same time, higher numbers of middle-class people could retire, especially through occupational pensions that were more generous than the state pension.²⁸ Yet the mechanisation of workplaces and the decline of traditional industries such as shipbuilding caused regional unemployment and the

²⁴ See an English translation: Marie Jahoda, Thomas Elsaesser, Paul Felix Lazarsfeld, John Reginald, and Hans Zeisel, *Marienthal: The Sociography of an Unemployed Community*, London, 1972; Olechnowicz, 'Unemployed Workers, "Enforced Leisure" and Education for "the Right Use of Leisure" in Britain in the 1930s', p.29.

²⁵ Olechnowicz, 'Unemployed Workers, "Enforced Leisure" and Education for "the Right Use of Leisure" in Britain in the 1930s', pp.33, 5-7.

²⁶ John Stevenson and Chris Cook, *Britain in the Depression: Society and Politics, 1929-1939*, 2nd edn, London, 1994, pp.15-7, 24.

²⁷ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951*, Oxford, 1998, pp.112, 5.

²⁸ Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, p.283.

disappearance of unskilled laboring jobs.²⁹ Social scientists understood unemployment as the most urgent social problem of their day and contemporary novels, such as Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* (1933) and Walter Brierley's *Means Test Man* (1935), portrayed the unhappy effects of unemployment on marriages and the family unit for a popular audience.³⁰

In the context of depression and uncertain labour markets during the interwar years, governments had encouraged the employment of younger people, in part by lowering the retirement age from 70 to 65 in 1925.³¹ Social surveys revealed that employers preferred younger workers long after politicians reversed their stance.³² Some older men and women probably shared this concern for younger workers, at least for those they knew. For example, in the mid-1940s, William Silk chose to retire from his position as the door-keeper at his local Working Man's Club after a young father inquired about the job. William remembered,

I didn't really want to give up but a young chap said to me once, he had three kids, 'if you're ever going to retire Jack, let me know.' I thought to myself about that young chap with three children wanting the job, so in the end I gave in me notice and I went along and told him.³³

While William was willing to step out of formal employment in deference to the needs of a younger worker he did not chose to do this until he was 70 years old, indicating that for five years (after qualifying for the pension at 65) his desire to stay in work was his primary

²⁹ McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951*, p.110.

³⁰ Walter Brierley, *Means Test Man*, London, 1935; Walter Greenwood, *Love on the Dole: A Tale of the Two Cities*, London, 1933.

³¹ Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, p.283.

³² *Ibid.*, p.396.

³³ Interview with William Silk, aged 79, 27 October 1954, SN 4723 Family Life of Old People, 1865-1955, The Peter Townsend collection, National Social Policy and Social Change Archive, available digitally through UK Data Archives (UKDA), <http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-4723-1>.

concern. As this chapter will explore further, William's decision was evidence of his continued engagement with the local community — he cared about the fate of the younger man — and the potential for retirement to affirm social identity rather than destroy it. He repeated the story later in his interview, suggesting lasting pride in his actions and the importance of the decision to his sense of self.

The Second World War rearranged these assumptions about participation in the workforce. Unemployment was no longer a problem; instead, public discussions emphasised the part that all workers could and should play in the war effort, especially in industrial production. The psychological implications of work and leisure were reframed within concern over civilian morale, especially in the first few years of the war when the population's tolerance for rationing, bombardment, and civilian casualties had not yet been tested.³⁴ The interplay of governmental concerns over civilian morale and social science projects is displayed most clearly in Mass Observation's reports on morale for the Ministry of Information (1940-1941) and the Admiralty (1941-1942).³⁵ This interest also informed the monthly directive questionnaires they sent to their voluntary panel of writers around the country. For instance in March 1943 Mass Observation asked the panel 'What are your feelings about your job nowadays, and what do other people who you know feel about their jobs?'³⁶ Participants were invited to reflect on their personal experiences of employment and also to engage in social scientific 'observation' of their friends and colleagues. The neat fit between these requirements and the public projects of maintaining morale and contributing to the war effort may explain the peak of participation in this strand of research mid-way into the

³⁴ Brad Beaven and John Griffiths, 'The Blitz, Civilian Morale and the City: Mass-Observation and Working-Class Culture in Britain, 1940-41', *Urban History*, 26, 1, 1999, pp.81-8.

³⁵ Hinton, 'Mass-Observation (Act. 1937-1949)'.

³⁶ March 1943 directive, (MOA).

conflict: the May 1942 directive generated the most responses — 533 — after which participation slowed to around 200 replies per month at the end of the war.³⁷ In this new context, retirement appeared problematic in a different way. The end of employment was no longer a generous act that could restore a younger worker's livelihood. In the wartime world of full employment and industrial warfare powered by workers on the home front, retirement was an affront to some of the most important roles a citizen enacted and denied the personal and psychological benefits that were understood to flow from productivity in the workplace.

Mass Observation's March 1943 inquiry into each research participant's 'feelings about your job' illustrated the importance that was attached to the psychological aspects of work in wartime Britain.³⁸ In response, twenty-two writers who were aged over 60 suggested some of the emotional contours of work and retirement that were particular to older Britons in this period. Although a handful of writers reported feeling happy in employment, a much larger number listed problems and gripes that were heightened by the feeling that individuals should contribute to the war effort.³⁹ A few were frustrated to have been rejected from useful positions and many more reported workplace tension, worry, and that people were more interested in money than in contributing on the home front.⁴⁰ Wartime did not make older workers feel part of the community as many histories of social consensus during the Second World War have implied, and few reported that sentiment among younger

³⁷ Hinton, 'Mass-Observation (Act. 1937–1949)'.

³⁸ On the application of industrial psychology in the interwar period see Vicky Long, 'Industrial Homes, Domestic Factories: The Convergence of Public and Private Space in Interwar Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, 50, 2, 2011, pp.434-64.

³⁹ Three sounded happy in their work. For example, 2251 reply to the March 1943 directive (aged 68), MOA.

⁴⁰ For example 3330 and 2142 replies to the March 1943 directive (aged 63 and 61), MOA.

colleagues.⁴¹ Moreover, the industrial demands of the conflict encouraged a narrow and dispiriting definition of 'jobs' which employed mid-century social scientific conceptions of the hard line between work and retirement. Only four replies to the 1943 directive described odd jobs or housework done by older people.⁴² Instead, nine elderly respondents bluntly explained they had 'no job' because they were retired or on a pension and one woman left the question blank — all responses that counted the writer out of the enquiry and out of the category of worker.⁴³ These personal testimonies were in line with mid-century social scientific and psychological claims about old age — that it marked the end of involvement in the formal economy and the community — but were produced by the unusual context of total war and living on the home front, where the most worthwhile contributions to the nation were tied to the field of combat and the industrial production line.

Such a narrow definition of 'jobs' was particularly ill-suited to women's work and experiences in the labour market. Women were more likely to be dismissed early from employment positions and their marginal employment status was rarely well measured.⁴⁴ When in work, they typically carried the 'double load' of formal employment and household labour, and after 'retirement' these domestic responsibilities continued.⁴⁵ Few women gained a pension in their own right, instead the system assumed the model of a male breadwinner so that the wives of insured men and widow were paid pensions.⁴⁶ The National Association of

⁴¹ For example Rodney Lowe, 'The Second World War, Consensus, and the Foundation of the Welfare State', *Twentieth Century British History*, 1, 2, 1990, pp.152-82.

⁴² For example in the Mass Observation directive 1686 reply to the March 1943 directive (aged 70), MOA.

⁴³ For example in the Mass Observation directives 2719 and 2885 replies to the March 1943 directive (aged 67 and 62), MOA.

⁴⁴ Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, p.284.

⁴⁵ Pat Thane, 'Old Women in Twentieth-Century Britain', in *Women and Ageing in British Society since 1500*, L. A. Botelho and Pat Thane, eds, Harlow, 2001, p.212.

⁴⁶ Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, p.331; Thane, 'Old Women in Twentieth-Century Britain', pp.210-1.

Old Age Pensions Associations, which was established in 1938, campaigned with the National Spinsters' Pensions Association, and convinced the government to reduce the pensionable age for insured women and wives of insured men to 60 in 1940.⁴⁷ Access to pensions was made universal in 1946.⁴⁸ Advocacy groups argued that the lower pension age for women reflected their more complex family commitments which frequently led to earlier retirement. The government believed the structure would encourage earlier retirement among men, as husbands and their (typically younger) wives would gain a pension at around the same time.⁴⁹

After World War Two, in the context of labour shortages, academic and governmental publications re-framed the psychological problem of retirement and encouraged older workers to stay in employment.⁵⁰ Medical doctors, social scientists, and welfare workers argued that good psychological health required mental stimulation and a feeling of usefulness to the community.⁵¹ The tools of the psychological sciences were employed in workplace studies which posited that older workers benefited from their greater range of abilities and experiences, even though they might work more slowly at certain repetitive tasks.⁵² Retirement was imagined to be a time of disconnection and apathy which, an increasing number of experts agreed, should be limited to a shorter time period and more advanced ages. However, in contrast to the wartime examples, in postwar Mass Observation directives virtually all respondents aged over 60 described their daily tasks as 'work' and asserted their

⁴⁷ Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, p.332; Thane, 'Old Women in Twentieth-Century Britain', pp.210-1.

⁴⁸ Thane, 'Old Women in Twentieth-Century Britain', p.211.

⁴⁹ Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, p.397.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.344-5.

⁵¹ National Association for the Care of Old People, *The Interests of the Aged*, pp.20-32.

⁵² Welford, *Skill and Age: An Experimental Approach*, p.9.

contribution to various fields of social life.⁵³ The October 1948 directive extended Mass Observation's interest in the psychological implications of mechanised or bureaucratised forms of labour which were believed to sap creativity and enjoyment from the working day, asking 'Do you consider that your present occupation allows you sufficient outlet for personal initiative or not?'⁵⁴ Retired and housekeeping men and women treated this question little differently to the respondents who were employed in the formal labour market in their old age.⁵⁵ A retired farmer from Essex made a typical claim when he celebrated that '[b]eing retired & able to choose my own jobs, I have no complaints'.⁵⁶ A 90-year-old woman boasted that, as 'my own mistress (housewife, children all grown up) I can do pretty well as I like'.⁵⁷ These older men and women assumed that Mass Observation's question about their 'job' was relevant to their informal labour in retirement and around the house, subverting the organisation's primary interest in work and leisure that was demarcated by the structure of industry.

Older men and women's definition of work was not limited to full-time, paid employment and instead supported their sense of contribution to local organisations and neighbourhoods. Of course Mass Observation participants did not escape the statistical likelihoods that social scientists and psychologists pointed out and many regretted their limited finances, physical difficulties, and the demanding routine of domestic chores in retirement. Therefore old age and retirement were presented as measured experiences featuring both losses and gains, but not as tragedies. For example a retired nurse answered

⁵³ Twelve out of fifteen writers aged over 60 claimed an occupation.

⁵⁴ 'Do you consider that your present occupation allows you sufficient outlet for personal initiative or not? If not, in what ways do you feel yourself to be restricted? What sort of changes would increase your personal satisfaction in your work?' October-November 1948 directive, MOA.

⁵⁵ Four of the respondents were in regular, paid employment.

⁵⁶ Mass Observation directive, 3653 reply to October-November 1948 directive (aged 67), MOA.

⁵⁷ Mass Observation directive, 686 reply to October-November 1948 directive (aged 90), MOA.

the third part of the directive, ‘What sort of changes would increase your personal satisfaction in your work?’ with the reflection that she would like to ‘keep my present experience of life and be forty years younger. Or, at least, have the physical strength I had then’.⁵⁸ Her varied experiences were a boon of later life, even if she lamented the effects of physiological ageing. A nonagenarian who was her ‘own mistress’, articulated a set of ambitious dreams in order to highlight the perceived limitations of her retirement: she did not have ‘a large enough income to do all I’d like. I want to study languages, travel’.⁵⁹ This was an expansive view of the self, the mid-century world, and what might be possible in old age. These older men and women described busy working lives and social roles that were not bounded by paid employment, and their dreams for the future further emphasised their interest in learning about and contributing to their society. While none of them described writing to Mass Observation as their job, the organisation’s collation of voluntarily-written directive responses and diaries was evidence of such a habit of social engagement — or what James Hinton has called ‘active citizenship’ — across the generations.⁶⁰

At least for those who reached old age with fair health, sufficient funds, and a predilection for community involvement, retirement was a time of varied social roles that required personal initiative and provided emotional satisfaction. Wartime did not interrupt this pattern of behaviour but only problematized the language that might be used to describe these activities, reserving the term ‘work’ for paid employment and contribution to the war effort. After all, when Mass Observation had inquired into volunteers’ ‘aims in life’ in August 1944 — receiving the intriguing replies which opened this chapter in response — a

⁵⁸ Mass Observation directive, 1056 reply to October-November 1948 directive (aged 66), MOA.

⁵⁹ Mass Observation directive, 686 reply to October-November 1948 directive (aged 90), MOA.

⁶⁰ Hinton and Mass-Observation, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass-Observation and the Making of the Modern Self*, p.1.

majority of the older respondents had described some form of labour.⁶¹ They aimed to keep their independence, to cheer up the sick, or help neighbours and friends with chores; to spread social movements; to study, teach, and gain knowledge; to maintain a good home-life; or to contribute to postwar reconstruction projects.⁶² The ageing process was employed differently across these answers, providing incentive for some to ‘justify my existence’ and making others feel that ‘ambitions & aims’ belonged to the past — yet these apparently opposing positions both encompassed hopes and plans for the future.⁶³ Self-deprecating statements about advanced age could co-exist with specific, meaningful, and aspiring dreams for the future. For example, an Oxfordshire housewife wrote, ‘I feel I am too old to have many definite aims in life, but I hope and pray I may be able to make a happy home for my husband and two sons as long as they want one, and to be able to be of use to my neighbours, and to be able to help in a small way in post War reconstruction.’⁶⁴ Despite her argument to the contrary, this writer’s first two aims were well-defined and focused on achievable goals and she demonstrated both social engagement and ambition in her hope to contribute to the reconstruction of the nation. Evidence of such ‘active citizenship’ was built into Mass Observation data; its participants had already volunteered to a social scientific project and the experience of sending in directives and diaries only affirmed their sense of connection to national issues and the production of knowledge. While it did not describe everyone’s experience of old age, the way ageing mass-observers wrote about work forces us to look beyond the mid-century social scientific and economic frameworks for retirement to explain its effects in the lives of older Britons.

⁶¹ Twelve of fifteen respondents referred to a form of labour, of which 3 wrote about aspirations for their professional career or paid employment. August 1944 directive, MOA.

⁶² Mass Observation directives, 2058, 1056, 2791, 3120, 1980, 2251, 1095, 1099, 3378, 3121, 1098, 3405 replies to August 1944 directive, MOA.

⁶³ Mass Observation directives, 1099 and 1098 replies to August 1944 directive (aged 66 and 64), MOA.

⁶⁴ Mass Observation directive, 3405 reply to August 1944 directive (aged 62), MOA.

These flexible definitions of work were echoed by the unpredictability of the mid-century job market for older people. Especially among mid-century working-class families, both men and women experienced periods of unemployment and this trend intensified with age. Older men and women frequently worked in positions of lower status and pay, or moved in and out of employment according to their health and that of their relatives. For example, at the time of her interview Jane Bayley, aged 64, had just given up her role as an under-cook, a position she had held for 16 years, to care for her husband Alfred.⁶⁵ She had entered employment during an earlier period when her husband was unemployed, cleaning offices for two hours a day at first, ‘to make money up’, before moving into longer hours and a more permanent arrangement. Alfred had loaded beer barrels at Charringtons brewery for 36 years but had taken 14 weeks off due to his arthritis and was to have an operation the day after Jane’s interview. Afterwards he hoped to return because: ‘The more active you are the better you are. I don’t want to give up work at 65. I want to keep there as long as I can.’ Rather than a straight-forward story in which men left work at 65 to be tortured by their lack of activity, the personal histories related by this couple revealed an uneven employment history for both men and women, that was frequently interrupted by ill health or unemployment but continued long past the age of 65, albeit in casual and low-paid positions. In another example, James Alford worked as a market porter until he was 75 years old.⁶⁶ When Townsend visited him seven years after his retirement he could recite the date he left his employment, the first of November, signalling the event’s importance in his life history. Despite his apparent exit from the labour market, James visited the market every day and

⁶⁵ Interview with Jane Bayley (aged 64), 22 August 1955, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

⁶⁶ Interview with James Alford (aged 81), 24 August 1955, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

was sometimes paid a small amount of money to do odd jobs, thereby keeping his workplace relationships alive and earning a few shillings each week.

The centrality of work to older men's identities was recognised and supported by their families, and particularly by their wives, during sociological interviews. In one example, the public world was incorporated into older Britons' private domestic lives and emotional relations within Harriet Allen's description of the way her husband William experienced the downgrading of working status, skill, and wages that was common for older men. William had been a builder and decorator until a few months prior to Harriet's interview, when his employer had died, and then — aged 69 — had managed to get a job with another building firm, but this time looking after paint and acting as general handyman.⁶⁷ Harriet reported social reasons in addition to William's likely financial motivation for persistence in paid labour at 69 years of age, he 'wants to keep on as long as he can. He's a man who's always been out. He can't content himself at home.' In telling this story, Harriet described William's character attributes and not just his employment status. Other interviewees asserted they were also the kind of 'man who's always been out' long into their retirement. John William Regelous had retired from his job driving refuse carts for the borough council just before the war (he then spent the war years sorting letters at Mount Pleasant).⁶⁸ At the time of his interview in October 1954, Townsend judged that John still displayed 'his pride in his abilities as a younger man', fetching his retirement certificate, which recognised 34-years of 'loyal service' to the metropolitan borough of Bethnal Green, down from the wall of his flat and boasting of 'gold medals, silver medals and bronze medals for driving too'. Working-class men were reluctant to lose the financial and social advantages of employment

⁶⁷ Interview with Harriet Allen (aged 71), 23 August 1955, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

⁶⁸ Interview with John Williams Regelous (aged 80), 26 October 1954, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

but their retirement was not an emotional wasteland, in part because the personal satisfactions of work were not bound to the workplace. Their participation in social research offered an additional and distinctively twentieth-century opportunity to reaffirm the connections between achievements in the past and life in the present.

Health

In the tradition of what Savage has called the ‘gentlemanly social sciences’, many statements of expertise about ageing merged social and medical research.⁶⁹ As I explored in the previous chapter about the provision of care for the elderly in residential homes, medical and welfare expertise and services were closely related in the mid-twentieth century: many pioneers of welfare for the elderly were state medical officers or doctors, and social services such as residential care were administered under the Ministry of Health until 1970.⁷⁰ Mid-century social inquiry into the lives of elderly Britons was frequently undertaken by physicians who adhered to the social research tradition that ‘the weaving together of physical, social, and moral characteristics’ would reveal a subject’s ‘entire social and moral being’.⁷¹ At the same time, the National Health Service’s widespread provision of physical correctives such as false teeth, spectacles, and hearing aids improved life for a large number of elderly Britons, while cutting-edge medical advances such as hip replacement and artificial cardiac pacemaker technology promised the enjoyment of good health into advanced ages

⁶⁹ Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method*.

⁷⁰ For example Hilton, ‘The Clinical Psychiatry of Late Life in Britain from 1950 to 1970: An Overview’, pp.423-8; Matthews, ‘Dr. Marjory Warren and the Origin of British Geriatrics’, pp.253-8.

⁷¹ Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method*, p.95. For example Howell, *Old Age; Some Practical Points in Geriatrics*; Howell, *Our Advancing Years; an Essay on Modern Problems of Old Age*; Sheldon and Nuffield Foundation, *The Social Medicine of Old Age: Report of an Inquiry in Wolverhampton*; Williams, *Middle Age and Old Age*.

for a majority of the population.⁷² These political and medical developments contributed to the process described by Thomas Cole as the ‘scientific management of aging’ in which old age ‘was removed from its ambiguous place in life's spiritual journey, rationalized, and redefined as a scientific problem’ in public culture.⁷³

When they turned their attention to family life and networks of support to flesh out this medicalised story about old age, mid-century researchers were interested in information that had been used under the poor law to refuse older people financial aid and to locate relatives who could be forced to pay their costs, both dire outcomes for older Britons.⁷⁴ Accordingly, some interviewees closed down discussion after they had volunteered what they considered should be the most relevant information: the state of their health, their employment history, and their weekly expenditure. A few became suspicious at a researcher’s searching questions about members of their extended family and the nature and intensity of familial relations.⁷⁵ For example, when Ada Wensley heard of the purpose of her interviewer’s call she announced: ‘I’m in good health and I manage by myself. There’s nothing more to say.’⁷⁶ Ada anticipated questions that would assess her lifestyle and prescribe services according to the state’s standards of health and wellbeing, and was confused by her interviewer’s further interest in her circumstances, relationships, and feelings. Others displayed what social scientists considered ‘canny’ behaviour to assess whether their interviewers could offer financial assistance, or simply declared at the door: ‘I don’t want anything to do with it

⁷² Conrad, 'Old Age and the Health Care System in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', p.136; Charles Webster, *The National Health Service: A Political History*, 2nd edn, Oxford, 2002, p.30.

⁷³ Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America*, p.xx.

⁷⁴ Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, p.173.

⁷⁵ For example, interview with Elizabeth Reeves (aged 64), 17 June 1954, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

⁷⁶ Interview with Ada Wensley (aged 67), 26 January 1954, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

unless I get something out of it.’⁷⁷ As Carolyn Steedman and Todd have argued, class is a relationship and working-class values and identities have been formed in dialogue with middle-class reformers’ and social workers’ intrusions into their lives and neighbourhoods.⁷⁸ For example, ‘the theatrical element’ in the awarding of charity had required nineteenth-century working-class women ‘to present some kind of emergency or tragedy to qualify’ and their early-twentieth-century compatriots ‘to represent appropriate domesticity and morality’.⁷⁹ Suspicious or ‘canny’ reactions to researchers’ questions reminds us that while many working-class Britons did not speak in the language of mid-century expertise, their reactions did not exist independently of past upper- and middle-class intrusions into their lives.

Yet in mid-century iterations of social research, both social scientists and research subjects had the chance to ‘get something’ else out of the process of talking about health: information about the psychological experiences of the elderly on one hand, and the opportunity to tell stories and gain emotional composure on the other. For example, interviewees boasted of their good health or of their ability to cope with bad health, which was interpreted as a project of diligence. A ‘strong constitution’ was frequently described as a personal achievement, which many attributed to their correct choices in ‘clean living’ or to the discipline they displayed in resisting any temptation to ‘let themselves go’.⁸⁰ Likewise,

⁷⁷Interview with Rosina Marney (aged 77), 29 May 1954; interview with Elizabeth Reeves, aged 64, 17 June 1954, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

⁷⁸ Carolyn Steedman, ‘Enforced Narratives: Stories of Another Self’, in *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*, Tess Casslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield, eds, London and New York, 2000, pp.25-39; Selina Todd, ‘Affluence, Class and Crown Street: Reinvestigating the Post-War Working Class’, *Contemporary British History*, 22, 4, 2008, p.511.

⁷⁹ Mandler, *The Uses of Charity: The Poor on Relief in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis*, p.26.

⁸⁰ Interview with Elizabeth Thompson (aged 73), 24 June 1954; Rose Smith (aged 72), 14 June 1955; John Knight (aged 70), 9 August; Elizabeth Petken (aged 79), 23 November 1954, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

recovery from illness was framed as 'perseverance' and cured invalids proudly recounted the admiration or surprise of doctors and hospital staff over their good health.⁸¹ The approving comments made by relatives and members of the medical profession encouraged stoicism and made the ageing body a focus of esteem. For example when Florence Holborn and her husband discussed his recent stay in hospital after he had broken his spine, they used a network of characters and stories to create a strong impression of his resolve. Mr Holborn reported overhearing his doctor advising the man in the next bed, 'you be like this one, it's will-power that's getting him right'.⁸² Florence supported his anecdote, 'I heard all about him from others there. He was always laughing and cracking a joke.' Finally Mr Holborn performed his determination and good humour for the researcher by asserting 'well, it's no use lying there with a face like that' as he mimed 'a very long and hideous' expression. The couple revealed the way that ageing bodies were understood in a web of past and present values, anecdotes, and actions. In social research as well as in family life, individuals' efforts to align the state of their bodies with their self-identity and public image were bolstered by the answering acts of their loved ones and acquaintances.

Although many of Townsend's subjects regularly frequented doctors' surgeries and hospitals, they typically felt sceptical about the intentions and abilities of the medical professionals who treated them. For these residents of Bethnal Green, medical advice and terminology did not seem as clear or straightforward as it did on the pages of social surveys, but was reported with confusion and unease. Frances Muckley had talked to doctors and was aware of the medical terms that might describe her husband William's condition but she felt uncertain

⁸¹ Interview with Mrs C. (aged 85), pilot study; George Thornley (aged 70), 20 December 1954, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

⁸² Interviews with Florence Holborn (aged 68), 15 and 23 November, 7 December 1954, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

about his health and distrustful of the experts around him. She reported that he had ‘an ulcerated stomach and a lump on it’ but she did not know whether it was a tumour or cancerous as ‘[t]hey wouldn’t tell you if it was anything bad’.⁸³ She suggested that the medical advice the couple received had been uneven and vague: ‘In October they told him he’d be in hospital in a fortnight’s time but he’s still here. I think its because his blood pressure is too high.’ Older research participants expressed social conventions and values that were frequently at odds with social scientists’ expectation that older people with physical problems would visit a doctor to be diagnosed and then be prescribed the treatment or social service that could alleviate their difficulty.

Many interviewees took great pride in not visiting the doctor, interpreting this as a sign of their independence and strength and sharing their secret of self-medication — orange squash syrup, liquid paraffin, boiling water with salt, or Guinness — with the interviewer.⁸⁴ In addition, interviewees accused doctors of not taking the time to listen to them properly, of offering ineffectual pills, and of dismissing the problems of the older population as incurable and unimportant.⁸⁵ Research subjects who identified their doctor as helpful and admirable represented the relationship as personal, recounting the doctor’s long or particularly thoughtful service to the family. Yet even a doctor’s exemplarily personal touch did not guarantee regular check-ups. Lilian Johnson’s approval of the ‘kind’ and gentlemanly Doctor Jetang only convinced her to try to stay away, as he was busy and not ‘too well himself’.⁸⁶ These patterns of behaviour suggest that the prescriptions of government and medical

⁸³ Interview with Frances Muckley (aged 60), 1 March 1955, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

⁸⁴ Interview with Florence Parsons (aged 71), 25 January 1955; Eleanor Doree, (aged 72), 10 November 1954; Gertrude Arrowsmith (aged 64), 10 August 1955, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

⁸⁵ Interview with William Silk (aged 79), 27 October 1954, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

⁸⁶ Interview with Lilian Johnson (aged 63), 29 December 1954, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

professionals were tempered by people's observations of older relatives and neighbours (many interviewees had cared for an elderly parent in the past) and by the values of their friends and acquaintances. As Daniel Yeo reported, illness and operations were the favourite topic of conversation among the retired men and women who sat together and chatted in Victoria Park Square beside the Bethnal Green public library.⁸⁷ As sociologists have theorised more recently, older individuals compared symptoms and responses to them in order to 'measure their own performance' and evaluate other people's ability to cope in appropriate ways.⁸⁸

Drawing on local knowledge and their experiences of watching others, ageing research participants did not share the assumption of the state and social science research that old age was defined by or synonymous with ill health and physical debility. Older research subjects accepted that life altered in old age but expected to function in familiar ways, albeit more slowly and with some aches and pains. As anthropologist Dorothy Jerrome observed in the mid-1980s, for the old '[h]ealth is defined as the absence of acute sickness like having a temperature or feeling exhausted and weak, rather than as difficulties of immobility, pain or breathing — relatively common experiences in old age.'⁸⁹ For the mid-century elderly, too, good health was defined by their ability to function, to remain independent and fulfil their social roles, and not by expert opinion or medical symptoms.⁹⁰ Interviewees were stoic and even dismissive about ongoing complaints such as arthritis that could be managed privately, but treated the onset of debility quite differently. Sarah Agombar, the wife of a retired road sweeper and dustman, described her sudden illness at the age of 76 in short, dramatic

⁸⁷ Interview with Daniel Yeo (aged 74), 8 September 1955, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

⁸⁸ Dorothy Jerrome, *Good Company: An Anthropological Study of Old People in Groups*, Edinburgh, 1992, p.98.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.94.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.101-2.

sentences, implying that it was unexpected and shocking: ‘last January I collapsed in bed. It was as if I had a black-out. I was there two weeks. It’s the first illness I’d ever had.’⁹¹ Her relatives’ actions confirmed her understanding of the experience. Family members came ‘rushing up’ as ‘[t]hey’d never heard of Mum being ill in bed before.’ Although she was in her 70s, Sarah’s collapse was treated as a surprising and disruptive intrusion in the family’s life.

Older men and women employed a split vision of the ageing body to separate their identity, defined by their personal history and performance of social roles, from health problems. The concept of an involuntary or defence-mechanism ‘splitting’ of the ego was coined by Pierre Janet and then explored by Sigmund Freud during the last years of his life.⁹² Melanie Klein developed the concept of split conceptions of good and bad objects, especially in her theory of early child development.⁹³ This Kleinian version of splitting has been employed by historians Graham Dawson and Michael Roper to explore the function of adventure stories and soldier heroes in the navigation of modern masculinity, and the psychological activity of writing ‘unsent letters’ in order to maintain a professional masculine identity.⁹⁴ Historians of old age have discussed split conceptions of old age in Western culture — for instance by Victorian health reformers ‘into health and self-reliance on the one hand and undisciplined decay and dependency on the other’ — but have not considered how individuals could ‘split off’ the negative aspects of physiological ageing so they did not chip away at self-identity.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Interview with Sarah Agombar, 20 November 1954, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

⁹² For example in a 1938 essay that was published posthumously, see the English language version, Sigmund Freud, ‘Splitting of the Ego in the Defensive Process’, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 22, 1, 1941, pp.65-8.

⁹³ See Melanie Klein and Alix Strachey, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, London, 1932, p.153.

⁹⁴ Graham Dawson, *Solider Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*, London and New York, 1994; Roper, ‘Splitting in Unsent Letters: Writing as a Social Practice and a Psychological Activity’, pp.318-39.

⁹⁵ Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America*, p.94.

When Townsend asked them to describe their health, a number of interviewees established their true state ‘in myself’ and carefully demarcated this from their ailments, insisting: ‘I’m not ill in myself. It’s just the growth’; ‘I’m fairly good in myself, but it’s my eyes what worries me’; or ‘[a]s far as general health it’s good. But I’ve got arthritis badly.’⁹⁶ These replies simultaneously invited respect for their stoicism and proclaimed their ability to continue fulfilling proper social roles. Health problems did not present the opportunity to air personal challenges or to dramatize internal struggle in the way they might in the twenty-first century. Nor did the physical effects of ageing define or interrupt identity-formation, even when the complaint was as serious as bronchitis, a stroke, heart problems, arthritis, or cancer. This pattern confused their interviewers, who recorded the frequency with which people that appeared to them to be ‘almost dying on their feet’ insisted that they ‘mustn’t grumble’ or that their health was ‘fair’.⁹⁷ This disconnect was partly caused by the explanatory power social scientists had lent ill health in defining quality of life in old age; older men and women did not often experience ailments as their defining feature in the same way.

Instead, older women discussed their bodies in narratives of family loyalty, affection, and service. As Ellen Ross has described, nineteenth-century economic and emotional structures were linked in a system where married women ‘schemed, struggled, and starved’ for the survival of the family and the exchange of cash or kind in the children’s teenage years evened out this debt in addition to ‘spontaneous’ exchanges ‘between grateful adult children and

⁹⁶ Interview with Sarah Hubbard (aged 73), 29 August 1955; Daniel Sparks (aged 78), 21 June 1954; Sophie Simmons (aged 67), 17 August 1955, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

⁹⁷ Interview with Annie Waller (aged 78), 15 November 1954, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

their aging mothers'.⁹⁸ Mid-century social scientific interviews revealed that this system of emotional intimacy, financial exchange, repayment, and guilt continued to shape the lives of older men and women in 1950s London. The pension and supplementary assistance payments supported twentieth-century parents in their determination to impinge as little as possible on the domestic independence and finances of their married children, as they were able to live separately, spend frugally, and draw on whatever savings they had for a period of time. However, older research participants almost universally understood their children to be the appropriate source of financial support and personal care if their savings ran out or they experienced a sudden and devastating physical decline. In particular, older women's accounts of their health and of their place in the family were interconnected and frequently inseparable. Dramatic health incidents provided an opportunity for women to test and reassert their importance to family and friends. For instance when Mary Pheby, the wife of a beer bottler, had suddenly found herself unable to get out of bed she reported that her daughter took time off work to care for her and run errands on her behalf.⁹⁹ Mary described her son's similar devotion as evidence of the value of her own character. She boasted, 'if my son thought I wasn't well he'd give me the top brick off the house. He always says "a good heart never wants for long."' Mary's reflections were partly the result of an interview schedule that was closely interested in who cared for the infirm elderly but, equally, older women were eager to connect the question of who cared for their bodies to their relationships with adult children and grandchildren. These narratives of care folded a mother or wife's past virtues into a family's current habits and provision of material, financial, and emotional support.

⁹⁸ Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918*, p.8.

⁹⁹ Interview with Mary Pheby (aged 60), 1 February and 29 March 1955, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

The ageing women of Bethnal Green mourned their inability to carry out the domestic tasks of a devoted wife and mother, performing their domestic diligence through story-telling once scrubbing and sweeping became impossible. Annie Walker insisted: 'I'd be happier if I could do all the ironing and washing. I'm done for it. I was brought up to it. If only I could do it.'¹⁰⁰ Rose Smith was 72 and struggled with her infirmity but refused to give up domestic chores, explaining 'I'm not one to lay about' and anyway 'Dad couldn't manage like a woman.'¹⁰¹ Husbands and daughters helped these older women in the project of retaining these responsibilities and bolstered their hard-working reputation. Florence Parsons' daughter insisted that even in illness 'you wouldn't get' her mother 'to bed' and teased the researcher for asking whether her mother was assisted in her chores by her adult children, 'Help her with the shopping? ... don't put those ideas into her head. I want her to keep getting mine.'¹⁰² Whether through their physical efforts or their regrets, Bethnal Green women presented portraits of hard work that were undiminished by the debilities that came with age.

Men and women supported each other's narratives in an effort to place ageing bodies at the centre of life stories and coherent social identities. Some of the gendered dynamics of this exchange were made visible when researchers visited Lilian Kempley, an 80-year-old wife and mother who had suffered a stroke and could not walk. Lilian's adult daughter had been lifting and dressing her but could no longer manage to move her from her armchair, where she now lived and slept. Lilian's interview notes reflect social scientists' concern that such infirmity was inseparable from social isolation and loneliness. Yet she did not comply with

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Annie Waller (aged 78), 15 November 1954, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Rose Smith (aged 72), 14 June 1955, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

¹⁰² Interview with Florence Parsons (aged 71), 25 January 1955, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

this expectation and took the opportunity to state her positive self-identity as a mother, putting forward her ailing body as proof of her family's esteem. Lilian asserted, 'if I was lonely I could have plenty here. They think I'm a wonderful mother. They think I'm wonderful not to grumble.'¹⁰³ Her ageing body restricted her to an armchair but also elicited the attention and care of her family. She celebrated the way her debility offered her relatives the chance to act out their appreciation of her past maternal care as well as their ongoing respect for the stoicism she displayed in the face of physical debility. Lilian also framed her husband's aged body in the long sweep of his life and implied that his past strength was directly relevant to understanding his body in old age, though in a different realm. She said, 'he can't do anything now. He's been a wonderful workman in his time.'¹⁰⁴ Lilian's statements fell on either side of a gendered divide between family and the world of work. However, she also revealed a cross-gendered process of identity-formation which required the cooperation of husbands and wives, sons and daughters, neighbours, and friends.

Older men were also proud of the attentions of their family but their narratives centred on the value of the family's matriarch. Eighty-seven-year-old retired shop assistant George Henry Barker directly attributed the state of his body to close familial relationships: 'I've always been in good health. You see, people's always looked after me. I've had the best wife a man could ever have, and good daughters.'¹⁰⁵ Sixty-nine-year-old Charles Cheeseman was less fortunate and bled almost continuously from his chest. He and his wife Martha chose to stop the visits of the district nurse because Martha could change his dressing more regularly

¹⁰³ Interviews with Thomas Kempley (aged 82), 31 August and 15 October 1955, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with George Henry Barker (aged 87), 29 October 1954, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

than the nurse could visit, and before it began to smell.¹⁰⁶ The couple asserted this task as a special sign of their marital relationship, stating they ‘couldn’t expect’ their daughters to deal with the blood-stained sheets, dressings and bandages, and the sight of their father’s chest looking ‘like a bit of raw meat’. Charles’ body was in a state that sometimes made his wife want to vomit but it was also evidence of the intensity of her loyalty and affection, and therefore of his value. In his interview, Charles

recounted, with evident pride to both of them, a conversation he had with a hospital doctor. ‘He asked me who did my dressings. When I told him my wife did these dressings he said “You’re a very lucky fellow, very lucky fellow.”’

Charles’ bleeding but freshly-bandaged body was evidence of an exemplary marriage and family life and even qualified him as lucky in the eyes of an authoritative outsider. His was not a response that mid-century experts had anticipated.

In his 1954-1955 study, Townsend encountered a few individuals whose bodies presented insurmountable barriers to happiness and a well-formulated self-identity. This experience was difficult for the researchers to explore in their interview format which primarily relied on older people’s words and stories to represent their lives, in contrast to the ‘visual observation’ of bodies, clothes, households, and streets by ‘cultivated’ informers that had informed early-twentieth-century social surveys.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, Townsend seemed unprepared for the few interviewees among some two hundred who were not able to hold their identity and life story together in conversation. Charles Ellwood’s wife, Rose, was housebound after fracturing her leg and spine several years before and at the time of her interview had not left their flat for four months. Charles indicated their shared distress over

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Charles Cheeseman (aged 69), 15 January 1954, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

¹⁰⁷ Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method*, p.94.

her infirmity by describing a series of events but did not report that the older couple had been able to voice the causes and nature of their feelings, even to each other:

The old gel has a lot to bear and I don't know what she thinks stuck up here every day. Sometimes I comes home and there she is sitting in the corner of the room and she doesn't say a word. She just looks at me. She goes on looking at me as I go about getting the tea and I says 'what's the matter? Are you thinking how it was years ago?' and then sometimes she will burst into tears. I don't know how she stands it.¹⁰⁸

For Charles, Rose's experience of infirmity was unfathomable, partly because Rose herself did not seem capable of putting her suffering into words. There were other instances of overwhelming physical and emotional difficulty, too. Alice Bentley was depressed over her poor health and had attempted suicide several times.¹⁰⁹ Sarah Ware began to weep as she recounted her depression and failing physical faculties.¹¹⁰ In both these cases the interviewer drew back from the distressing subject of health to allow their interviewee to express themselves with greater clarity and more self-possession about other things. What they did record suggests that in some cases the ageing body could threaten emotional stability, identity, and the ability to live out a meaningful old age.

Conclusion

In Rose's story, we encounter the limits of what narrative could achieve in the face of debility and grief. Her wordless despair resembled the anomie mid-century social scientists frequently attributed to old age. Yet this chapter has shifted us beyond the social scientific employment of such imagery as a summation of old age. Rose's ageing body had meaning in

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Charles Ellwood (aged 71), 15 June 1954, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Alice Bentley (aged 67), 13 January 1955, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Sarah Ware (aged 72), 8 August 1955, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

relationship to her public and private social roles and her narratives of self. Private and domestic cultures could incorporate the negative aspects of her physiological ageing to a surprising degree, but could not make financial or physical difficulties disappear. By tracing some of the opportunities social research participants found to reaffirm their self-identity and life histories in old age, I have shown that the body, public and private social roles, and subjectivity were interwoven in different ways than experts assumed: there was no straightforward connection between physical or financial misfortune and melancholy, and identity was not wedded to the material circumstances of the present but was equally shaped by story-telling about the past. Old age emerges from the stories in this chapter as a vital field of inquiry in the histories of subjectivity and emotion. In considering this time of life, we witness how key aspects of selfhood such as work, health, and family life built upon each other and also how the collapse of one aspect of identity — such as Rose’s malfunctioning body — could threaten the entire project.

While historians have spilt much ink discussing the extent to which Mass Observation volunteers were ‘representative’ of the British population, they have spent less time considering whether the preoccupations and methods of social research projects allowed participants to tell stories that faithfully represented even their own bodies and lives.¹¹¹ This chapter has woven together some of the unexpected stories told by older people in order that they may challenge our perception of old age as a period of misery brought on by unproductivity, boredom, and physical decline — an image that is itself a legacy of mid-

¹¹¹ Sue Harper, Vincent Porter, and Mass-Observation Archive, *Weeping in the Cinema in 1950: A Reassessment of Mass-Observation Material*, *Mass-Observation Archive Occasional Papers Series*, Brighton, 1995, p.2; Kushner, *We Europeans?: Mass-Observation, 'Race' and British Identity in the Twentieth Century*, pp.112-3; Jenny Shaw, *Intellectual Property, Representative Experience and Mass-Observation*, *Mass-Observation Archive Occasional Papers Series*, Sussex, 1998, p.5; Dorothy Sheridan and Mass-Observation Archive, *'Damned Anecdotes and Dangerous Confabulations': Mass-Observation as Life History*, *Mass-Observation Archive Occasional Papers Series*, Sussex, 1996, p.15.

century intellectual and political concerns. Yet this same evidence reveals the boundary of what story-telling could achieve within private experiences of old age and convey to researchers — beyond which the emotional experiences of ageing remained and remain a private matter. These tragic scenes offer further evidence of the limitations of language in conveying and recording certain historical experiences and therefore emphasise the same set of challenges posed by archival research that Roper has explored in his writing on experiences of fear and violence.¹¹² They broaden the range of emotional experience that should be afforded the careful attention Roper has given to traumatic wartime experiences by suggesting that everyday and monotonous experiences of pain, poverty, and debility, could defy the expressive capabilities of written or spoken language in the same way.

¹¹² Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War*.

Chapter four

The emotional landscape of the home: marriage, family, and bereavement

In January 1955 Alfred Harvey delivered an expressive and thoughtful account of his relationship with his wife to the listening social researcher Peter Townsend, who was interested in the family lives of the ageing residents of Bethnal Green, East London.

She's always been something different from other people to me. She was always kind when you were queer. You can't tell how you miss someone until they go. Death's a terrible thing, to lose someone you love. She never grumbled, all the times when I was walking and walking, trying to get work. She was exceptional, what you would call exceptional good. My son misses his mother. He went into his room and he cried that terrible. And I cried too, especially when I heard one of those dramas on the wireless where there was a husband and wife rowing. Just to think of all the happiness we've had.

Sometimes I get lonely. I think of her. There's not a day passes but she's in my mind. When she died I don't know how I stood on my feet. You don't know what it is when you don't have a wife. Sometimes I think I hear her calling in the new room.¹

Nine years after his wife's death, Alfred gave a detailed and heartfelt description of their married life and his feelings on the day she died. Based on existing histories of marriage and of old age, the 83-year-old's discussion of the distinctive nature of his love for his spouse ('She's always been something different from other people to me') and his intense, long-standing grief over her death ('I don't know how I stood on my feet') appears to be an

¹ Interview with Alfred Harvey (aged 83), 3 January 1955, SN 4723 Family Life of Old People, 1865-1955, The Peter Townsend collection, National Social Policy and Social Change Archive, available digitally through UK Data Archives (UKDA), <http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-4723-1>.

unusual outburst of emotion amid the prosaic attitudes of long-married, elderly, working-class men. Yet marital bonds were often as strong as Alfred's in old age and widowhood was a compelling motivation to honour them in front of others. Further, Alfred's tribute laid out a series of different ways that his everyday domestic life reinforced and symbolised the depth of his feelings, when he listened to the radio or imagined that he could hear his wife in another room. This chapter explores how the home channelled emotional experiences in old age and tracks intense manifestations of joy and despair by exploring older men and women's experiences of marriage and bereavement.

This version of the end to a marriage's life cycle, in widowhood, encouraged reflections on love and the marital relationship which were demonstrated in the particularly open and emotional life histories rehearsed by those participants in social research projects who described the death of a loved one. Older men and women spoke in great detail about the illness of their spouses and the experience of nursing them or seeing them die, describing their heartbreak when a husband struggled to walk to the ambulance, or the way a wife lay on the floor in a seizure.² The emotional impact of these stories was delivered in intimate and sometimes gory details supplied side-by-side with the tropes of romantic love. Eliza Simmons, a 67-year-old widow, recounted the trials she faced during her husband's time in hospital in great detail, offering what Townsend called a 'minute by minute' and 'graphic account of the last days', but concluded romantically, 'He was an angel from heaven, I miss every hair on his head.'³ Moreover, older people identified a spouse's death as the event that made them realise the depth of their feeling. From the standpoint of widowhood, Alfred's

² Interviews with Annie Waller (aged 78), 15 November 1954; William Silk (aged 79), 27 October 1954, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

³ Interview with Eliza Simmonds (aged 67), 1 November 1954, Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

wife's loveable qualities were especially clear to him. He had reflected on their marriage and the strength of his feelings in the dramatic aftermath of her death — when his son was inconsolable and Alfred could hardly stand — and then during his everyday routines about the house, for almost a decade. Their shared history provided the material for his reflections; Alfred positioned his feelings as a response to his wife's death but his memories reached back further into the past to celebrate her patience when he was unemployed and 'walking and walking' to find work, in a scene that evoked the infamous hardships of the 1930s.

Widowhood was a common experience in mid-century Britain, especially for women who had longer life expectancy and generally married at younger ages compared to men.⁴ Yet apart from noting the frequency of its occurrence and its effect on pensions policy, this aspect of emotional life has rarely been touched on by British historians of old age. Instead, discussions of widowhood in American, British, and European history have focused on questions of demographic and social history, primarily exploring the place of widows and widowers in household economies.⁵ In contrast, this chapter has the emotional significance of marriage and bereavement at its heart, and therefore explores widowhood in the context of affective life, home, and family. These topics highlight important emotional experiences that have not featured in histories of old age and how these were built in to the domestic routines and spaces that have frequently been associated with this period of life. They

⁴ Dorothy Cole Wedderburn, 'Economic Aspects of Ageing', *International Social Science Journal*, 15, 3, 1963, p.403; Marjo Buitelaar, 'Widows' Worlds: Representations and Realities', in *Between Poverty and the Pyre: Moments in the History of Widowhood*, Lourens P. van den Bosch and Jan N. Bremmer, eds, London, 1995, p.5.

⁵ Ida Blom, 'The History of Widowhood: A Bibliographic Overview', *Journal of Family History*, 16, 2, 1991, pp.191-210.

deepen the previous chapter's discussion of the personal dimensions of retirement and ill health, both of which also changed the nature of marital relationships.

The home has been both the most common setting for social scientific and historical studies of old age in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Britain and an important category of analysis within them, but scholars have been primarily interested in the way intergenerational relationships played out within its walls.⁶ Through this focus on older Britons' experiences as parents and as dependent members of multi-generational households, the domestic boundaries of these studies have connoted restricted emotional lives in which older Britons have appeared to be concerned exclusively with the minor tasks and struggles of daily life. With their private lives almost always understood through the lens of their relationship with their children, the strong feelings experienced by older Britons have been assumed to include loyalty, pride, and resentment, but the passions of marriage and romance have been virtually ignored.⁷ This chapter considers how the home was an emotionally-laden setting for old age in different ways by exploring demonstrations of marital devotion and grief. While older Britons' stories about their work, health, and retirement demonstrate the wide scope of social roles that was available to individuals in their later lives, narratives about domestic and family life show the depth of feeling that was also a feature of this end of the life cycle.

This exploration of the emotional drama of late life extends this thesis' critique of the ubiquitous notion that a 'social death' predated the biological end of a life. According to scholars who have written on old age from the mid-century to the present day, 'elderly

⁶ Pat Thane, 'The Family Lives of Old People', in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity*, Paul Johnson and Pat Thane, eds, London, 1998, pp.180-210.

⁷ Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, pp.300-2.

people in Britain are channelled collectively away from the main areas of social activity and their social ties with the wider society are progressively weakened in anticipation of their biological end'.⁸ This process ostensibly begins with retirement and removal from the workplace. Afterwards, lower earnings restrict older people's access to consumption, economic life, and many aspects of socialising. According to the theory, the apogee of an elderly person's social isolation occurs when they are removed from a family home to live in an institution, where they are no longer treated as an individual or as if they have a life worth living. The middle of the twentieth century has been identified by many scholars as the historical period when these processes were established: retirement was a common experience for the first time in the 1950s, new languages of expertise posed ageing as a medical challenge to be managed rather than understood philosophically, and the number of older people who lived out their later life in an institution increased.⁹ For example, Sheila Adams has traced the '[d]isplacement' of death from the home to the hospital and funeral parlour during the interwar years, in a case study of Coventry.¹⁰ The 'pattern of informal care' for the dead that had been organised by women and carried out by a neighbourhood 'layer-out' was replaced by 'the professional care of the dying by the medical and nursing professions and the professional treatment of the dead body by morticians'.¹¹ In fact, since the mid-century period, scholars have taken the institutionalisation of death to typify modern

⁸ Mulkay, 'Social Death in Britain', p.35.

⁹ Glennys Howarth, *Death and Dying: A Sociological Introduction*, Cambridge, 2006, p.24; Jane Littlewood, 'The Denial of Death and Rites of Passage in Contemporary Societies', in *The Sociology of Death*, David Clark, ed., Oxford, 1993, p.71.

¹⁰ Sheila Adams, 'A Gendered History of the Social Management of Death in Folehill, Coventry, During the Interwar Years', in *The Sociology of Death*, David Clark, ed., Oxford, 1993, p.149.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.149-50.

Britain and its social relations. For instance in 1955 British anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer argued that death had replaced sex as British society's primary taboo.¹²

This chapter and the previous one work together as a prolonged rebuttal to the idea that ageing in mid-twentieth-century Britain was analogous to a process of social death. Chapter three established older people's flexible relationship to public social roles and formal organisations, and described how even those dimensions of ageing that have been interpreted to be steps towards alienation, such as ill health and retirement, could reaffirm self-identity within domestic cultures of story-telling and conversation. Chapter four considers domestic spaces and marital relationships in order to evoke the depth and complexity of emotional attachments that were formed in old age. Its material complements the previous chapter's illumination of the broad scope of social roles claimed by older Britons by exploring the strength and emotional freighting of their closest relationships. In particular, I argue that the home was a primary emotional landscape for later life and that it shaped — and was shaped by — the process of ageing. Mid-century social science and social policy work was anxious about home and family life but followed a methodology that left some of its aspects hidden from view, especially the romantic devotion and despair I analyse below.

The present chapter departs from the discussion of intergenerational exchange and dependence that was established in mid-century social science to chart some of the high (and low) drama of love and death in old age. To draw out the significance of the social science

¹² In 1981 Philippe Ariès described these behaviours as the 'denial of death' in the West, achieved by removing the dying from view. Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, London, 1981; Geoffrey Gorer, 'The Pornography of Death', *Encounter*, 1955, pp.49-52.

tradition for our understandings of family life, my starting point is an exploration of how family life and its affective aspects were presented in Peter Townsend's sociological study *The Family Life of Old People* (1957). Townsend experimented with analytical and presentational techniques in order to do justice to the social lives and feelings of his elderly subjects but primarily focused on connections between the generations, therefore missing out significant aspects of his participants' emotional lives. I consider the interview notes which informed Townsend's published study in conjunction with older mass-observers' writing about marriage, home, and family in order to illuminate experiences of marriage and bereavement in later life. Older men and women offered touching descriptions of romantic love and companionship and identified particular experiences of marriage which they understood to be unique to old age, such as being forced to spend more time together, for good or ill, and potentially realising a distinctive form of cooperation. Like changes within married life due to retirement or illness, the ways that widows and widowers coped with the death of a spouse were organised to fit the domestic realm; the home was the primary site for mourning and expressions of grief, which hinged on everyday rituals and objects that were afforded great emotional significance. Such personal experiences of marriage and bereavement freshly illuminate the particular significance of home in later life and expand our conception of emotional life in old age.

Social research, home, and family

Social researchers had been preoccupied with the home from the beginning of the twentieth century. The influential poverty studies that were completed around the turn of the century measured poverty by household, and Charles Booth famously presented his findings about

poverty in London in a map of its streets.¹³ These early surveys described the built environment of cities to evoke the emotions of their research subjects. In Seebohm Rowntree's account of York, 'dingy walls' and 'narrow streets' conveyed 'depression', and 'dilapidation' revealed the 'character of the tenants'.¹⁴ The continuity of these environmentalist concerns through the first half of the twentieth century has been traced by Matthew Hollow in his history of state housing.¹⁵ However, in the mid-century, domestic arrangements in the home attracted fresh concern. For instance, Harvard sociologist Talcott Parsons' influential assertion that the increased geographical mobility of younger people in modern society left old people isolated encouraged British commentators to worry about the corrosive influence of industrialisation, urbanisation, and welfare services on family bonds.¹⁶ Commentators worried that families and local communities had been forced apart by workers' migration to cities and no longer cooperated through their informal labour, while expanding social services ostensibly destroyed whatever feelings of familial responsibility had survived. Researchers such as Michael Young, Peter Willmott, and Richard Titmuss responded to these critiques of modern Britain and its welfare politics by measuring the closeness of relations between ageing Britons and their adult children and applying social science methods to the domestic realm in the hope of producing accurate appraisals of the affective landscape of the home.¹⁷ This conversation employed an interest in emotions to assess the ethics of social welfare from the perspectives of both its advocates and critics;

¹³ Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*; Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*.

¹⁴ Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, pp.152, 4.

¹⁵ Hollow, 'Housing Needs: Power, Subjectivity and Public Housing in England, 1920-1970'.

¹⁶ Cosin, *The Need for Emotional Adjustments in the Elderly*, p.4; W. Andrew Achenbaum and Peter N. Stearns, 'Old Age and Modernization', *The Gerontologist*, 18, 3, 1978, pp.307-12; Thane, 'The Family Lives of Old People', p.181.

¹⁷ Sheldon and Nuffield Foundation, *The Social Medicine of Old Age: Report of an Inquiry in Wolverhampton*; Townsend and Institute of Community Studies, *The Family Life of Old People: An Inquiry in East London*; Tunstall, *Old and Alone: A Sociological Study of Old People*; Young, Willmott, Titmuss, and Institute of Community Studies, *Family and Kinship in East London*.

social researchers argued that older people should not be left alone in the home, where they would feel lonely, but neither should familial and state intervention stifle independence or self-respect.

Contrary to the expectations of a number of politicians and social researchers, the introduction of the pension in 1908 had little impact on the living arrangements of the elderly.¹⁸ Instead, a decisive shift in household makeup occurred after the First World War when the real value of the pension rose and older people were able to retain the independence of their households and avoid imposing on their children.¹⁹ Instead of viewing this trend as an index of financial independence, mid-century expert commentators cited the rising number of old people living alone as evidence of their social isolation. Physician Trevor Howell wrote that loneliness was among ‘the greatest enemies’ of the elderly and linked their solitary existence to senility and ‘rapid deterioration’.²⁰ In 1960, gerontologist Kenneth Hazell introduced his analysis of the ‘elderly at home’ by summarising the strands of psychological, medical, and existential concern that had coalesced around older Britons living alone,

There is little doubt that one of the most serious hardships for the elderly is loneliness. Out of the millions, there are some who do not object to it, but this should not mislead anyone into thinking it is not a dreadful hardship to the majority. The affliction is of a negative kind — just being left alone, of no interest to anyone, just waiting to die, or as if they never existed or their lives had any meaning. For those without relatives it is a hard thing to bear, and for those with relatives who never visit them it leads to cynical despair. Continued loneliness brings about, not only mental illness in the way of apathy, indifference, depression or even dementia,

¹⁸ Richard Wall, 'Elderly Persons and Members of Their Households in England and Wales from Preindustrial Times to the Present', in *Aging in the Past: Demography, Society, and Old Age*, David I. Kertzer and Peter Laslett, eds, Berkeley and London, 1995, p.100.

¹⁹ Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, pp.304-6.

²⁰ Howell, *Our Advancing Years; an Essay on Modern Problems of Old Age*, pp.18-9.

but also physical illness resulting from lack of reasonable exercise, inattention to diet with poor nutrition, and failure to obtain treatment for any accompanying illnesses.²¹

From this perspective, to live alone was a disaster for an elderly person's chances of maintaining health and happiness, and the increasing likelihood of this household arrangement was therefore an indictment of British family life. Motivated by this mixture of medical, psychological, and economic concerns, social researchers, politicians, and physicians were careful to record the composition of households and to predict the willingness of adult children to care for their parents. The narrative of declining familial support due to industrialisation, urbanisation, and the establishment of the welfare state was a dominant feature of public discussions about the elderly population and informed the writing of a variety of experts, encouraged by popular fears over the ageing population and debates over the morality and efficacy of the postwar welfare state.²²

In 1948 physician Joseph Sheldon intervened in this conversation by explaining that solving the 'problem' of care for the aged required more careful attention to British social and family life and, in particular, a better understanding of the relationship between generations. While working within the parameters of the existing debate, Sheldon suggested that much social knowledge of family life in old age was hearsay or assumption. As he wrote in the introduction to his study of the 'social medicine' of old age,

No solutions of this coming problem is likely to either be equitable or successful which is not based on what one may term the normal social biology of old age. The object of the present inquiry was to explore this field; to determine the ways in which the community at present deals with old age; and to discover, if possible, what

²¹ Hazell, *Social and Medical Problems of the Elderly*, pp.179-80.

²² See the speeches and comments made by government ministers, medical doctors, representatives of charitable organisations, and academics during mid-century National Old People's Welfare Committee conferences, National Old People's Welfare Committee, *Working Together for Old People's Welfare*, p.6. National Old People's Welfare Committee, *Welfare Problems of Old People*, pp.6, 44-6; National Old People's Welfare Committee, *The Care of Old People*, pp.5, 8.

hardships are imposed and what strains are created both on the old people themselves and on those who look after them.²³

Here, Sheldon called attention to everyday family life and its apprehension through social science as important factors in the design of social policies that might solve the ‘coming problem’ of supporting the elderly population. Moreover, he pointed out that most elderly people lived in their own homes — calculating that 98 per cent of old people did so in the area he would study in Wolverhampton — so that the physical and mental health of this population, and not the institutionalised elderly, should inform policy.²⁴ In his methodology and findings, Sheldon developed social scientific assessments of home and family life that, he argued, would better apprehend the nuances of social interactions. Rather than counting the number of old people living alone, he tracked people’s movements within and beyond households, calculating the percentage of old people in Wolverhampton whose daily routines were restricted by their trouble navigating staircases or crossing roads.²⁵ Through these measurements Sheldon described the close relations between generations living in different homes, whose occupants were ‘independent in health and co-operative in illness’.²⁶ Elderly individuals were judged to live near their relatives when a hot meal could be carried door-to-door without re-heating.²⁷ Sheldon demonstrated that the boundaries of households were frequently crossed during familial interactions and in care for elderly relatives. He highlighted the important role played by relatives — whose contributions were far greater than they had been given credit for within political debate — and that new methodologies were required to understand how family and home life operated in old age.

²³ Sheldon and Nuffield Foundation, *The Social Medicine of Old Age: Report of an Inquiry in Wolverhampton*, p.1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.13, 33, 7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.140-8.

²⁷ Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, p.409.

Published just under a decade later, Townsend's *The Family Life of Old People* built on Sheldon's approach. In his foreword to the book, Sheldon hoped the 'wealth of facts' it presented about 'the role of the family in the lives of so many of our old people' would inform social policy.²⁸ Like Sheldon, Townsend extended the social scientific traditions that had afforded houses great explanatory power but complicated the relationship between the borders of a household and the social and emotional lives of its inhabitants. Townsend's introduction to the East London borough of Bethnal Green re-worked early-twentieth-century social scientific observations of working-class neighbourhoods and reversed the conclusion they had drawn about life in the 'London slums'.²⁹ He wrote that the terraced cottages of Bethnal Green displayed 'neatness and dignity' and their 'small back-yards and gardens' showed that privacy was sacred to the inhabitants.³⁰ Household possessions revealed the variety of emotional lives that were played out inside these cottages: photos indicated the size of families, incorrect clocks were a sign of isolation and 'weary resignation', furniture had frequently been gifted by or inherited from loved ones, and radios and televisions were evidence of connection to the outside world.³¹ Like Sheldon before him, Townsend highlighted the difference that growing older made to domestic lives. He wrote that in the home, 'associations with the past and long usage provided comfort and security in old age'.³² For the older residents of Bethnal Green, who had lived in the same house for an average of 24 years, home 'embodied a thousand memories and held promise

²⁸ Townsend and Institute of Community Studies, *The Family Life of Old People: An Inquiry in East London*, p.v.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.11.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.11-2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp.14-5.

³² *Ibid.*, p.27.

of a thousand contentments'.³³ In old age, the household was 'an extension of personality' and 'a symbol of family unity and tradition'.³⁴

To match these psychological insights, Townsend quantified the function of home and family for old people. He calculated that his 203 research subjects had 2,700 relatives living near them and an average of 13 family members within a mile of their home.³⁵ Eighty-five per cent of these older people had children living within a mile of their home and half had children living on the same street, in the same block of flats, or just around the corner.³⁶ On average, his research subjects met one of their relatives each day.³⁷ Experimenting with how best to comprehend and communicate these social facts, Townsend presented older people's primary social connections in 'kinship maps' that arranged marriages, births, and visiting patterns in visual format (below).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., p.31.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., p.39.

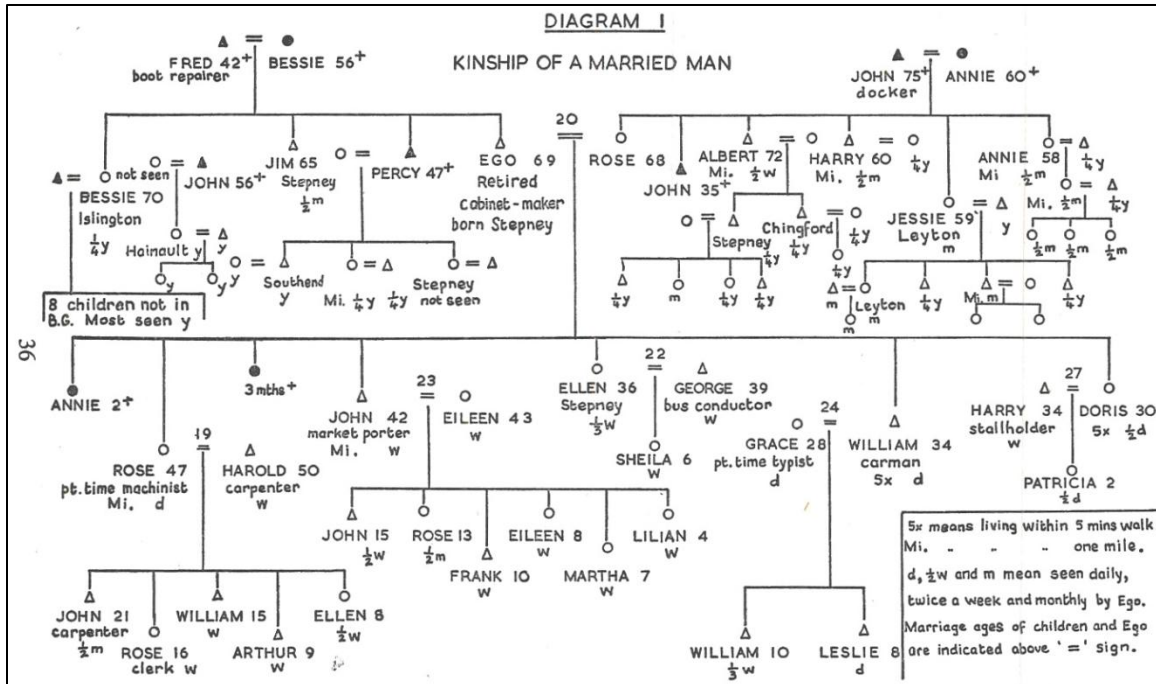


Figure 12: Townsend’s ‘kinship diagram’ embedded his research subjects (labelled as ‘ego’ in the diagram) in an extensive and complex web of family relations. The key indicated which family members lived within five minutes’ walk or one mile and how often they met with the research subject. Peter Townsend and Institute of Community Studies, *The Family Life of Old People: An Inquiry in East London, Reports of the Institute of Community Studies*, London, 1957, p.36.

These maps built on the quantitative evidence Townsend gathered about the density of families within this East London neighbourhood by conveying the richness of social life through the crowdedness of each diagram and its web of connections, while adopting the appearance of a logical and scientific arrangement of knowledge in its key, signs, and straight lines. Of course, the diagrams communicated a set of mid-century social arrangements that relied on the close confines of urban boroughs. The living and visiting arrangements demonstrated by Townsend’s research subjects were on the brink of profound changes that would be wrought by slum clearance, suburbanisation, and the building of council estates on the edges of cities. When they moved to council estates families also moved further apart and began to spend more time commuting to and from workplaces, so that daily visiting became much harder. This change was itself the subject of social scientific attention as early

as 1934, in a survey of the Becontree and Dagenham estates on the outskirts of London, and was discussed in many working-class autobiographies that were written in the later twentieth century, especially among those that were published by community presses in the 1970s.³⁸ While signalling a change in the social scientific treatment of older people by highlighting the richness of their social networks, Townsend's kinship maps reaffirmed that the parental roles of older people and the operation of their extended familial networks were the key points of inquiry for social researchers attempting to understand social and emotional life in old age.

Townsend's interest in uncovering and presenting emotionally laden truths about old age — as well as his conviction that such truths would be found in family and home lives — are suggested in his plea for the publication of photographs of older people with their families in the published version of his study (below).

³⁸ Young and Becontree Social Survey Committee, *Becontree and Dagenham: A Report Made for the Pilgrim Trust*. The Pilgrim Trust was founded in 1930 by the wealthy American philanthropist Edward Stephen Harkness. Harkness endowed the Trust with just over £2 million to be given in grants for some of Britain's 'more urgent needs' and to 'promote her future well-being'. The final chapter of this thesis explores this aspect of 1970s working-class autobiography.

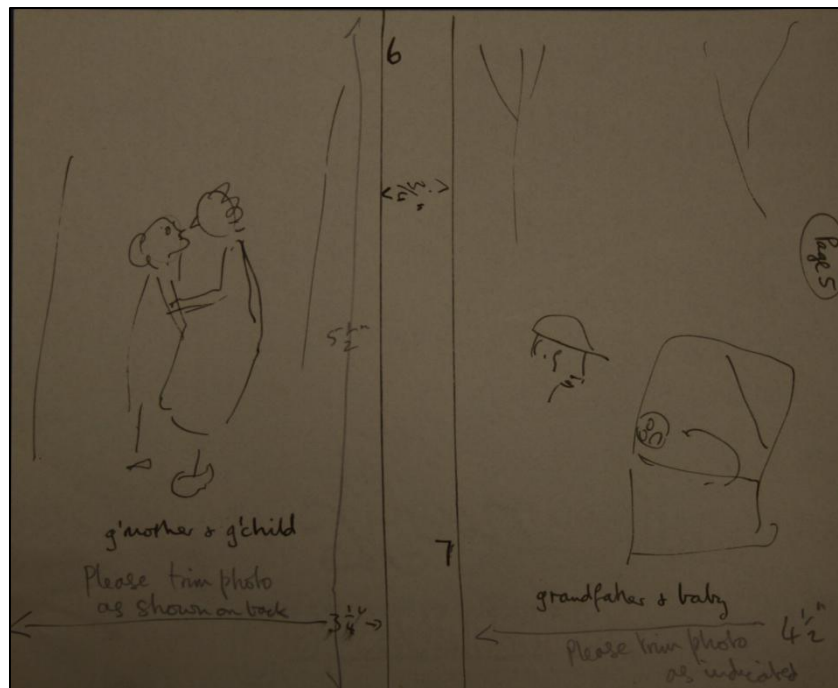


Figure 13 and Figure 14: 'Grandfather & baby'. Townsend's photographs, and his plans for their reproduction, drew attention to the involvement of grandparents in childcare during a period when family life, motherhood, and fatherhood were afforded new importance within popular culture and developmental theory. Box 35, file B9: photographs, in the Peter Townsend collection, SN 4723 The Family Life of Old People 1865-1955, National Social Policy and Social Change Archive.

Townsend's photographic portrait of 'grandfather and baby' illustrated one of the vital social tasks that Townsend argued were performed by older people as part of a generational exchange which he emphasised was two-way, with elderly relatives contributing as much to household economies as they consumed. He placed it beside another portrait of childcare, 'grandmother and grandchild', and framed both shots to cut others out of the frame and bring each pair forward, emphasising their closeness to each other. As Laura King has argued, fatherhood was invested with a greater significance in mid-twentieth-century Britain than has commonly been recognised.³⁹ The 'changing circumstances of this era', chiefly 'rising living standards, reduced family size and an emphasis on the nuclear family as a self-contained, private unit' encouraged the development of 'family-orientated masculinity'.⁴⁰ The importance of fatherhood was reinforced by the social and psychological sciences, whose practitioners stressed that fathers and children were 'of extreme importance to each other' and described the detrimental effects of absent fathers.⁴¹ New attention to the psychological importance of childhood in these disciplines and in the popular press, led to an 'intensification' of fatherhood, as well as motherhood, in this period.⁴² As King has highlighted, the apparently increasingly common sight of a 'family man' out pushing a pram was eagerly discussed by social scientists and in the popular press, and was frequently celebrated as a symbol of the shifts that were occurring in British marriages and in understandings of masculinity.⁴³ Building on this conversation, Townsend's image of a grandfather with a pram suggested that older men played an equally significant role in mid-century family life.

³⁹ King, 'Hidden Fathers? The Significance of Fatherhood in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain', pp.25-6.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.27.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.28.

⁴³ Laura King, 'Pushing the Pram with Pride? Fatherhood and Masculinity Represented and Experienced in Post-War Britain', Paper Presented at the Social History Society Conference, University of Manchester, 13 April 2011.

Townsend selected 13 photographs for publication in *The Family Life of Old People* which depicted a variety of familial relationships and occasions — in addition to images of grandparenthood these included a family on the beach, a sister and her infant brother in Bethnal Green, and a wedding reception at a bride's home.⁴⁴ This set of photographs featured varied and lively human scenes set against the brick walls and narrow lanes of East London. Townsend's tightly cropped compositions — in which the viewer appeared to be standing amid a circle of relatives in a doorway in one example, and people laughed into the camera in another — communicated the busyness and intimacy of the family lives that were on display and highlighted some of the significant social connections in old age, which were echoed in the stories told by his interviewees. Writing to the Chairman of his publishing company, which had decided against the inclusion of photographs because they would 'lower the tone' of his academic work, Townsend insisted on the vital importance of his portraits, even offering to reduce the size of the images or to fund some of the cost of their printing out of his own pocket.⁴⁵ Townsend argued that his images were necessary to explain Bethnal Green to readers who lived outside of London, in line with British scholars' mid-century impulse to apply anthropological perspectives to their home communities.⁴⁶ But he also believed that the photographs powerfully stated his points about older people's family lives; they were not mere illustrations but had been 'carefully selected' to add a 'new dimension' to his argument about the close-knit family structures which did the real work of

⁴⁴ Nine of the fifteen photographs featured family groups. List headed 'Photos', Box 35, File B9, The Family Life of Old People, ASL.

⁴⁵ Letters from Cecil A. Franklin to Peter Townsend, 7 March 1957, from Peter Townsend to Cecil A. Franklin, 11 March 1957, from Cecil A. Franklin to Peter Townsend, 12 March 1957, Box 35, File B9: photographs, in the Peter Townsend collection, SN 4723 The Family Life of Old People 1865-1955, National Social Policy and Social Change Archive, held at Albert Sloman Library, Colchester, University of Essex, (ASL).

⁴⁶ Letter from Peter Townsend to Cecil A. Franklin, 11 March 1957, Box 35, File B9, The Family Life of Old People, ASL.

financial and social support of the elderly in Britain.⁴⁷ However, while offering a rich depiction of older people's domestic contributions and participation in domestic work and social occasions, Townsend's diverse attempts to analyse emotional life in old age each focused on these aspects of family life to the exclusion of older people's intimate relationships with each other. This chapter illustrates that romantic experiences were discussed by older research participants during social scientific interviews and observations, including those conducted by Townsend, even though they remained outside the frame of most social scientific theories about old age.

Love in later life

In order to access descriptions of love, marriage, and widowhood in old age, and therefore consider the emotional experience of ageing in the round, this chapter departs from crowded doorsteps and busy kitchen tables to visit the home's places of solitude and reflection: perhaps a favourite chair at the end of the day or a mantelpiece stocked with photographs. Striking a different note to the animated family lives depicted by mid-century social scientists, Amanda Vickery has traced British preoccupation with the private haven of home through the eighteenth century, when 'access to a small place of privacy held out a promise of some autonomy and independence' while an existence 'with no vestiges of privacy was understood to be a most sorry degradation, which stripped away the defences of the spirit'.⁴⁸ Claire Langhamer has discussed the widening of the ideal, if not always the reality, of inhabiting a home that was 'a place of relaxation, freedom, peace and privacy' in the postwar

⁴⁷ Letter from Peter Townsend to Cecil A. Franklin, 11 March 1957, Box 35, File B9, The Family Life of Old People, ASL.

⁴⁸ Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England*, New Haven and London, 2009, pp.28-9.

era and has described how mass-observers writing in 1942 understood such a home to offer both 'actual physical comfort and a psychic space within which to establish and develop personal and family identities'.⁴⁹ The valorisation of domesticity developed particular power in mid-century Britain when postwar hopes for family life, consumer culture, and affluence aligned most clearly in middle-class depictions of the home. As Matt Houlbrook has explored, this 'transformation of bourgeois culture' had wide-reaching influence over emotional lives, in part because the 'domestic sphere became the central site in the formation of male sexual practices and identities'.⁵⁰ While demonstrations of 'household pride' had helped to define 'what it meant to be British' since the early-nineteenth century or before, 'the making and securing of British family life' appeared particularly vital amid postwar reconstruction so that existing links between identity, affective life, and the home were rearticulated and strengthened.⁵¹ The middle-class notion of the domestic realm as a setting for privacy and leisure contrasts with the crowded social spaces of Bethnal Green as they were depicted by Townsend in his kinship maps and photographs. Yet these quieter, more intimate, and potentially romantic exchanges were also experienced by older working-class couples, who lived in their own homes for as long as they were able to. Even when it was accompanied by poverty and ill health, old age was understood by many as a special period of companionship within marriage, while the rituals of memory and memorial that were described by elderly widows and widowers were embedded in domestic spaces.

⁴⁹ Langhamer, 'The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain', p.344.

⁵⁰ Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957*, Chicago and London, 2005, pp.198, 201.

⁵¹ Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions*, New Haven and London, 2006, p.ix; Langhamer, 'Love, Selfhood and Authenticity in Post-War Britain', p.278.

In answering a directive in October 1942, mass-observers who were aged over 60 affirmed that they shared the understanding that there was an important connection between emotional life and domestic settings.⁵² These writers pointed to their household's value as somewhere to spend time with family and friends, or to be yourself and to do as you wished.⁵³ Home was a place for resting, relaxing, ease, and freedom, variously symbolised by its constituent sites (a workshop or library), practices (lighting a fire, reading books at the table), and activities (listening to music, reading, and walking). Yet the metaphors mass-observers employed to explain the emotional dimensions of home illustrated the way the notion was difficult to contain within the boundaries of particular social contacts, entertainments, or rooms; instead, home was a refuge, an anchor, 'everything', and recuperation for body and soul.⁵⁴ Some of the most powerful accounts of the meaning of home were crafted by older people who no longer considered that they had one. In one woman's keenly-felt missive the home was a living being,

I have no home – its skeleton is now in storage & will probably never come alive again. Without it, I feel as though I have been torn up by the roots and shall never be planted again, so I suppose Home was for me the one place where I belonged. While persons counted for more than houses or furniture, continuity of surroundings counted for a great deal. A house that has been lived in long enough to become one's home seems to fit around one as the door is entered, as though neither is complete without the other.⁵⁵

These writers emphasised the passing of time and 'continuity of surroundings' that shaped their strong feelings about a house, experiences that have been noted in childhood

⁵² October 1942 Mass Observation Directive, 'What does HOME mean to you?' Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex (MOA). This directive received 19 replies from mass-observers aged over 60, two of whom did not answer this part.

⁵³ For example in Mass Observation directives, 2058 and 2889 replies to October 1942 directive (aged 75 and 74), MOA.

⁵⁴ Mass Observation directives, 1056, 2251/1015, 2700, 2719 replies to October 1942 directive (aged 60, 67, 67, and 66), MOA.

⁵⁵ Mass Observation directive, 1056 reply to October 1942 directive (aged 60), MOA.

reminiscence but have not been recognised for their significance in old age.⁵⁶ A married man from Kent and Northern Ireland had had no home since the outbreak of war and wrote: 'I desire nothing so much as to be able to end my days after the war in my own home somewhere. Home means a very great deal to me.'⁵⁷ The independence, freedom, and close affection that contributed to happiness in old age were available exclusively in a home of one's own. Mass-observers' reflections simultaneously highlighted how much was at stake for those who lost it.

Like these odes to the household, ageing research participants' descriptions of love and marriage in old age demonstrate some of the deepest workings of emotional life and remind us that working-class homes were sites of reflection and privacy as well as the hustle and bustle created by children and household work. These aspects of old age and domestic life were downplayed by mid-century social researchers and have been ignored by historians. Yet introducing older people's iterations of romantic love and companionship to the history of old age directs our attention to an entirely new aspect of the emotional drama that was enacted in the home. Importantly, older people's descriptions of marriage and bereavement were striking for their depth of feeling rather than for the noise and activity they contained, in the style of their stories about extended family and grandparenthood. The changes that occurred in marriage during later life compel us to take older people's feelings seriously as we consider how Britons understood relationships that seemed almost lifelong, and how they confronted and coped with death. Mid-century couples experienced leisure, domestic labour, companionship, and love differently in later life. The social and financial implications of retirement and the dramatic intrusions of physiological ageing on personal

⁵⁶ Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions*, p.138.

⁵⁷ Mass Observation directive, 1662/ 1622 reply to October 1942 directive (aged 68), MOA.

relationships — through ill health and death in particular — created occasions to reflect on and discuss the emotional experiences of marriage in unique ways. We need to situate these emotional experiences in particular relationships (such as marriage) and material circumstances (such as the financial and social implications of retirement) in order to combat repeated stereotypes of lonely old people and to establish a framework for discussing subjectivity over the life cycle, in contrast to existing attempts to describe ‘self-image’ in later life which have relied on the personal writing of a few well-known individuals.⁵⁸

My analysis intervenes in a history of romantic love that has so far belonged to the young. In America, Beth L. Bailey argued that the significant change in the culture of romance occurred when young people’s new spending power and enjoyment of consumer entertainments and transport technologies took them from ‘front porch to back seat’ during courtship.⁵⁹ British historians have privileged a similar set of interests. Demographic and social historians have charted the lower ages of first marriages and childbirth after the Second World War, describing how these trends created a ‘golden age of marriage’ and the nuclear family, an image that has provided the domestic backdrop to many account of mid-century Britain, and to our conception of the 1950s in particular.⁶⁰ As Pat Thane has reflected, the period between 1930 and 1950 has represented ‘the golden age, indeed the only age, of the near universal, stable, long-lasting marriage, often considered the normality from

⁵⁸ See the sections on ‘images and self-image’ in Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, pp.259-70, 458-72.

⁵⁹ Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America*, Baltimore and London, 1988.

⁶⁰ B. Jane Elliott, ‘Demographic Trends in Domestic Life, 1945-87’, in *Marriage, Domestic Life and Social Change: Writings for Jacqueline Burgoyne 1944-88*, David Clark and Jacqueline Burgoyne, eds, London, 1991, pp.85-110.

which we have since departed'.⁶¹ The popularity of marriage peaked in the 1970s, before divorce rates also increased.⁶² British historians interested in the cultural meanings and subjective experiences of love have written about the generation who grew up and coupled off during this mid-century period, leaving older generations' experiences to the side.

Following the same pattern, Claire Langhamer's first step in complementing the 'intellectual history of love' with 'thoroughgoing analysis of the ways in which love was understood, invoked, and deployed "in the round" of everyday life' looked at the courtship practices of young heterosexual couples.⁶³ However, Langhamer has long argued for greater attention to the social significance of the life cycle and, since her first essay on courtship, has expanded the scope of her research to include some of 'the varied experiences of married people beyond the realm of fertility', for example in her article about adultery in postwar England.⁶⁴ With this publication, the history of love in Britain entered middle age. It would have been possible for Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher's recent oral history project on 'sex before the sexual revolution' (1918-1963) to explore the interplay of love, sex, and marriage over a longer period of time by considering their interviewees' full lifetimes.⁶⁵ Although Szreter and Fisher made interesting observations about which stories their interviewees chose to tell in later life, their published study primarily detailed the everyday practices and understandings of young men and women as they learnt about sex, looked for romantic partners, and

⁶¹ Pat Thane, 'Family Life and "Normality" in Postwar British Culture', in *Life after Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s*, Richard Bessel, Dirk Schumann, and German Historical Institute, eds, Washington, D.C and Cambridge, 2003, p.198.

⁶² Elliott, 'Demographic Trends in Domestic Life, 1945-87', p.105.

⁶³ Langhamer, 'Love and Courtship in Mid-Twentieth-Century England', p.175.

⁶⁴ Langhamer, 'Adultery in Post-War England', p.88.

⁶⁵ Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher, *Sex before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England 1918-1963*, Cambridge Social and Cultural Histories, Cambridge, 2010.

negotiated sex, birth control, and childbearing.⁶⁶ Their book offered a retrospective account of the young courting and married lives that have fascinated so many others, rather than exploring their interviewees' later lives or engaging with the questions about ageing and memory that lie at the centre of this thesis.

As this suggests, British historians have failed to realise the promise of their insight that experiences of romantic love have been organised by the life course. It is vital to consider both marriage in later life and experiences of widowhood if we are to construct a full picture of romantic relationships and family life in this way. Moreover, older people's descriptions of their marriages offer a new perspective on the rise of 'companionate marriage' during the mid-twentieth century, which has almost always been associated with youth. Janet Finch and Penny Summerfield wrote that the new model of gender relations cultivated by young couples was 'the most distinctive feature of family life' from 1945 to 1959.⁶⁷ According to their research, young men and women pioneered a form of marital relations arranged as 'teamwork' and 'sharing', which broke down the clearly demarcated gender roles of the past and seemed ideally suited to the postwar projects of reconstruction and stable family life. Although Finch and Summerfield noted the asymmetrical expectations of husbands and wives in mid-century literature on sexuality, education, work, and domesticity and questioned whether mid-century marriage ideals constituted 'equal partnership' either in ideology or practice, the notion of companionate marriage has remained a central plank in histories of private life in the twentieth century.⁶⁸ Marcus Collins argued that the ideal of 'mutuality'

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Janet Finch and Penny Summerfield, 'Social Reconstruction and the Emergence of Companionate Marriage, 1945-59', in *Marriage, Domestic Life and Social Change: Writings for Jacqueline Burgoyne 1944-88*, David Clark and Jacqueline Burgoyne, eds, London, 1991, p.7.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp.30-1.

reshaped gender relations to create ‘modern love’ over the twentieth century.⁶⁹ While the idea of mutuality evolved in the adult worlds of politics, Christian commentary, and suffrage, Collins described its application in ‘mixed’ youth clubs and in the path-breaking cultural projects of marriage counsellors, pornographers, and second-wave feminists.⁷⁰ New sites of entertainment and radical interventions in the cultural life of the nation have proved seductive to British historians yet, as this chapter shows, romantic relationships were also being reformulated by married couples facing the physiological, financial, and emotional challenges of growing older. While mutuality and companionship were expressed in less glamorous terms by elderly men and women, their reformulation of private life points to the wide-ranging effects of mid-century political and social changes, such as the workplace and welfare practices that encouraged retirement, within the lives of individuals.

Both mid-century social scientists and historians have employed the division of domestic labour as a symbol of the extent to which marriages embodied partnerships of equality and mutuality. Judged on these terms, many older couples described the kind of companionate relationships that appeared so difficult for young men and women to realise. Collins identified the sexual division of labour as the ‘first obstacle’ for ‘[a]spirant companionate couples’, pointing out that even when women worked outside the home, they also bore the ‘main brunt’ of domestic labour.⁷¹ Men’s ‘modest efforts’ to help did not often ease the burden and could cause further problems, when ‘tactless men’ began to instruct women on housework or intruded too far into a women’s ‘realm’.⁷² Townsend described a similar set of

⁶⁹ Marcus Collins, *Modern Love: An Intimate History of Men and Women in Twentieth-Century Britain*, London, 2003, pp.4-5.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.117.

⁷² *Ibid.*

problems in old age when he wrote that the segregation of roles between elderly couples was an extension of traditional working-class family arrangements.⁷³ In his published account of marriage in later life, husbands had great authority as the head of a household but gave little help with housekeeping.⁷⁴ Instead of relying on a spouse's assistance, older women formed close relationships with female relatives, especially adult daughters, so that both work and leisure were segregated by sex.⁷⁵ After retirement the unhelpful and intrusive presence of men in the home only caused friction between couples.⁷⁶ This description of marital relations complemented Townsend's account of the emotional connections between older Britons and their adult children, particularly between older women and their daughters, but ignored the potential for older couples to experiment with alternative routines that better fit the context of retirement and old age.

In contrast to Townsend's analysis, when Mass Observation asked its male volunteers whether they helped with domestic jobs in the home in March 1948, every one of the 22 men aged over 60 who replied reported doing at least some work around the house.⁷⁷ Their labour was not offered lightly — eight men used terms similar to 'fair', 'right' or 'conscience' to explain their reasoning — and it was embedded in the context of old age, especially for the six men who reported helping more since retirement.⁷⁸ The domestic disruption caused by retirement shaped the reply sent in by a 73-year-old retired schoolmaster. He wrote,

⁷³ Townsend and Institute of Community Studies, *The Family Life of Old People: An Inquiry in East London*, p.71.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp.72-3.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp.73-5.

⁷⁷ Mass Observation directive, March/ April 1948: "To women: Do you feel that the men in your household should be expected to help in domestic jobs, or not? If so, why? And what sort of help do you expect to have? If not, why not? To men: Do you feel that you should do domestic jobs in your house, or not? If so, why? And what sort of help do you expect to give? If not, why not?"

⁷⁸ Mass Observation directives, 1099, 3951/1533, 1120, 3634/117, 1751, 2039, 4452/1709 replies to the March/ April 1948 directive (aged 70, 67, 70, 62, 73, 64, and 73), MOA.

Since my retirement (before which since I lived in a large institution the question did not arise) I have increasingly and gladly helped in the domestic work of the house and this for several reasons:

- i) I considered it only right that my wife should enjoy the amenities of retirement together with myself.
- ii) Labour shortage brought about the necessity for such sharing of labour. The work I have undertaken has been in connection with the rougher or less skilled types of house work: washing up, helping with bed-making, polishing floors, preparation of vegetables etc. An accident to my wife added to these jobs even cooking — a type of work I have come to enjoy.⁷⁹

This passage communicated a mixture of the factors that might encourage older men to work in the home in a way they had not done before: the end of paid work, the wish to share the pleasures of retirement, the mid-century shortage of domestic labour, and necessity — in this case an accident that meant a wife could no longer prepare meals. Yet the ex-schoolmaster's reply primarily emphasised his commitment to sharing the advantages of retirement with his wife, a philosophy he held in common with many contemporaries. Following this assertion, he presented a list of caveats which maintained a gendered distinction in his household activities and therefore protected the traditional separation of labour to some extent, although this relied on the couple's agreement that washing up and preparing vegetables were 'rougher and less skilled' than other household work. Finally, this writer extended his activity to cooking — an archetypal wifely and maternal form of work — due to his wife's impaired ability. While the term 'accident' connoted the temporary overturning of normal routines, physical debility frequently challenged older couples' habits and demanded greater flexibility in this way. As a number of sociologists have recently argued, physical debility and mental health problems were dramatic interventions in the everyday habits and routines of marital relationships, often requiring new forms of

⁷⁹ Mass Observation directive, 1751 reply to the March/ April 1948 directive (aged 73), MOA.

cooperation and meaning that 'the stereotypes of gender relations no longer applied over large areas of daily life' for long-married couples.⁸⁰

Unlike his published study, Townsend's interviews with working-class couples in Bethnal Green indicated the need to step across gendered boundaries in the context of poor health and poverty as well as the tensions this might generate between husbands and wives, especially during the process of explaining the division of their domestic labour to an outsider. When 60-year-old Ellen Nash described the domestic work done by her husband, Walter, she indicated both his willingness to cooperate and suggested some of the psychic discomfort it caused her. Townsend recorded,

The informant said that 'Dad mucks in, especially if I don't feel too well.' Apparently he'll do the washing up and carry in the coal and things like that. But this seemed to be more a claim on the husband's part than of the wife's because before this question was answered there seemed to be an embarrassed silence then the wife said, 'Well you see there's no need for him to do anything because by the time he gets home there's nothing left for him to do.'⁸¹

Ellen happily described Walter 'mucking in' in the context of her old age and ill health. Yet while the gendered boundaries of housework may have been blurred they had not been erased in this household. Walter carried out the particular roles of washing dishes and carrying coal and Ellen was careful to complete most domestic work before he arrived home; her 'embarrassed silence' on the topic may have covered over Walter's ignorance of her labour and overestimation of his own contribution. While older men were content to help out, the work of maintaining a household remained a woman's responsibility as far as it was possible, allowing them to claim a valued social identity.

⁸⁰ Twigg, 'The Body and Bathing: Help with Personal Care at Home', pp.143-69; Gail Wilson, "'I'm the Eyes and She's the Arms'": Changes in Gender Roles in Advanced Old Age', in *Connecting Gender and Ageing: A Sociological Approach*, Sara Arber and Jay Ginn, eds, Buckingham, 1995, p.104.

⁸¹ Interview with Ellen Nash (aged 60), 12 August 1955, The Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

In contrast to their reticence on domestic labour, many of the working-class men who participated in Townsend's study were happy to describe their sense of a unique kind of companionship and greater emotional connection with their wives post their retirement. These aspects of marital life demonstrated the interweaving of loss and gain within the private experience of ageing. Commonly, couples' experiences of spending more time together, getting to know each other better, and feeling closer, were direct results of being unable to leave a tiny flat (perhaps because of infirmity) and no longer being able to afford a pint at the pub or a trip to the cinema.⁸² For working-class couples, income dropped on retirement (the pension was around one fifth of an average wage) which meant commercial entertainments and meeting friends became unaffordable at the same time that men left their workplaces.⁸³ The almost constant presence of retired men in the home altered everyday experiences of marriage and, while some relationships imploded under the pressure, many others were reformulated so that husbands' and wives' greater social contact was mirrored in new feelings of cooperation and closeness. Further, the claim that with retirement 'definitely husband and wife grow closer together' was not an admission that a couple had only their own company to enjoy.⁸⁴ Even the matriarch of a family which Townsend later described as the epitome of a busy and closely-bonded extended clan, which he remembered as 'like meeting a tribe, because they had, literally, something like 80, 90, 100 related people in the surrounding streets, who had relationships among and with each other', claimed a new

⁸² For example in interviews with Mary and Alfred Powell (aged 76 and 78), 23 August 1955, and Aubrey and Elizabeth Todd (both aged 80), 17 August, The Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

⁸³ Paul Johnson, 'The Employment and Retirement of Older Men in England and Wales, 1881-1981', *Economic History Review*, 47, 1, 1994, pp.122-3.

⁸⁴ Interview with William Henry Young (aged 72), 2 November 1955, The Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

degree of exclusivity in her relationship with her husband.⁸⁵ Townsend quoted Sarah Agombar comparing her earlier and later married life: 'When I was younger I wouldn't be in till 12 o'clock. We play with our two selves now'. Her husband Robert agreed, "I get the hump when she goes out" he said, pointing to his wife.'⁸⁶ The economic and social context of old age created a space where 'companionate marriage' and 'mutuality' was enacted and claimed by working-class couples far from the sites of youthful rites of passage and commercial entertainments which historians have privileged.

Of course, the occasion of spending more time together, in a limited space, with less money to spend, and with new health problems to treat, did not go well for all couples. In response to questions about whether she felt lonely, 68-year-old widow Elizabeth Martin stated, 'Never' and 'I thank God for the last 5 years' since the death of a husband who had been 'always after the women and deceiving me'.⁸⁷ Widowhood was a calmer time when 'I've always got my mind occupied. I always take up a hobby or a book. And I've always got people to go and see.'⁸⁸ Florence Smith also declared herself 'better off now than I've ever been' following the death of her abusive husband in 1946 at the age of 63.⁸⁹ She described the 'terrible life' she had spent with him and reported that he had tried to strangle her not long before he died. Sixty-four-year-old Gertrude Arrowsmith missed her husband, who had died in 1950 at the age of 62, but appeared to be coping much more cheerfully and living a less frugal lifestyle than other widows and widowers, visiting the pub and going

⁸⁵ Peter Townsend Interviewed By Paul Thompson, 'Reflections on Becoming a Researcher', pp.87-8.

⁸⁶ Interview with Sarah and Robert Agombar (aged 76 and 78), 20 November 1954, The Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

⁸⁷ Interviews with Elizabeth Martin (aged 68), 28 and 31 January 1955, The Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Interview with Florence Smith (aged 73), 2 February 1955, The Family Life of Old People, UKDA.

dancing at the Hackney Empire.⁹⁰ Townsend also portrayed Charles Palmer, a widower of only seven months, to be coping with his bereavement better than others, 'he is lonely since the death of his wife has left a gap which can't be filled. But he also said that he didn't mind being on his own, as he enjoyed reading.'⁹¹ However, in alignment with contemporary researchers' findings that older women often lived at the centre of extended family networks while their husbands were frequently on its outskirts after years working away from the home, the most striking narratives of liberation and enjoyment in widowhood were offered by older women while ageing men were more likely to complain of abandonment by their children and increased social isolation.⁹²

The shifting responses that were possible in the face of alterations to social and material circumstances of late life were charted by 73-year-old Arthur Wiltshire in his interview, at which his 70-year-old wife Emma was also present.

Referring to the way they got on now that he was retired, the informant said, 'the wife always used to have the place on her own. They get grumpy if you get in their way. I want to do this, she'll say. What are you doing here, and you have to get out'. He said, however, 'You get to know one another better. You never see enough of each other at work ... I never go nowhere without the wife. You see some of the old uns though, it's like penal servitude. They come out about nine in the morning and don't go home till five in the afternoon'. Talking about widowers, he said, 'I know one who's tried to commit suicide. They sit in the parks and fade away.'⁹³

Arthur's interview touched on several possible reactions to the changed social circumstances of retirement. At first, Emma was unhappy at his intrusion in the domestic environment she was used to having control of and ordered him out of the house. However, later in the story Arthur described a changed mode of marital relations when the couple could finally 'see

⁹⁰ Interview with Gertrude Arrowsmith (aged 64), 10 August 1955, *The Family Life of Old People*, UKDA.

⁹¹ Interview with Charles Palmer (aged 67), 12 September 1955, *The Family Life of Old People*, UKDA.

⁹² For example, Interviews with James Alford (aged 81), 24 August 1955, Frances Muckley (aged 60), 1 March 1955, and Elizabeth Petken (aged 79), 23 November 1954, *The Family Life of Old People*, UKDA.

⁹³ Interviews with Arthur Wiltshire, 25 June and 10 September 1954, *The Family Life of Old People*, UKDA.

enough' of each other and no longer went out alone, in a reversal of the working-class gender segregation described by Townsend and many historians. Finally, Arthur's observations at the park — a space outside the home that pensioners could occupy without drawing on their meagre earnings — revealed more extreme responses: some men were banished from their houses between the hours of nine and five while others went to the park in widowhood, where they faded away without the companionship of their wives.⁹⁴

Although individuals responded to the circumstances of old age with an infinite variety of feelings, the ageing process was correlated with a set of social and financial circumstances that required married couples to alter their habits of interaction and many of them, including Arthur and Emma, reformulated their relationships in response. Writing on this theme for Mass Observation, a 60-year-old married man who worked in retail and as a County Councillor in Glamorgan tied the success and enjoyment of marriage to its life cycle, indicating the importance of sexual attraction at the outset of marriage and the value of tolerance later on. He wrote,

Marriages, if fifty years be the average, are usually successful only during the first five months and the last five years. I mean by this that in the early days both parties are too absorbed in the physical side of marriage to worry much about lasting success. Whether they enjoy a limited happiness afterwards depends a good deal upon their capacity for tolerance.⁹⁵

This writer's assessment of the chances of success in any relationship was ambivalent, his paragraph implied that sexual attraction distracted 'absorbed' young couples from other miseries and that most husbands and wives achieved only 'a limited happiness' after this passion faded. Yet, in contrast to a meagre five months of infatuation, this married man

⁹⁴ Hence the emotional power of the visual imagery of lonely older men that was discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, and which helped social scientific publications to make their case for the expansion of social services such as visiting and clubs.

⁹⁵ Mass Observation directive, 3450 reply to September 1943 directive, MOA.

reserved a full five years of ‘success’ for the tail end of marriage when couples had learned to exercise the patience that was vital to their mutual contentment. In so doing he challenged the tropes of romantic love that were rehearsed in romantic novels and Hollywood films alike, redefining marital ‘success’ as the cultivation of personal maturity and forbearance. A number of older mass-observers agreed that the ability to conduct a good marriage was learned and only arrived with advanced age. When Mass Observation asked ‘What do you consider the foundations of a good marriage?’ in September 1943, among the 26 replies written by men and women aged over 60 (of whom ten were married, nine single, four widowed, and one divorced), tolerance was the most popular theme, appearing in nine of the answers.⁹⁶ The next most popular factors also privileged a vision of marriage that required work, commitment, and measured understanding of a partner, including shared interests, humour, and loyalty. While the medical and economic dimensions of the ageing process frequently made cooperation necessary, it appeared that the experience also encouraged the development of emotional priorities which supported a distinctive version of companionship and happiness.

Death and bereavement

Paying attention to the intimacy that was frequently experienced within marriages in later life throws the pathos of widowhood into clearer relief. As I suggested by beginning this chapter with Alfred’s description of his feelings for his wife, many of the most detailed narratives of emotional experience in old age were recorded in response to the experience of bereavement. Therefore the feelings of love and grief were connected in the production of

⁹⁶ One person’s marital status was not given. Mass Observation directives, 3120, 2677, 1109, 3450, 2251/1015, 1095, 1686, 3204, 3450 replies to September 1943 directive, MOA.

the sources that form the basis of this chapter. While Alfred's account signalled some of the ways that domestic environments changed on the occasion of bereavement, when they became sites of remembrance and mourning, this connection was not explored by mid-century social scientists and has not featured in the history of ageing. Instead, in his 1965 study of *Death, Grief and Mourning*, British anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer passed over the place of the home within the experience of bereavement with little comment, choosing to focus on public rituals instead.⁹⁷ By placing Gorer's interviewees' descriptions of death and mourning within the context of the particular meanings of home and marriage in late life, I identify more of the emotional depth within domestic life in old age that has been omitted from its historical and social scientific literature.

Gorer's interest in the public practices of mourning was rooted in his 1930s education, when reading Sigmund Freud taught him 'that the driving forces in humans were sex and death', and his career-long belief that English culture was emotionally repressed compared to the societies he explored during his tours and anthropological observations in West Africa and Southeast Asia.⁹⁸ His study of death followed a similar format to his earlier *Exploring English Character*, an anthropological survey and statistical analysis of the English population that was sponsored by the popular Sunday newspaper the *People*, whose editor hoped to emulate the intellectual sway and commercial success of the Kinsey report in America (instead, the study was criticised for its over-reliance on Freudian analysis).⁹⁹ With similar aims, Gorer's survey of death, grief, and mourning was funded by the *Sunday Times*, through which he circulated a questionnaire and received 359 responses from the recently bereaved, including 212 offers of

⁹⁷ Geoffrey Gorer, *Death, Grief, and Mourning in Contemporary Britain*, London, 1965.

⁹⁸ Mandler, 'Being His Own Rabbit: Geoffrey Gorer and English Culture', pp.193-4.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.200-1.

an interview.¹⁰⁰ Drawing from this pool of volunteers, Gorer carried out 80 interviews around Britain.¹⁰¹ He argued that his research subjects' stories proved his earlier contention that death had superseded sex as a taboo subject in postwar Britain, a theme he introduced through his own experience of watching the public mourning rites of his Edwardian childhood disappear, to be replaced by the 'shocked embarrassment' that met his public displays of sadness following his brother's death in the 1960s.¹⁰² Gorer posited that the psychological results of this 'taboo' were severe, writing that 'adults *need* help in living through the phase of intense grief' and questioning 'whether they can appeal for help at all' in Britain, 'where the majority wish to ignore grief and treat mourning as morbid'.¹⁰³

In his concern with public ritual the anthropologist passed over the significance of home as the primary site of mourning for many of his interviewees and ignored older Britons' cultivation of their domestic environment so that even the dead remained present there. Contrary to theorists of social death, those who passed away were not progressively forgotten by their families and friends. Instead, in his 18 interviews with men and women aged over 60, Gorer recorded that widows and widowers frequently dreamed of their spouses and sometimes saw or heard them, sitting in their favourite chair or ringing their sick bell for attention.¹⁰⁴ Interviewees had kept their houses exactly the same following their

¹⁰⁰ Gorer, *Death, Grief, and Mourning in Contemporary Britain*, p.157.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.160.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.9.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.131.

¹⁰⁴ Interview notes from interview 32, with Mrs F. Neville (aged 67) in Sunderland; interview 37, with Mr T. McAnelly (aged 66) in Gateshead; interview 67, with Mr. Carr (aged 67) in Birmingham; interview 14, with Mrs Mitchell (aged 60) in Bath; interview 21 with Mrs W. N. Fosbury (aged 67) in Torquay; interview 44, with Mrs J. Sumner (aged 74) in Lancaster; interview 15, with Mrs Vickers (aged 85) in Bath; and interview 20, with Mrs R. E. Stone (aged 64) in Exeter, Interview transcripts, 1H and 1I, Survey Material, Death Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain, in The Geoffrey Gorer Archive, University of Sussex (US).

partner's death.¹⁰⁵ Amid familiar household scenes, widows treasured keepsakes that evoked their husband: his watch, suit, hearing aid, pipe, or tobacco.¹⁰⁶ In Middlesbrough, Mr Rawlings stated that he just had 'photographs, nothing otherwise' to memorialise his wife who had died less than a year earlier, '[t]here's lots of things that remind me of her you know in the house you see'.¹⁰⁷ The construction of domestic memorials revealed the determination of the bereaved to continue to think about, dream of, and see their loved ones in all these ways; their keepsakes and photographs built such rituals of remembrance into everyday life. As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton theorised in 1981, the home had become a 'storehouse of signs' which offered 'not only a material shelter but also a shelter for those things that make life meaningful'.¹⁰⁸ Through reminiscence,

signs of loved ones or past experiences are communicated, certain moods associated with those people are induced, and a stream of thought about 'how it was' is brought about from a person's current perspective on how things are now ... But this activity has another dimension. It also indicates intention — a direction, purpose, or habit that is an essential feature of the meaning of this activity.¹⁰⁹

Ageing Britons organised domiciliary spaces to influence their future feelings and behaviour in just this way. Displays of mementos and portraits, and even particular arrangements of furniture, were designed to trigger memories and encourage the rituals of mourning which maintained the presence of the dead and smoothed over some of the disruptions to social life that were caused by their absence.

¹⁰⁵ Interview notes from interview 32, with Mrs F. Neville (aged 67) in Sunderland; interview 43, with Mr G. Taylor (aged 61) in Preston; and interview 25, with Mrs C. W. Cattermole (aged 64) in Ipswich; Interview transcripts, *Death Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain*, US.

¹⁰⁶ Interview notes from interview 61 with Mrs. A. Clark (aged 70) in Dundee and interview 25, with Mrs C. W. Cattermole (aged 64) in Ipswich, Interview transcripts, *Death Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain*, US.

¹⁰⁷ Interview notes from interview 34, with Mr W. T. Rawlings in Middlesbrough, Interview transcripts, *Death Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain*, US.

¹⁰⁸ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self*, Cambridge, 1981, p.139.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.174.

In particular, many interviewees showed Gorer photographs of the dead and described the role these artefacts played in domestic routines and rituals. For example, on the birthdays of her husband and son, Mrs Carr placed flowers beside the photographs she displayed in her home in Birmingham.¹¹⁰ As Gillian Rose and other theorists of family photography albums have argued, the social practices surrounding family photographs are as significant as their visual content. A family photograph is treasured because of 'who took it; who it shows; where and how it is kept; who made copies of it and sent them to other people; who those other people are; and how it gets looked at by all those people'.¹¹¹ Despite this insight, 'most photography criticism almost entirely ignores the social practices in which the taking, making and circulation of photographs are embedded'.¹¹² Yet these rituals were so pervasive that they were sometimes judged to have been taken too far. For instance, Gorer commented that Mr Hickman, a 72-year-old widower from West Bromwich, was 'really making a shrine' when he 'kept all his wife's things, had her buried just round the corner, went three times a week to the cemetery, and had flowers for her birthday and Christmas'.¹¹³ Gorer was reluctant to acknowledge that familiar and private domestic scenes conjured the presence of the dead and comforted the bereaved as much as their visits to the graveyard. Yet the experiences of losing a close family member shaped every aspect of daily life, especially when a death disrupted the cycle of generations or marked the end of intimate marital relationships.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Interview notes from interview 67, with Mr Carr (aged 61) in Birmingham, Interview transcripts, Death Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain, US.

¹¹¹ Rose, *Doing Family Photography: The Domestic, the Public and the Politics of Sentiment*, p.14.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Interview notes from interview 72, with Mr A. Hickman in West Bromwich, Interview transcripts, Death Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain, US.

¹¹⁴ Wedderburn, 'Economic Aspects of Ageing', p.403; Buitelaar, 'Widows' Worlds: Representations and Realities', p.5.

While domestic objects such as photographs operated as focal points of reflection and conversation for widows and widowers during their interviews with Gorer, the dead were frequently present in the home in less material forms through the workings of sleep and imagination. For example, Mrs Truman, who was a pious member of the Church of England and had been widowed for more than three years by the time Gorer visited her home in Bath, sensed her husband in the house through a mix of dreams, visions, and sounds. She reported,

Sometimes now I see him standing by me and he says 'Oh Agnes' then I wake up and realize. I go back in the past, it's stupid of me. I remember I was sitting in that chair one night and I was reading and I thought I heard a rustle and I looked up and there he was in his dressing gown. I'm not a bit frightened of anything like that it's rather nice.¹¹⁵

Mrs Truman was not alarmed by her husband's apparition and only felt a little 'stupid' to have confused her past with the present. Rather than appearing mysterious or frightening, his appearance in homely settings — wearing his dressing gown and voicing a familiar reproach — was a reminder of the couple's marital intimacy and a 'rather nice' moment. Christine Stansell has called for historians to pay attention to the ways dreams have been 'critical ways of knowing the world' for many communities in the past, for example when they 'brought warnings and messages from the other world; they were the vehicles for visions and visits from Jesus; they opened an anteroom to mingle and converse with the dead; they gave license to the soul to zoom across space to visit places and people left behind.'¹¹⁶ While they confirmed the emotional significance of dreams, the visions encountered by Mrs Truman and other widows and widowers of her generation were more familiar and soothing than the dramatic departures from reality explored by Stansell. These

¹¹⁵ Interview notes from interview 15, with Mrs Vickers (aged 85) in Bath, Interview transcripts *Death Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain*, US.

¹¹⁶ Stansell, 'Historic Passion: Dreams', p.243.

dreamers reported apprehending their dead loved ones without professing their visions to be portents or dismissing them as hallucinations. Their descriptions had much in common with the fin de siècle 'ironic believers' who have been described by Michael Saler, especially in the way they were happy to enjoy the pleasures of what they saw with a 'double-minded awareness' that their visions were not real.¹¹⁷ The twentieth-century recognition that 'perceived reality was to some extent an imaginative construct, and that reason itself was beholden to imaginative insights and desires' meant that the bereaved could 'immerse themselves in imaginary worlds without relinquishing their practical reason'.¹¹⁸ They could enjoy the momentary presence of the dead as an easing of their troubles, not an omen of further change and disruption.

Beyond the privacy of the domestic realm elderly men and women were more circumspect in their demonstration of memory and grief. While Gorer argued that the lack of public attention to bereavement interrupted individuals' ability to cope, his interviewees' emphasis on the significance of the home in their emotional lives suggests that the absence of public scripts for mourning marked the boundaries of emotional expression instead of obstructing it. Moreover interviewees' expectation that they should deal with their feelings in private and avoid impinging on the domestic lives of friends and neighbours led to a measured view of outsiders' ability to help them in their grief. Visitors to the households of the bereaved were credited with important tasks in the immediate aftermath of a death: Mrs Neville reported that her neighbours had been 'friendly and kind' while Mrs Clarke told the common story that her neighbours were the first on the scene to offer practical assistance after her

¹¹⁷ Michael Saler, "'Clap If You Believe in Sherlock Holmes': Mass Culture and the Re-Enchantment of Modernity, c. 1890-c. 1940', *The Historical Journal*, 46, 3, 2003, p.606.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

husband's death, when she 'kind of fell away with shock.'¹¹⁹ After more time had passed Mr Taylor, a 71-year-old pensioner, still enjoyed conversations about his wife, 'you see it brings back memories'.¹²⁰ However in a clear statement of the limits to such interactions, Mr Rawlings cautioned that 'of course you don't like to' discuss grief with others and pointed to the psychological gulf that divided those in mourning from the people around them, 'it's very difficult you see, unless you've been under the same circumstances yourself it's not the same'.¹²¹ Similarly, Mrs Carr of Birmingham described a variety of public communities and service that helped her, including her friends, Birmingham's welfare services — which she referred to as 'the kindness of Birmingham' — and the radio, but insisted that there was a limit to the sadness she could express in public.¹²² Following a set of self-imposed rules, Mrs Carr believed she should not 'be a bore' by talking about her loved ones too much and she should not become a 'nuisance' by 'butting in' on the domestic lives of her married friends. Set in the context of elderly people's private, familial, and domestic modes of mourning, these cautionary statements underline the emotional significance of the home rather than signalling the absence of rituals for expressing grief in the way Gorer concluded they did.

Similarly to their descriptions of domestic objects, memories, and visions, widows and widowers described religious belief as a private comfort more often than they celebrated its public sites. Gorer's interviewees expressed a variety of stances on the afterlife and the extent to which it consoled them in widowhood. While many expressed their belief that the

¹¹⁹ Interview notes from interview 32, with Mrs F. Neville (aged 67) in Sunderland, and interview 61, with Mrs A. Clark (aged 70) in Dundee, Interview transcripts, *Death Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain*, US.

¹²⁰ Interview notes from interview 54, with Mr D. Taylor in Carnoustie, Interview transcripts *Death Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain*, US.

¹²¹ Interview notes from interview 34, with Mr W. T. Rawlings (aged 66) in Middlesbrough, Interview transcripts *Death Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain*, US.

¹²² Interview notes from interview 67, with Mr Carr (aged 67) in Birmingham, Interview transcripts *Death Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain*, US.

afterlife existed and looked forward to meeting loved ones again, many others did not hold strong religious convictions, were not comforted by faith, or found the notion of an afterlife less convincing as they grew older.¹²³ In this way, elderly individuals followed the same pattern as other age groups in displaying great personal variation in the nature and strength of their spiritual beliefs.¹²⁴ Mr Rawlings shared in a commonly expressed agnosticism as he confessed, 'I'm hoping that you know, that we'll meet again you see, in what shape or form it might happen we don't know'.¹²⁵ Mrs Carr demonstrated her ambivalent feelings when she said that religion gave her comfort '[t]o a point' but cited other people's hardships and therefore her relative good fortune as a better answer to the painful question '[w]hy should it happen?'.¹²⁶ Rather than turning to church services for help she stayed away, explaining 'I'm afraid I'm rather emotional, I get a lump' when the service made her think of the last hours of her son. All of these interviewees proved their awareness of religious explanations for death as well as alternative public structures for understanding its significance, such as the ubiquity of bad fortune and suffering, but framed these communal scripts for emotional experience as the basis for private reflections not public ritual.

Ageing men and women hinted at the contours of their private lives when they described their feelings, domestic rituals, visions and dreams, but ultimately their interactions with Gorer belonged to the public realm, where they argued that emotion should be more

¹²³ See Geoffrey Gorer's questionnaires which asked for descriptions of the afterlife, Questionnaires, Survey Material, Death Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain, US.

¹²⁴ See Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000*, London, 2001; Jane Garnett, Matthew Grimley, Alana Harris, William Whyte, and Sarah Williams, eds, *Redefining Christian Britain: Post-1945 Perspectives*, London, 2007; Jenny Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism and British Society between the Wars*, Studies in Popular Culture, Manchester, 2000.

¹²⁵ Interview notes from interview 34, with Mr W. T. Rawlings (aged 66) in Middlesbrough, Interview transcripts, Death Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain, US.

¹²⁶ Interview notes from interview 67, with Mrs Carr (aged 61) in Birmingham, Interview transcripts Death Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain, US.

carefully contained. In particular, widows' and widowers' expressions of stoicism supplied a comforting and socially acceptable end-point to their conversations with the anthropologist. Capturing both its briskness and underlying emotion, although perhaps also caricaturing this mode of coping, Gorer described Mrs Fairburn of Gateshead as 'a stout cheerful body but tears very near the surface the whole time' whose determinedly pragmatic attitude was epitomised in her remark of the death of her husband, 'Well you never get anywhere if you stay and brood, it's for the best because he might have been a patient on my hands.'¹²⁷ Mr Rawlings sounded more sullen, 'Well there's people tell me there's people a lot worse off than me but that doesn't make my case better. I know it's unfortunate but I suppose we have to face this sort of thing.'¹²⁸ The commonly employed public scripts of 'facing up' to personal tragedies and 'getting on' in their aftermath may have offered some comfort within private experience of mourning; what is more clear from Gorer's interview records is their usefulness in closing off discussions of grief so that the bereaved maintained their self-possession and were able to draw some meaning from their misfortune.

Conclusion

In dwelling on their own deaths, older Britons were more likely to be concerned about those they would leave behind than their own fate. Older mass-observers reported a measured attitude to their own deaths, an event which was at the forefront of the mind for many. A number of older respondents framed their descriptions of their feeling toward death by speculation about how many years — and frequently about how few years — they might yet

¹²⁷ Interview notes from interview 36, with Mrs Fairburn (aged 73) in Gateshead, Interview transcripts, *Death Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain*, US.

¹²⁸ Interview notes from interview 34, with Mr W. T. Rawlings (aged 66) in Middlesbrough, Interview transcripts, *Death Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain*, US.

live. Yet writers did not report panicked feelings over their own demise but only a sense of regret over the trouble it might cause others and about the end of their social relationships in general. One female writer for Mass Observation wrote that, 'It is not reasonable to fear the cessation of all consciousness, but I often have a feeling of being cheated when I think that I shan't ever know how things turn out I do very greatly fear being ill enough to die, for myself, & still more for those whom I love.'¹²⁹ A 65-year-old married man was more specific in his concern for how his younger wife would fare after his death explaining,

I have reached the age (65) when death cannot be very far off. My feelings about it are very much what they have been for the last five years. I am ready for it, and not afraid of it and in some minds welcome the idea of it. The only falter in my thoughts about it is my wife who is a good deal younger than I and who would, I think, be very 'lost' & lonely if I went, and would also be very poor. I think a good deal about it.¹³⁰

The experience of confronting one's own death was largely comprised of coping with the end to the rich and varied relationships that characterised later life; older men and women struggled to come to terms with the facts that they would never 'know how things turn out', that their loved ones might have to nurse them, that those left behind might be downhearted or destitute. Mid-century research participants did not ignore death — as scholars have suggested twentieth-century citizens began to do — or anticipate the breaking down of their social identity. Instead, in bereavement and in meditation on their own death, ageing Britons stressed their socially embedded identities and evoked the strong and bittersweet emotions of later life.

In this chapter and the previous one, I have extended our understanding of the social worlds that were sometimes threatened by ill health and death in the ways older mass-observers

¹²⁹ Mass Observation directive, 1056 reply to May 1942 directive (aged 60), MOA.

¹³⁰ Mass Observation directive, 1622 reply to May 1942 directive, (aged 65), MOA.

feared, by establishing the variety of Britons' social roles and relations in old age, and the depth of feeling they cultivated within these. Describing older people's sense of connection to their local communities, national culture, and each other reveals the philosophical value of studying old age as a contribution to our understanding of how Britons have judged the value of a life and how they managed some of the most traumatic experiences we can imagine. Moreover, I have argued that in the mid-century the social and financial implications of retirement underlay a reformulation of these aspects of private life. Many of the older individuals who participated in social research projects discussed the importance of time spent with their spouse and in the privacy of their own home, both experiences that were more widely experienced as the value of the pension rose and retirement became common. The emotional significance of home and family was not ignored in mid-century social research. Instead, as I argue in the first chapter of this thesis, the domestic and emotional lives of elderly research subjects were investigated within intellectual traditions that focused attention on economically-and politically-significant social arrangements, such as financial exchanges between the generations. The experiences of love and grief that were couched in domestic routines for the widows and widowers interviewed by Geoffrey Gorer and Peter Townsend shore up the central place accorded to the home in social scientific understandings of old age and demonstrate extra dimensions to its emotional significance, which encompassed the deep attachments of marital life as well as of parent- and grandparenthood.

Thus, in contrast to sociological theories of social death and disengagement, older people's descriptions of marriage and bereavement illustrate the frequent intimacy and intense emotions that were part of domestic life in old age and suggest new perspectives on the

relationship between later life and domestic spaces. The family life of the old was not only a matter of economic exchange and social support during a period of dependence but featured qualitatively different versions of pre-existing relationships. Writing about old age as an era of emotion details the material and physical disadvantages of later life without assuming they destroyed older people's social and inner resources. It builds a more nuanced image of emotional experience in old age which includes joy as well as tragedy, and contentment as well as apathy. It connects the emotional resilience shown by many older individuals to a process of ageing that encouraged adjustment over time, and the mingling of past achievements with present discontents. While old age was not always a happy experience, the emotions of ageing were certainly more intense, complex, and bittersweet than mid-century social and psychological theory managed to describe. New modes of seeing the self also shaped the way mid-century Britons responded to the challenges of ageing. I have already considered the influence of the expansion of welfare services and the interventions of social researchers in the public sanctioning of elderly individuals' emotional and psychological needs in the period. The next two chapters further explore the cultural resources that were pressed into service as Britons negotiated growing older in mid-century Britain, by addressing beauty and fashion culture and the practice of writing and publishing autobiography in late life.

Section III: Tools of selfhood in late life

Chapter five

Grooming an ageing body: fashion and beauty culture

The first question of Mass Observation's directive of July 1950 asked participants to write 'as honest a confession as you can of your own attitude to personal appearance in yourself and others'. Specifically, Mass Observation wanted to know 'how much trouble and expense do you find it worth to devote to it, and what are your main conscious reasons? Are there factors which make it difficult for you to keep up to the standard you consider desirable?' One of their informants at this time, a sixty-year-old married housewife from Lancashire, mused that she could not 'say truthfully I'm very clothes conscious as regards up to the minute fashion' but stressed that 'what I wear must fit perfectly' and 'be immaculately clean'.¹ While she did not feel attuned to the latest fashions, style was important to her: 'wide flamboyant checks' or 'ugly' sling back shoes made her 'positively cringe' and she would 'go to any trouble to try & make exactly' what she wanted to wear. She reflected, '[i]t's not always been easy to keep my "finicky" standards but I know if I gave them up — when illness has made me have to for instance, something inside me suffers.'

¹ Mass Observation directive reply, 1061 reply to July 1950 directive, Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex, (MOA).

This mass-observer — one of about 3,000 Britons who contributed to Mass Observation's recording and analysis of modern British life by answering monthly directives between 1939 and 1955 — was intensely concerned that she present herself in carefully-tailored and pristinely-cleaned garments and had energetic opinions on current sartorial tastes. She paid meticulous attention to her image and articulated its importance to her identity and sense of pride: the 'something inside' that suffered when she lowered her standards. Although her answer was imbued with awareness of her age, and the behaviours or 'up to the minute' clothes it precluded, this mass-observer did not record a disconnection from fashion culture but a change in her relationship to it. As this chapter will show, mid-century fashion was more accessible and greater fun for old people than historians have realised, and ageing men and women felt stylish and attractive more often than history has given them credit for. This chapter recounts how older Britons tried on mid-century fashion and beauty culture for size and found that, with some small adjustments, it fit them 'perfectly', reassessing scholarly interpretations of elderly bodies and ageism in the process.

In Catherine Horwood's history of interwar fashion, older men and women clung stubbornly to their outdated stiff collars, hats, and gloves — ignoring comfort, convenience, and exciting new fashions.² Yet the pursuit of respectable garb exceeded Horwood's notion that interwar garb was solely a game of class conformity and 'keeping up appearances'.³ While older women did not usually wish to be absolutely up-to-the-minute in their dress, they were interested in wearing colourful and stylish clothes and in being noticed for their attractive faces, hands, hair, and accessories. Older men were often more cautious about inviting

² Catherine Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances: Fashion and Class between the Wars*, Stroud, 2005, pp.64, 124, 9, 32, 38.

³ *Ibid.*

attention because they operated in an environment of simultaneous encouragement of, and anxiety over, men's interest in consumption, fashion, and beauty, but they still wanted to look good.⁴ Horwood characterised the sartorial lives of all middle-class age groups as staid and conventional, but by recognising the more dynamic views of the old — the most conservative of all according to her study — this chapter explores different terms of engagement between Britons and beauty culture. This chapter's consideration of personal writing about fashion and beauty, alongside the fashion advice and advertising Horwood has used, reveals that 'respectable' articles of clothing had a greater range of meanings than she supposed. By considering their dress and appearance to be part of an exploration and statement of identity, older Britons approached fashion in the same ways as young people, even if they made different choices.

Dress has been an important symbol of generational conflict in histories and autobiographies that discuss the mid-twentieth century, connoting sexual and social repression in anecdotes about the 1950s, and newfound freedom in memories of life in the 1960s. Callum Brown has noted the pleasure mid-century British women felt as they donned their formal 'Sunday best' outfits and attended church feeling attractive and looking forward to meeting young men.⁵ Yet autobiographies by women who came of sexual age in the 1960s discount the value of 1950s style, and use it to denounce the period's class-based standards of behaviour. As Angela Carter recounted, 'I grew up in the late fifties — that is, I was twenty in 1960, and by God I *deserved* what happened later on. It was tough, in the fifties, girls wore white

⁴ Jill Greenfield, Sean O'Connell, and Chris Reid, 'Fashioning Masculinity: Men Only, Consumption and the Development of Marketing in the 1930s', *Twentieth Century British History*, 10, 4, 1999, p.122; Frank Mort and Peter Thompson, 'Retailing, Commercial Culture and Masculinity in 1950s Britain: The Case of Montague Burton, the "Tailor of Taste"', *History Workshop Journal*, 38, 1, 1994, p.122.

⁵ Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000*, pp.131-2.

gloves.⁶ In these personal narratives and in many historical accounts of the mid-century, young women in white gloves are evidence of a repressed younger generation and society. In these texts, the unrealistic expectation that young women's gloves should remain unsullied and pale symbolises the way they were denied useful work and meaningful social roles, and were forced to conform to out-dated and stultifying social and sexual norms. By contrast, the 1960s are described as a time when young people found their voice and their own beliefs, as they pressured their parents and communities to support the liberation of private life, and their right to personal happiness, political accountability, and the pleasures of a vibrant pop culture. Recent publications have begun the work of complicating this narrative. For example, Becky Conekin has located the roots of 1960s style in the professional practices and career trajectories of fashion models and photographers working in London in the 1950s, who 'set the scene' for the apparently sudden shifts of the subsequent decade.⁷ This chapter reclaims the expressive value of mid-century style for an older generation. I argue that older women viewed the signatures of mid-century ladylike style as tools of beauty and self-worth, as well as symbols of propriety and restraint. Amid the stories of the liberation some felt as they wore their skirts shorter and eyelashes long, we might also consider what was lost in the transition, including a world of fashion and beauty that welcomed elderly subjects.

⁶ Quoted in Callum G. Brown, 'Women and Religion in Britain: The Autobiographical View of the Fifties and Sixties', in *Secularisation in the Christian World: Essays in Honour of Hugh McLeod*, Callum G. Brown and M. F. Snape, eds, Farnham, 2010, p.163.

⁷ Becky E. Conekin, 'From Haughty to Nice: How British Fashion Images Changed from the 1950s to the 1960s', *Photography and Culture*, 3, 3, 2010, pp.285-94.

As Lucy Delap has pointed out, historians routinely focus on new trends, especially when we know that they caught on and changed the ways people thought and behaved.⁸ We tend to see change as meaningful while conservative impulses are treated as relics of a time past and as irrelevant and superficial by default. However, if we listen to some of the things older men and women had to say about beauty and fashion around the middle of the twentieth century, we hear them engaging in a delicate balancing act as they groomed themselves with the right amount of concern for fashion and comfort, glamour and neatness, standing out and blending in. Older people's choices about dress, conservative or otherwise, signalled their participation in family and community life and expressed their understandings about personal values and worth. The appearance they aimed at was class-specific (and Mass Observation volunteers were disproportionately from the middle and upper classes) but it was also shaped by gender, location, age, and personal style.⁹ Differently to Horwood's narrative, our understanding of older people's dress and grooming must acknowledge the multiple roots of their concern to look good, and allow for corresponding pleasure to be felt when their goals were achieved.

While continuing to analyse the type of social research data that has featured throughout this thesis, this chapter moves beyond the concerns that shaped social scientific theories of old age to access what older research participants said about how they felt about their bodies on a daily basis, and how they presented their image to the world. Providing a stark contrast to the worries about health and mobility that dominated medical and welfare literature, this chapter's attention to older people's writing that described the joy and frivolity of fashion

⁸ Lucy Delap, 'Conservative Values: Anglicans and the Gender Order in Post-Suffrage Britain', Paper Presented at the Modern British History Seminar, Oxford 2010.

⁹ Calder, Sheridan, Harrison, and Mass-Observation Archive, *Speak for Yourself: A Mass-Observation Anthology, 1937-1949*, p.74.

challenges our perception of social research participation, as well as of physiological ageing. I explore how both sets of activities — contributing to social research projects and grooming the ageing body — were tools for self-fashioning and identity-formation among the elderly. While the likelihood of an older man or woman partaking in these past-times was partly a matter of their social class, political views, and personality, the testimonies of those who were involved reveal their connection to public life and popular culture within fields that have not been explored in the history of old age, and yet were significant for many: those of fashion, beauty, and story-telling.¹⁰ The individuals who responded to Mass Observation's request for diaries and essays do not represent the state-of-mind of their generation, but they offer valuable points of comparison to the powerless, isolated, and frequently voiceless older people who have populated most of our histories of ageing. As this chapter explores further, participation in social research formalised a process that occurred in private for other ageing Britons. As Alistair Thomson has argued, nearing the end of the life cycle makes resolving questions about the meaning and 'worth' of a life especially urgent.¹¹ The responses of older mass-observers to a series of directive questionnaires sent to them by Mass Observation on beauty and fashion in April and May of 1939 and again in July 1950 were one form of the story-telling that did important emotional work for ageing individuals.¹²

¹⁰ A number of historians have pointed out that mass-observers were most likely to be upper-working or middle class and politically left-wing. They also typically believed they were contributing to an important social project and sometimes hoped to see their writing in print in Mass Observation's publications. *Ibid.*, pp.73-4.

¹¹ Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend*, p.185.

¹² See the full questions in the appendix to this thesis. The April 1939 directive was answered by 8 writers aged over 60 (4 women and 4 men; their average age was 66). The May 1939 directive was answered by 12 writers aged over 60 (5 women and 7 men; their average age was 65). The July 1950 directive was answered by 31 writers who were aged over 60 (17 women and 14 men; their average age was 66).

In these directives both male and female Mass Observation respondents recorded their habits of self-observation, studious grooming, and self-conscious appearing, but within gendered boundaries and therefore with different things at stake. This chapter shows that, although they chose their clothes according to such gendered systems of meaning, older men and women agreed on the kinds of things that their outward appearances revealed. For instance, a person's knowledge of dress-styles and the time and money they could devote to grooming suggested what their occupation and social class might be. However, women's demonstrations of their knowledge and mastery of fashion or beauty culture underlined their success in the gendered roles of wife, mother, neighbour, social hostess, community worker, or professional. Their routines of shopping and grooming also supported private pleasures of feeling feminine, desirable, and in control of their image. By contrast, older men told shorter and simpler stories about their dress and grooming although they, too, embedded the social duty of maintaining their looks within their relationships: through the pride their wife and children might feel, the respect they hoped to earn from colleagues, or the way they wished to be viewed in their neighbourhood and local community. These men were more likely to enthuse over their skills in thriftiness than their delight in beautiful colours and flattering cuts, but they put just as much thought into how they appeared to others, and could take equal satisfaction and pride in the overall effects of their choices in grooming and dress.

The counter-narrative to this chapter — the idea that older men and women in the past would have felt disconnected from and confused by their bodies rather than finding pleasure in their appearances — makes sense to us, as these are common messages within contemporary media and academic publications. We expect that ageing bodies are placed

out of sight or experienced as shocking in modern culture.¹³ We are told they are hard to look at and heart-breaking for older people, especially women, to consider in the glass. Sociologists working with the elderly have described how wrinkled faces, stooped backs, and shuffling walks define old age for those outside the category but are refused — this body ‘isn’t me’ — by their owners.¹⁴ The horror of old age in the past is enhanced by our knowledge of its harsher material realities — greater poverty and shorter lives — and by our self-congratulatory notion that images of ageing have become more positive since the 1960s.¹⁵ A few sociologists have questioned whether ageism has had this hegemonic influence. For example, Peter Öberg interviewed men and women of a range of ages about their feelings towards their bodies and revealed a complicated relationship between age and body confidence, suggesting that ‘even if the aging body may be represented as an enemy the majority do not seem to experience their body in that way’.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the idea that ageing bodies are a source of emotional suffering has proved a long-lasting motif in academic and popular culture.

The present chapter analyses older women’s use of makeup, the place of age in the high fashion magazine British *Vogue*, and the grooming habits of the mass-observers who were aged over 60, in order to reinstate some of the pleasures that have been found in ageing bodies by people in the past, and to suggest how mid-century fashion and beauty culture operated in the lives of its older consumers. I argue that the marginality of the old and the

¹³ Öberg, 'Images Versus Experience of the Aging Body', p.15.

¹⁴ Lois W. Banner, *In Full Flower: Aging Women, Power, and Sexuality: A History*, New York, 1992, p.15; Bill Bytheway and Julia Johnson, 'The Sight of Old Age', in *The Body in Everyday Life*, Sarah Nettleton and Jonathan Watson, eds, London and New York, 1998, p.255; Frida Kerner Furman, *Facing the Mirror: Older Women and Beauty Shop Culture*, New York and London, 1997, p.106; Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, 'The Everyday Visibility of the Aging Body', in *Aging Bodies: Images and Everyday Experience*, Christopher A. Faircloth, ed., Walnut Creek, 2003, pp.210-2.

¹⁵ Featherstone and Wernick, *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, p.32.

¹⁶ Öberg, 'Images Versus Experience of the Aging Body', p.126.

abjection of the ageing body is not timeless, but has been both historically-specific and culturally-constructed. This shift occurred towards the end of the period I study here, catalysed by the youth-centric nature of mid-1960s popular culture and the increasingly visual and commercial mechanisms of the fashion market, which prioritised glamorous advertising and ready-made clothes to an ever-increasing degree. As the inheritors of this set of beliefs, of this age-conscious gaze, we must be especially careful with historical sources describing ageing bodies. Forgetting the ‘anti-ageing’ rhetoric of our own beauty culture we should allow the mid-century elderly to display their smart outfits, trim figures, and smooth skin, all traits that were claimed by the older men and women whose musings enliven this chapter. Only then can we recognise the complexity of the ageing process, which this behaviour revealed to be a continuation of lifelong habits of adjustment to shared ideals, rather than a marker of cultural disenfranchisement. The strong opinions of the housewife who introduced this chapter with her thoughts about fashion reveal that mid-century social scientists and medical professionals misread how older Britons felt about their bodies when they focused on medical diagnoses and mobility alone. Although their limbs did not function or look as they had in the past and sometimes caused pain and inconvenience, none of the older men and women in this chapter had given up on their bodies or on life. More often, ageing bodies symbolised rich emotional and social lives and were judged well worth the care and attention they claimed.

Style and self-worth in later life

Mid-twentieth-century Britons were acutely aware of being observed. As in America, ‘new urban sites of consumption and display, a flourishing fashion economy, the spread of image-

making technologies, and a nascent culture of celebrity’ meant that, ‘Seeing and being seen’ took on greater cultural importance from the late nineteenth century.¹⁷ Liz Conor has shown how 1920s Australian consumer culture linked feminine identity to ‘techniques of appearing’ so that ‘it was as visual images, spectacles, that women could appear modern to themselves and others’.¹⁸ In particular, she has traced how beauty culture ‘constructed appearing as a procedure of knowledge of the self, achieved through the surface effects of the body and a calculated regime of care, and by placing oneself before one’s eyes and the eyes of the public’.¹⁹ Social scientists and historians have focused on struggling older bodies, those who were in pain, in need, or could not leave their houses — elderly figures that were not readily included in the visual culture of modern Britain. By contrast, many older research participants were interested in the attractiveness of ageing bodies and how they appeared in the spotlight of beauty culture and community social life. This confidence contrasts with sociologists’ findings that older women ‘disappear’ as they age: they feel eyes slipping over them in the street and are ascribed no personal attributes other than oldness.²⁰ Instead, a 63-year-old music teacher was aware that ‘one ought to try as far as possible to make a pleasing “picture” for others to look at’.²¹ The writing of a Durham housewife, who was the same age, revealed the way friends and neighbours might critique this picture:

I examine the appearances of all I meet. I might be saying to myself ‘You’re really a nice face & figure if only you (1) bought the right hats, (2) clothes, (3) did your hair differently & (4) carried yourself well.’ Or I might be thinking ‘Your smartness makes you for you’ve a very poor face.’²²

¹⁷ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*, pp.44-6.

¹⁸ Liz Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s*, Bloomington, 2004, p.2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.48.

²⁰ Furman, *Facing the Mirror: Older Women and Beauty Shop Culture*, p.30; Gubrium and Holstein, 'The Everyday Visibility of the Aging Body', p.211.

²¹ Mass Observation directive, 2895 reply to July 1950 directive (aged 63), MOA.

²² Mass Observation directive, 1016 reply to July 1950 directive (aged 63), MOA.

These categories of assessment externalised this older woman's standards for her own appearance, which required that she navigate a series of consumer and cultural sites of knowledge in order to make decisions about clothes, accessories, personal grooming and posture. She expected equally scrupulous appraisals from those she met and so did not visit the shops looking 'any old sight' and would 'leave the milk in the hands of the milkman' rather than let him see her poorly-groomed.²³

Such attention could be inspirational as well as critical and older women admired and copied the style displayed on the bodies around them. A 61-year-old mass-observer noticed well-groomed hair, 'extremely good shoes & gloves', and a correct choice of colours, cut and bag, which added up to the 'delight' of the 'American finish' she observed in female acquaintances who often crossed the Atlantic.²⁴ Another older writer sounded wistful as she evoked the polished femininity she sometimes encountered:

I admire with envy women who are perfectly groomed, who appear always to have just bathed, had their hair 'dressed', and whom one can guess wear dainty, and always fresh underwear with 'outerwear' perfectly fitting, hands and face makeup perfect, but not too obtrusive.²⁵

This deeply sensual and feminine vision had suitability and self-possession, not fashion or youth, at its core and its 62-year-old author was not barred from successfully embodying it by dint of her advancing age. While Connor associated spectacular femininity with youth, the same habits of appearing and observing were carefully practised by older women who styled themselves as 'pictures', confidently judged the image presented by others, and understood that appearances said important things about their status and identity.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Mass Observation directive, 1654 reply to July 1950 directive (aged 61), MOA.

²⁵ Mass Observation directive, 1312 reply to July 1950 directive (aged 62), MOA.

Older mass-observers had a specific vision of how they wished to appear which was related, but not identical, to the fashions they observed in advertising and shop windows. At 63, a Suffolk housewife and secretary considered herself ‘too old to wear clothes simply because they are in fashion’ but liked ‘to wear things sufficiently still in fashion to look Right’, emphasising the emotional significance of the final term through its capitalisation.²⁶ This impulse was also central to advertising in *Vogue*; between 1937 and 1964 fashion advertising frequently addressed itself to ‘those who want to look Right’ in well-styled suits.²⁷ Using similar language, an 86-year-old author did not wish to be ““smart” whatever that may be, nor dull nor dowdy, just right for my size, age & type & dressed for the occasion’.²⁸ She understood smartness to connote a fashion consciousness that would be unbecoming at her age, but this did not put an end to her efforts to dress and appear ‘just right’. As this passage suggests, age was only one of the characteristics that affected women’s choices about suitable attire and it did not exclude them from the influence and pleasures of fashion.

Men trod on riskier ground than women when they fretted about the style of their shoes or the cut of their clothes. As Jill Greenfield, Sean O’Connell, and Chris Reid have demonstrated, men were being wooed as consumers of style in the 1930s. Between 1935 and 1939 a fifth of lifestyle magazine *Men Only*’s articles and one third of their advertising dealt with men’s bodies and clothes. However, the awkwardness of columns and editorials dealing with the magazine’s advertising and the male reader’s purchase of these products showed that ‘focussing so openly on male appearance still had to be dealt with discreetly’

²⁶ Mass Observation directive, 3035 reply to July 1950 directive, MOA.

²⁷ *Vogue*, 17 March 1937, p.17; *Vogue*, 1 October 1964, p.70.

²⁸ Mass Observation directive, 914 reply to July 1950 directive (aged 86), MOA.

and had 'socially constructed limits'.²⁹ If men knew too much about beauty and fashion culture they would appear effeminate, a charge that carried harsh legal and social penalties. As Matt Houlbrook has demonstrated for interwar London, appropriately masculine behaviour could be policed by monitoring men's possession and use of accessories of beauty such as the powder puff.³⁰ In this context older men could not appear as 'spectacularly' as women, but they were still aware that their appearances were being scrutinised and judged by others.

Compared to female mass-observers, men wrote shorter and less enthusiastic descriptions of their routines of purchasing and caring for clothes. The suitable appearance they desired involved less colour and a quieter sense of pleasure. Many older men pronounced themselves 'indifferent' to their appearance, but their ostensible apathy might more usefully be understood as a carefully monitored class- and gender-based relationship to fashion and bodily ideals. Breward has indicated the way that the relatively conservative and slow changing male fashion market in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century London turned men's attention to 'minor changes in the choice of hat, gloves, shirt or tie according to function or season' or to 'signify a knowledge of prevailing tastes'.³¹ A lack of ostentation did not mean that men were unconcerned with style, and achieving a 'plain' appearance required much thought and effort. As Breward has usefully highlighted in the context of 1870s tailoring journalism, 'plainness' can mean 'an attention to neatness in finish and the provision of an uncompromised setting against which accessories and detail could be more

²⁹ Greenfield, O'Connell, and Reid, 'Fashioning Masculinity: Men Only, Consumption and the Development of Marketing in the 1930s', p.470.

³⁰ Matt Houlbrook, 'The Man with the Powder Puff in Interwar London', *The Historical Journal*, 50, 1, 2007, pp.145-71.

³¹ Christopher Breward, *The Hidden Consumer: Masculinities, Fashion and City Life 1860-1914*, *Studies in Design and Material Culture*, Manchester, 1999, p.39.

clearly displayed, rather than a complete disavowal of surface interest'.³² Dressing within the narrower boundaries set for their gender, men may have been more alert to the social meanings of style and grooming than women and felt there was more at stake. As for 'plain' men in 1870s London, the 'indifference' of older men in mid-twentieth-century Britain provided an ideal 'uncompromised setting' for the details that signalled their respectability, style, and worth to the community.

Frank Mort has suggested the unease that surrounded male consumption, fashion and potential effeminacy into the 1950s, but has also described a mid-century ideal of masculine appearance that was frequently attained by ageing men. While the muscular and barely-clothed body of Eugene Sandow and the success of physical culture around 1900, including Sandow's performances of fitness and strength, indicated some sense of male alienation from consumer culture and fashion, men encountered alternative images in the windows and catalogues of tailors' shops over the first half of the twentieth century.³³ To sell suits to the lower-middle and respectable working classes, the Leeds-based tailoring company the House of Burton presented an ideal 'of full adult manhood, indeterminate in age, but secure in position' and always 'correctly dressed'.³⁴ Burton's version of the gentleman 'acquired status by being absolutely normal. Neither spectacular nor bizarre, not a "clothes crank" or an eccentric, he was secure in his personality.'³⁵ This was exactly the position that male mass-

³² Ibid., pp.30-1.

³³ Ibid., pp.245, 9, 52.

³⁴ Frank Mort, *Cultures of Consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in Late Twentieth-Century Britain*, London, 1996, p.137.

³⁵ Ibid., p.138.

observers aimed to occupy: ‘neat and tidy but not conspicuous’ they carefully situated themselves on the midpoint between ‘overdressing’ and ‘carelessness’.³⁶

Yet, like that of their female counterparts, older men’s writing suggests that dressing ‘so that one’s appearance should not offend canons of propriety and good taste’ was only the first or ‘lowest’ step on the rungs of style and good looks.³⁷ Similarly to older women, these men often listened carefully to the advice about appearances offered by family and friends, felt that their grooming expressed their values and character, and found many pleasures in fashion and bodily care. One retiree was ‘quite critical of the get-up of my friends’ and a fellow respondent described how he and others in the Glasgow press room of the *Daily Record* would ‘get on to’ any ‘unsightly’ unshaven colleagues and insist that they shaved.³⁸ These older men were active in community policing of standards of appearance, which often affected their habits in turn. A retired clergyman recorded that ‘remarks from the lady members of the family’ caused him to improve his appearances and take more care in shaving while a 63-year-old reported removing his beard after a fellow train passenger addressed him as ‘dad’, a title he felt his years did not yet deserve.³⁹ Wives, daughters, workmates and the men themselves were concerned that they should meet standards of respectability and correctly represent their character to the world. As a retired chemist observed, a man’s appearance was ‘an index of his character’ and projected ‘obvious indications’ about his inner self: untidy dress signalled carelessness and sometimes intellect; overdressing was evidence of a person ‘lacking in brains and good taste, and overburdened

³⁶ Mass Observation directive, 1124 reply to July 1950 directive (aged 73), MOA.

³⁷ Mass Observation directive, 1015 reply to April 1939 directive (aged 63), MOA.

³⁸ Mass Observation directives, 1762 and 4564 replies to July 1950 directive (aged 69 and 70), MOA.

³⁹ Mass Observation directives, 3204 reply to July 1950 directive and 1095 reply to April 1939 directive (aged 74 and 63), MOA.

with self-esteem'.⁴⁰ Older men's acceptance of these 'obvious' ideas evidenced their interest in the cultural meanings of dress and their concern to present themselves correctly.

As Kathy Peiss has explained, established traditions of the 'reciprocal relation of the inner and outer body' survived the scientific ideas about beauty and hygiene that were popular in the twentieth century.⁴¹ Just as nineteenth-century physiognomy and phrenology understood that personality was revealed through face and body, 1930s beauty advertising used the 'therapeutic language' of psychology and psychiatry to sell the possibility of simultaneous 'transformation of external appearance and inner well-being'.⁴² Older men and women invoked this long-standing connection between outer appearances and inner self when they judged the cut of their hair or the neatness of their attire to be an 'indication of character' which communicated their 'self-esteem, conscientiousness, energy, carefulness and balance (between vanity and slovenliness)'.⁴³ While British historians such as Horwood have located older bodies in the milieu of conformity, class consciousness, and respectability, Mass Observation respondents' awareness of the many signals they sent out through dress complicates their pursuit of respectability by highlighting the private and internal benefits of good grooming.⁴⁴ Looking respectable was not just unthinking adherence to tradition: it was keeping your job, pleasing your family and friends, and affirming your sense of self.

⁴⁰ Mass Observation directives, 1099 reply to April 1939 directive (aged 61), MOA.

⁴¹ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*, pp.16-7.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp.24, 144, 55.

⁴³ Mass Observation directive, 1099 reply to April 1939 directive (aged 61), MOA.

⁴⁴ Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances: Fashion and Class between the Wars*.

Picking up on such concern among their older readers, in March 1949 *Vogue* introduced Mrs Exeter, a figure who was, ‘Approaching sixty’ and did not look ‘a day younger’.⁴⁵ Mrs Exeter would advise older women how to present themselves with grace and style in a column that appeared around every two months until 1965. For over a decade, this character voiced her pride in later life and insisted that older women should accept and groom their bodies, not seek to deny their age. Moreover, by placing Mrs Exeter at the centre of vibrant social scenes, *Vogue* also suggested that later life was important and enjoyable. For example, Mrs Exeter’s value was reflected in the many characters that depended on her wisdom and social nous between the magazine’s pages: over the summer of 1953 alone she had escorted her niece through the season, accompanied her grandchildren to the coronation, and hosted friends from abroad.⁴⁶ As an older woman Mrs Exeter had much to offer her family and community and she took her place alongside the young in committee work and at garden parties, dinners, theatre outings, and weddings.⁴⁷ Her ever-stylish and appropriate clothes were one sign of her belonging to these social scenes: she was ‘businesslike and charming’ at meetings and radiated a ‘restrained and formal beauty’ during dinners. Although she covered more of her body than younger women in the same fashion spreads, Mrs Exeter frequently occupied the centre of these images, framed by admiring men and younger women (Figure 15).

⁴⁵ *Vogue*, March 1949, p.72.

⁴⁶ *Vogue*, October 1953, p.84.

⁴⁷ *Vogue*, February 1959, pp.62-75.



Figure 15 and Figure 16: *Vogue's* Mrs Exeter steps out into the limelight at committee meetings and dinners, framed by carefully listening and appreciative audiences. The soft fabric and loose fit of these outfits reflected her adjustment to the increasingly relaxed styling of the late-1950s. *Vogue*, February 1959, pp.62, 68.

Older research participants used their bodies and clothing to assert their social belonging and intrinsic value in the same ways, both in their writing and their daily routines. For example, a 69-year-old housewife proudly described the way that she ‘always dressed fully on rising’ regardless of the time-consuming and dirty domestic work the day might hold, and changed into a fresh outfit before her husband returned home, ‘even as late as 10’ at night.⁴⁸ Serving different interests, a 61-year-old woman who worked as a political organiser insisted that an ‘effective appearance is an absolute essential to anyone in public life & platform work’, with first priority going to her ‘well kept hair, extremely good shoes & gloves’.⁴⁹ Men’s concerns about appearances and clothes were consistently shaped by the expectations of their

⁴⁸ Mass Observation directive, 261 reply to July 1950 directive, MOA.

⁴⁹ Mass Observation directive, 0197 reply to July 1950 directive, MOA.

workplace in this way, and the connection sometimes structured their modes of dressing into retirement. Older research participants opined that for men, ‘Sunday clothes represent freedom from the thralldom of labour and the domination of “the boss” as much as an exhibition of our fancy in colour’. On the other hand, fashionable clothes were ‘a business asset’ and part of the reason the 63-year-old writer responded so actively to being called ‘dad’ by a stranger was his conviction that looking younger would help him keep his job.⁵⁰ These connections retained their power after retirement robbed Sundays of their special leisured status and business commitments were wound down. Working in the garb of a civil servant — ‘a black coat and vest and a black Homburg hat’ — for forty years meant that it was a particular ‘treat’ for a retiree in Hertfordshire to don the old clothes he wore to garden and work around the house.⁵¹ The steps older men and women took to dress suitable for their environment gave them a ‘perfectly comfortable feeling’ which meant far more than meeting minimum class-based standards of dress.⁵²

While their gentlemanly and business-like model of dress seems austere, older men were still able to take trouble with and find enjoyment in their appearances within its confines. A pensioner of 68 aimed to ‘please myself and others’ by looking ‘spruce’.⁵³ He expected his acquaintances to share his enjoyment of ‘observing clothes, hats, fashions, stance and general bearing and grooming’, especially in a ‘well bred and well dressed crowd’ such as the social circle he encountered at the Wimbledon tennis competition. As his enjoyment of this ‘fine collection of people’ indicates, this mass-observer’s interest in fashion and style was class-

⁵⁰Mass Observation directives, 1124, 1099, and 1095 replies to April 1939 directive (aged 73, 61, and 63), MOA.

⁵¹Mass Observation directives, 3634 reply to July 1950 directive (aged 64), MOA.

⁵²Mass Observation directive, 914 reply to July 1950 directive (aged 86), MOA.

⁵³Mass Observation directive, 1916 reply to July 1950 directive (aged 68), MOA.

conscious, but this should not overshadow the aesthetic and internal pleasures it brought. He equated cleanliness with happiness, celebrated that he looked ‘younger than my age’, and explained that being ‘fresh in appearance and well dressed gives you ease and confidence and makes you more acceptable socially’. Perhaps ‘to see and mix with a well bred and well dressed crowd of both sexes and all ages’ was one of this man’s ‘particular pleasures’ because it made him feel engaged with 1950s British life. His excitement at looking younger than his 68 years reminds us of the particular emotional challenges older people faced as they negotiated spaces for themselves in the public settings of modern Britain. Yet placed in this attractive visual scene, at the centre of exciting events and conversations, and clearly connected to modern fashions and entertainment, he did not fit the assumption that old age has been a lonely, unfulfilling, and culturally irrelevant stage of life.

Mid-century high fashion and age

In May 1939, a 64-year-old retired office-worker detailed how she chose an item of clothing in a process that spanned a period of months, drawing on the fashions displayed in printed advertising and along the shopping streets and markets of London, as well as on the advice of her friends and family.⁵⁴ Her approach to purchasing clothes is evidence of the penetration of fashion advertising into the world of older women, but it also reminds us of the centrality of concerns beyond the two-dimensional fantasies presented on newspaper and magazine pages: the importance of budget and the critical eye of friends and family. By contrast, a 61-year-old male mass-observer reported much less engagement with commercial

⁵⁴ Mass Observation directive, 1015 reply to May 1939 (1) directive (aged 64), MOA.

ideals and was scathing of the idea that he might follow ‘fads’.⁵⁵ Nevertheless he had a specific and assertive view about the way his suits should be designed: with pockets on the inside, in indigo blue, with trousers that were short in the ‘body’ and a long waistcoat. He was not willing to accept less than his ideal and only found it ‘surprising how difficult it is to make a tailor understand that I know what I want and mean to have it’.⁵⁶ Both these writers presented themselves as competent, and even unusually clever, in their navigation of this world of marketing fads and uncooperative professionals — where appearing correctly, by their own exacting standards, was judged vital.

In the years between the late-1930s and mid-1960s, older Britons’ tailoring of commercial fashion culture to their own needs was supported by a visual culture which celebrated ideals of feminine beauty that were less age-specific than those which emerged in the 1960s and continue to shape our interpretation of older bodies today. Youth and beauty were often aligned throughout this time period, but equal admiration was paid to women who were stylish and mature. Although changing in form over the mid-century and eventually shifting away from such age-based inclusivity, the enticing imagery of mid-century *Vogue* — realised in sketches, fashion photography, advertising, the career of Britain’s ‘first supermodel’, and the character of Mrs Exeter — delineated the high-fashion and aspirational end of a mid-century beauty culture which ageing women could comfortably inhabit. After marking out the place that was forged for older women within this fundamentally exclusionary world, I go on to explore the ways that women put the tools and imagery of beauty culture to work in their own lives.

⁵⁵ Mass Observation directive, 1099 reply to May 1939 (1) directive (aged 61), MOA.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

This study picks up near the end of the ‘golden age’ of fashion illustration, when sketches had seemed an expression of modern life and its panache, especially in the interwar media.⁵⁷ The demise of this visual format began in 1936, when *Vogue*’s publisher Condé Nast surveyed *Vogue* news-stand sales and concluded that photographic covers sold better than illustrated ones. However, line drawings had a strong visual presence in *Vogue* until the mid-1960s and were considered especially appropriate for conveying Parisian chic. Like the introduction of Mrs Exeter, this style of drawing privileged poise and experience over youth. Here, a woman’s visage was imaged to be angular rather than round, her body were elongated rather than curvaceous, and her facial features appeared thoughtful rather than wide-eyed and naïve (Figure 17).



Figure 17 and Figure 18: *Vogue*’s line drawings: the illustration on the left demonstrated the Paris fashion for pleating, here on a navy wool box jacket. The one on the right promoted Mrs Exeter’s slimming coat frock in pin-striped grey jersey. Each image depicted a similar style, stance, and set of facial features. *Vogue*, April 1950, p.92; April 1951, p.126.

⁵⁷ Cally Blackman, *100 Years of Fashion Illustration*, London, 2007, p.71.

As the above comparison suggests, illustrators used angularity to denote high fashion, slimness, and age. A single popular and recurring set of fashion ideals — of being well-put-together, refined, and cosmopolitan — inspired both high fashion and Mrs Exeter's look.

Gradually taking over the magazine from the late-1930s, mid-century fashion photographs relied more on smooth skin and feminine roundness for their appeal. Yet their visual vocabulary of understated style, trim figures, and swept-back hair could also be emulated by older women. In these prints, which were particularly dominant over the 1940s and 1950s, women covered and shaped much of their bodies with suits, stockings, gloves, and hats. Donning this style, Mrs Exeter frequently appeared in *Vogue's* main fashion spreads beside younger models who also advertised a mature femininity (Figure 19). Both Mrs Exeter and her younger counterparts were photographed in confident but refined poses, inhabiting a world of mature entertainments; perhaps enjoying pre-dinner cocktails, passing a weekend in a country house, or shopping for groceries in town (Figure 20). Aiming for the same 'smart' style, one 60-year-old social worker ensured that her gloves, bag, and jewellery would 'harmonise' with each of the outfits she purchased, took special care to hang, dry clean, and press her clothes (even storing light-weight garments in tissue paper), visited her hairdresser fortnightly (and brushing her hair 'thoroughly' each day then pinning it up at night, under a net to protect the 'set' from steam as she bathed), and planned her exercise and diet so that she would 'keep trim & active'.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Mass Observation directive, 3981 reply to June 1950 directive, MOA.



Figure 19: A fashion shoot displaying ‘tailored contrasts’. This model’s youth was not emphasised. Instead, the important things about her image are her sharply defined and trim shape, her chic suit, and the completeness of the outfit of suit, gloves, and hat, all virtues that older women could emulate. *Vogue*, December 1950, p.72.



Figure 20 and Figure 21: The tailored, self-contained look was embodied by Mrs Exeter over her lifetime in *Vogue*. These images appeared on facing pages in 1957 and represent her most common looks: daytime country chic in tweed or checked suits, and refined and sophisticated evening wear. *Vogue*, September 1957, pp.154 and 155.

As a fashion publication aimed primarily at women, *Vogue* positioned men in the background of fashion shoots and advertising to frame stylish women and to suggest their glamorous lifestyles. Yet, in the process, the magazine's mid-century advertising and photography suggested that, while men had to carefully judge their grooming by the requirements of appropriate masculinity, advancing age was not a factor that necessarily threatened their potential to look and feel attractive. From the late-1930s until the early-1960s many of the men featured in *Vogue* displayed physical signs of ageing such as greying hair and some wrinkles around the eyes. These handsome and well-groomed older men symbolised wealth, status, and power, and were pictured accompanying women of all ages to the races, the theatre, and glamorous cocktail parties. For instance, an upper-class and ageing dinner

attendee embodied the aristocratic pretensions of the trademark ‘Aristoc’, evoked the kind of privileged woman who would be meeting him (wearing the brand’s stockings, ‘of course’), and was positioned as part of a romantic fantasy (Figure 22). The verbal and visual link the advertisement established between the singular man pictured and the ‘she’ mentioned below the image emphasised the intimacy and romance of their preparations. Moreover, this older man’s looks — and especially the accoutrements of his grooming — were part of this dashing image. Similarly, in a more sultry image, the older man and younger woman who were posed together in an advertisement for ‘Saint Joseph’ French jersey generated a sexual charge through their downward gazes, the closeness of their lower bodies, and the intimate moment they anticipated sharing as they lit a cigarette together (Figure 23).

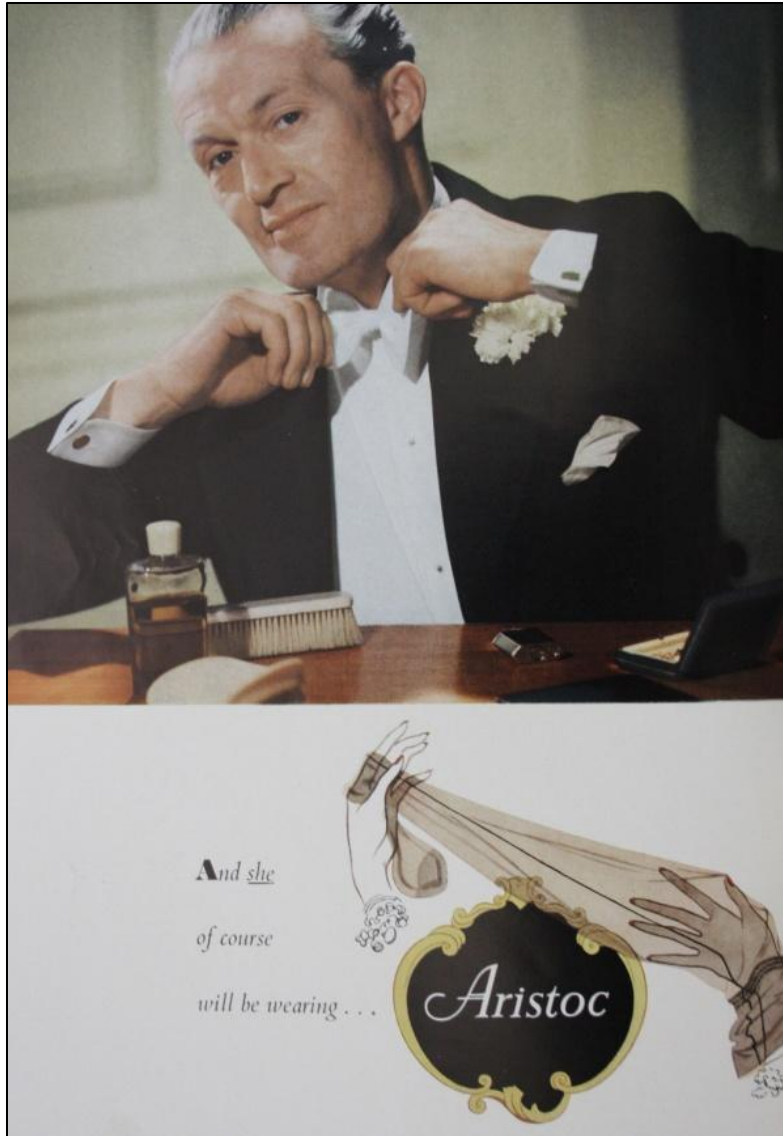


Figure 22: Advertising for 'Aristoc' hosiery. Here, the model's age communicated his social nous and prestige, and affirmed his attractiveness. *Vogue*, June, July, August, September, October, December 1954; January, February, March 1955, inside front cover.



Figure 23: Modelling luxury ‘Saint Joseph’ French jersey, this man’s age did not interfere with his status as a suave figure. Instead, he appeared to be the love interest of a younger woman. *Vogue*, 1 March 1962, p.30.

The popular appeal of mature styling was reflected in the reception of Barbara Goalen, ‘Britain’s first supermodel’ and for a time the ‘most photographed woman’ in the nation, who dominated the British fashion pages between 1947 and 1954.⁵⁹ Goalen became a mannequin in her mid-twenties and enjoyed the fashion limelight into her early-thirties.⁶⁰ She was said to exude a sophisticated and mature glamour: while displaying the necessarily

⁵⁹ Rebecca Arnold, ‘Goalen, Barbara Kathleen (1921–2002)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Online), Oxford University Press, 2006, Available at: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/76961> (26 September 2012); ‘Barbara Goalen’, *Telegraph*, (Online), 19 June 2002, Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/culture-obituaries/1397667/Barbara-Goalen.html> (26 September 2012); Veronica Horwell, ‘Obituary: Barbara Goalen’, *Guardian*, Online 22 June 2002, Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2002/jun/22/guardianobituaries.veronicahorwell> (26 September 2012).

⁶⁰ Mannequin was the appellation used before the American term model took over.

stunning ‘figure, cheekbones and swallowtail eyebrows’, she did not have overt youthfulness, instead ‘adult experience showed in her black-pencil-lined eyes’. Goalen wore elegant and expensive-looking garb inspired by Dior’s New Look and ‘designed for women, not girls’ (Figure 24). After 1954, she organised dress shows and wrote a fashion column for the *Daily Telegraph*. In both pursuits she ‘made no concessions to the brevity of skirts and dearth of real jewellery in the 1960s’ but authored and designed ‘dispatches from another, pre-mini and tights, world’.

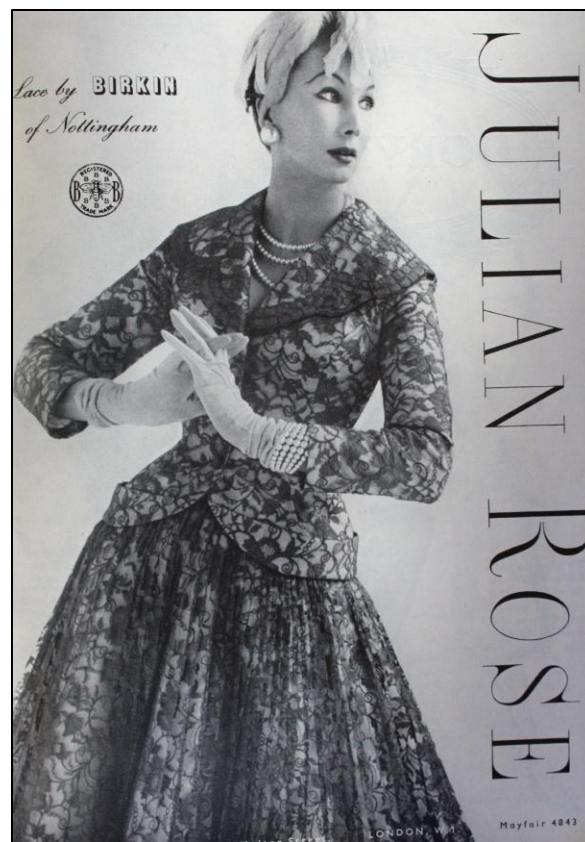


Figure 24: ‘Britain’s first supermodel’ Barbara Goalen. Her beauty did not rely on exposed skin — which she showed very little of in this image — but on a carefully tailored and structured feminine body and on the ease with which she wore formal and luxurious clothing. *Vogue*, September 1955 p.201.

In all these activities, Goalen embodied the mature femininity that dominated *Vogue*’s fashion imagery and beauty ideals across the first half of the twentieth century. Conekin’s

work on mid-century models and fashion photographers has also highlighted this trend, for example by quoting the former model Cherry Marshall's description of the generation that looked 'more like thirty than twenty-one' and Jennifer Hocking's memory that in 1957, after having two children with her model-actor husband, she 'suddenly became the It girl, the model of the year at 27'.⁶¹ As Goalen's biography and appearances suggest, for a time in mid-century Britain, glamour was more important than youthfulness. Hence, I argue, older women could hope to emulate *Vogue's* most celebrated beauties — albeit with flexibility about the size of waists and dress allowances alike — in ways that would become impossible during the 1960s. Although Goalen's expensively styled appearance and luxe lifestyle were unattainable for almost all British women, media figures like her had long offered 'vicarious pleasures' and the chance to reproduce some upper-class glamour in customised or home-made clothing.⁶² The vital point, for this chapter at least, is that ageing was no barrier to embodying a portion of Goalen's beauty and elegance.

Christopher Breward has also suggested that historians have overemphasised the effect of the beguiling imagery of the lithe flapper of the 1920s and wrongly implied an overwhelming obsession with youth.⁶³ Breward reminds us that the first half of the twentieth century also offered mature fashions from the 'statuesque, heavy-chested grandeur' of Edwardian fashions to the 'huge swirling skirts' and 'formal demeanour' of the New Look championed by Dior from 1947.⁶⁴ For example, from the starting point of this study in 1937, British

⁶¹ Linda Scott has described similar trends in America in the 1950s. Conekin, 'From Haughty to Nice: How British Fashion Images Changed from the 1950s to the 1960s', p.285; Linda M. Scott, *Fresh Lipstick: Redressing Fashion and Feminism*, New York and Basingstoke, 2005, pp.256-7.

⁶² Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, *Oxford Historical Monographs*, Oxford, 2004, p.172.

⁶³ Christopher Breward, *The Culture of Fashion: A New History of Fashionable Dress*, *Studies in Design and Material Culture*, Manchester, 1995, p.185.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.185-6, 91.

Vogue considered the dress of older women and presented attractive looks for mothers of the bride, clothes that knew ‘no age limit’ and elegant sartorial answers to the question: ‘After fifty, what?’⁶⁵ *Vogue* models appeared womanly and wore dresses of ‘tailored, architectural severity’ and ‘studied, yet easy formality’ that were marketed as stylishly and ‘distinctively English’.⁶⁶ As Zillah Halls has described, New Look dresses were tailored to flatter ageing bodies and suggested an ideal of femininity that was attractive for older women:

slim hips were no longer important, and the right foundation and a softer style were kinder to the expanding waist than what had gone before, especially when a discreet amount of shoulder padding was used to give more shapeliness to the upper torso. And the most admired qualities — ‘sophistication’, ‘poised’, ‘soignée’ — are virtues less of artless and innocent youth than of maturity, wisdom and experience.⁶⁷

Advocating all these virtues, Mrs Exeter’s column was a monologue of chatty advice about fashionable and flattering dress for women of a certain age. *Vogue* emphasised her age: in March 1949 she was accused of mumbling, in June that year she was interrupted napping and reminiscing about the past, and in September she was knitting for her granddaughter.⁶⁸ Moreover, the character freely voiced the aesthetic challenges posed by her thickening waist, yellowing complexion, and rheumatism. However, *Vogue* wrote, the fact that she was definitively not ‘young-looking’ did not preclude her from being ‘good-looking. The best in her class’. The periodical judged their missives to older women a success, and in November 1950 Mrs Exeter gazed out from the cover of *Vogue* in a vision of ladylike style. This appearance on the publication’s cover suggests the character’s popularity and appeal, which

⁶⁵ *Vogue*, February-March 1937, pp.29-31, 48-49; July, pp.20-21; 10 November, pp.92-93.

⁶⁶ Christopher Breward, Becky Conekin, and Caroline Cox, 'Introduction: "Dyed in the Wool English?"', in *The Englishness of English Dress*, Becky Conekin and Caroline Cox, eds, Oxford, 2002, p.5.

⁶⁷ Zillah Halls, 'Mrs Exeter — the Rise and Fall of the Older Woman', *Costume*, 34, 2000, p.106.

⁶⁸ *Vogue*, March 1949, p.72; June 1949, p.6; September 1949, p.104.

would be proven by her long-lasting career in the magazine, her frequent bi-monthly appearance, and the adoption of her pointers by many British women.⁶⁹ For instance Halls has recalled the many ‘mothers, aunts and older friends who really did value, even take’ Mrs Exeter’s advice during the period and, in an autobiography published in the year of her ninety-first birthday, Diana Athill described the character’s success in persuading elderly women to wear ‘stylish clothes’.⁷⁰

In 1952 *Vogue* discovered and introduced their ‘real-life Mrs Exeter’ who lent the character her distinctive and recognisable face (Figure 25).⁷¹ Mrs Exeter’s personal style was crystallised at this time; she typically appeared in well-cut, flattering suits, with a fashionable twist in colour or tailoring that marked her out as attractive and up-to-date. Although Mrs Exeter always shopped on a budget and emphasised thrifty behaviour, she belonged to the upper classes and attended the Ascot races, the Henley regatta, and events in the London social season.

⁶⁹ Halls, 'Mrs Exeter — the Rise and Fall of the Older Woman', pp.107-8, 10.

⁷⁰ Diana Athill, *Somewhere Towards the End*, London and New York, 2008, p.14; Halls, 'Mrs Exeter — the Rise and Fall of the Older Woman', p.108.

⁷¹ *Vogue*, August 1952, p.65.



Figure 25: Mrs Eastley: the ‘real life’ Mrs Exeter.. This photograph is typical of the well-groomed style which she wore on the pages of *Vogue* until the 1960s, when she reconsidered some aspects of her look. *Vogue*, October 1953, p.85

Significantly, Mrs Exeter did not appear unusual against the backdrop of smart suits, matching bags, and gloves that *Vogue* marketed to women of all ages. Instead, *Vogue*’s advertisers and authors agreed with Mrs Exeter on the vital importance of ‘Quality’ and ‘Clothes of Distinction’.⁷² Female mass-observers who were aged over 60 shopped and dressed by these fashionable ideals, too. These women applied the same categories of judgement as *Vogue* to their wardrobe: their clothes should be fashionable but also good quality, have a classic look, and be versatile, flattering, and morale-boosting to wear.⁷³

Vogue’s visual culture changed in the 1960s as fashion ideals split between this mode of elegance, and looks that were off-limits to older women because of the flesh they displayed

⁷² *Vogue*, February 1951, from p.48; *Vogue*, August 1951, p.12.

⁷³ *Vogue*, Mid February 1959, p.32.

and because they were explicitly youthful. Conekin has recently demonstrated the close relationship between these two modes of fashion by showing how photographers and models of the late-1950s created ‘the world’ that the youthful icons of the 1960s would inhabit. For example, John French made fashion photography attractive for a mass audience by pioneering ‘high contrast black-and-white photography to get the resolution necessary for the photographs to look elegant on cheap newsprint’ of mass-circulation media.⁷⁴ With other innovators of the 1930s, Norman Parkinson had ‘enjoyed photographing his models in natural settings and in dynamic poses’ — a visual code which would be adopted in *Vogue* to showcase their younger models and the feeling of freedom and relaxation.⁷⁵

In 1953, Parkinson contributed the photograph that launched *Vogue*’s ‘Young idea’, a section designed to appeal to the ‘booming’ youth market.⁷⁶ Over its first decade, this section and similar features were points of intersection between *Vogue*’s increasing interest in young women and its celebration of poise and ageless style. For example, the 1956 ‘Clothes with no age tag’ fashion spread insisted that the same looks were accessible for women of any age, but its visual cues emphasised the differences between younger and older women’s bodies and activities in a way that earlier images had not. The feature pictured the actresses Elizabeth Seal and Adrienne Allen wearing matching twinsets, but the developing graphic language of youth culture highlighted their differences in other ways, especially through the juxtaposition of jeans with a tweed skirt, the clean white space of a studio with a drawing room, and a pixie cut with a perm (Figure 26). Of course, this shift did not occur overnight

⁷⁴ Conekin, ‘From Haughty to Nice: How British Fashion Images Changed from the 1950s to the 1960s’, p.288.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.289.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

and, elsewhere in late-1950s *Vogue*, the styling appropriate for young and old was deemed to be the same (Figure 28).



Figure 26 and 27: 'Clothes with no age tag'. The central point of this 'feature was that the model's outfits bore 'no age tag', yet the positioning and styling of the younger and older woman undermined this proposition. *Vogue*, February 1956, pp.54-55.



Figure 28: A ‘What to wear with fuchsia’ fashion spread, in which age-specific style was expressed through subtle alterations in accessories and jewellery. Their dresses were fit for similar social activities and adhered to the same ideal of feminine beauty. *Vogue*, September 1957, p.169

However, by 1959 younger and older women who appeared in the ‘Clothes with no age tag’ feature were shown to inhabit the same social spaces, but in different outfits. While the explicitly youthful activities and spaces of the mid-1960s had not yet taken over these *Vogue* fashion shoots, they made an increasingly clear distinction between the visual signifiers of

youth and age.⁷⁷ In 1964 most of *Vogue's* style suggestions — including patent leather knee-high boots, miniskirts, and false eyelashes — would have alienated older women. At the same time, Mrs Exeter's column became an advertorial, with only a few, tangential references to her identity as an older woman. High fashion had ceased to be an appropriate location for the celebration of older bodies, but we should not ignore what came before the mid-1960s, when fashion illustrations and photography championed mature, statuesque women, and Mrs Exeter was a symbol of glamour for those approaching and on the far side of 60.

The uses of beauty culture: older women and cosmetics

Historians and sociologists have argued that Western culture has a blind spot in addressing a meaningful old age. Andrew Blaikie began his study of *Ageing and Popular Culture* with a quotation about the difficulties of imagining ageing: 'The trouble is that old age is not interesting until one gets there, a foreign country with an unknown language.'⁷⁸ Many philosophers and intellectuals have considered the reluctance and even inability of the young and middle-aged to imagine the aged self.⁷⁹ Some of the greatest resistance and horror seems to be directed against physical change. Simone de Beauvoir encouraged her readers to feel disgust at the prospect of gazing in to the mirror at 20 to see a 60-year-old self looking back.⁸⁰ But de Beauvoir's imaginary scene is shocking because it is unnatural. We do not age within a moment: instead 'Providence leads us so kindly through all these different stages

⁷⁷ For example in a 'Dressing for committee work/ a garden party/ dinner/ the theatre/ a wedding' spread *Vogue*, February 1959, pp.62-75.

⁷⁸ Blaikie, *Ageing and Popular Culture*, p.1.

⁷⁹ For example Simone de Beauvoir, *Old Age*, London, 1972, pp.1-4.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.287. She is quoting Madame de Sévigné, 27 January 1686.

of our life that we hardly feel them at all. The slope runs gently down; it is imperceptible — the hand on the dial whose movement we do not see.⁸¹ The older mass-observers featured in this chapter were not horrified at their ageing but drew on mid-century beauty culture to allow for each alteration as it arrived. Their later lives were not located in ‘a foreign country with an unknown language’ but remained squarely in mid-century Britain, though their constantly-adjusted relationship to the ideals of mainstream culture.

Older women’s use of makeup illustrates some of the ways that their experience of ageing was a continuation of views and practices that had been developed over a lifetime. The layered meanings of applying cosmetics in old age were suggested in a 63-year-old music teacher’s response to Mass Observation’s July 1950 inquiry, which asked her to consider her use of and feelings about makeup. The writer opened her reflection on cosmetics with cutting remarks about the look of old age and dismissed makeup’s potential to affect improvement, yet the rest of the paragraph suggested a more complex view of the function of cosmetics in older women’s beauty regimes and inner lives.

I use make-up occasionally still, as so many elderly women do I imagine, in the forlorn hope that it may help in some magical way to rejuvenate the depressing spectacle that confronts me whenever I look in a mirror. When I see the effect of make-up on some ageing faces I realise what a complete illusion this is. Then why does one continue to powder and use lip-stick. I think probably because the illusion at least gives one a temporary feeling of confidence; one’s face feels younger; even if it doesn’t look it for long, and the moral support this induces gives one a pleasanter, more refreshed expression, and that is important. Unfortunately during the stress of daily life these days it’s impossible to prevent the worried and anxious expression returning (as is only too painfully evident to many women, including myself, who suddenly catch sigh of themselves in the mirrors of shops). Then off we hie to the nearest ladies cloak room — though many don’t mind doing up their faces in the street, shop or ‘bus — to ‘do up’ the face again; then we feel better, and at once look it.⁸²

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Mass Observation directive, 9141 reply to July 1950 directive (aged 63), MOA.

The intricacies of this woman's relationship with cosmetics are signalled from the outset: her 'forlorn' reaction to the 'depressing spectacle' in the glass registered the emotional impact of physical ageing yet her hope that makeup could 'rejuvenate' this vision suggests that she saw underlying beauty there too. In this context, wearing cosmetics was a sensory and affective experience that meant 'one's face feels younger' and which brought inner loveliness to the surface. Her description shifted from the internal dimensions of this 'magical' experience — greater confidence and 'moral support' — to its outward expression in a 'pleasanter, more refreshed' appearance. This doubling or layering of opposing understandings of the power of makeup resembles the 'ironic believers' who, as Michael Saler has described, 'willingly believed' in Sherlock Holmes 'with the double-minded awareness that they were engaged in pretence'.⁸³ In accordance with 'the fin-de-siècle recognition that perceived reality was to some extent an imaginative construct, and that reason itself was beholden to imaginative insights and desires', such 'indulgence in the imagination' became permissible within the modern pursuits of mass entertainment and self-fashioning.⁸⁴ This Mass Observation volunteer, and other women of her age, were 'immersed but not submerged' in the belief that '[m]odern enchantments' like powder and lipstick could transform their faces.⁸⁵

Kathy Peiss positioned her history of America's beauty culture, *Hope in a Jar*, according to this notion: while the phrase 'hope in a jar' could be used to deride the cosmetics industry as profiting from female delusions, Peiss has argued that women have always known 'precisely what they were buying'.⁸⁶ The 'pleasures of fantasy and desire' and their delight in 'the

⁸³ Saler, "'Clap If You Believe in Sherlock Holmes": Mass Culture and the Re-Enchantment of Modernity, c. 1890-c. 1940', p.606.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.607.

⁸⁶ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*, p.6.

sensuous creams and tiny compacts, the riot of colours, the mastery of makeup skills, the touch of hands, the sharing of knowledge and advice' were part of women's purchases.

Likewise, older women could enjoy the glamour and promise of makeup without measuring themselves by the brand of slim, youthful, beauty that was often featured in cosmetics advertising. In recent works, sociologists have recorded the disconnection that contemporary older women have felt from their bodies, and particularly from the external signs of ageing, and have described the shock older women have felt on seeing photographs of their face, which they have perceived as a 'mask' concealing their inner selves.⁸⁷ This is not reflected in the writings of the mid-century elderly who groomed their bodies in order to express their character and who were able to locate an appropriate place for themselves on a continuum of beauty and fashion ideals, a process they had engaged in throughout their lives.

Seeking to flesh out this process of adjustment, Peiss has described how American women of all ages embedded their use of cosmetic in the reality of their always less-than-perfect lives, appearances, and relationships. The success of door-to-door cosmetics sales and in-store demonstrators showed that cosmetics businesses had to do more than present women with 'fantasy images of glamour and romance'.⁸⁸ Selling makeup also entailed 'communicating cosmetic information, educating consumers, providing services, and fostering women's sociability'. Moreover, women retained a degree of scepticism about cosmetics marketing and 'approached advertising messages not as isolated consumers but as social actors, reading their warnings and advice in light of personal experiences and local

⁸⁷ Furman, *Facing the Mirror: Older Women and Beauty Shop Culture*, p.106; Gubrium and Holstein, 'The Everyday Visibility of the Aging Body', pp.211-2; Öberg, 'Images Versus Experience of the Aging Body', p.106.

⁸⁸ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*, p.132.

contexts'.⁸⁹ American market studies of the 1920s and 1930s revealed that the opinions of friends and neighbours were much more powerful than makeup advertisements and that women's use of cosmetics was rooted in the gift-giving, advice, and gossip of their social circles.⁹⁰ Female consumers wrote the idealised beauty displayed in advertisements into the 'true story' of their lives so that, for women of all ages, the application of rouge or lipstick had 'as much to do with aging bodies, loss of vibrancy, the requirements of employers, and the physical demands of housework and child rearing' as with the pursuit of male admiration or Hollywood glamour.⁹¹

Female mass-observers' testimony about their use of makeup shows how firmly their understandings and practises of beauty were situated in their social milieu. While a number of women named the brand of powder they used or wrote about 'skin food' or 'tonic lotion' in the language of advertising, purchases of these specific products were often motivated by the comments and habits of friends and family members.⁹² In 1939, a 63-year-old widow living in Kent sounded grateful that her daughter and sister-in-law 'took me in hand about ten years ago & insisted on my using an eyebrow pencil as I was going so grey'.⁹³ Other women mentioned the influence their families and friends had on their beauty routines. For example, the same housewife whose reflections opened this chapter linked the pleasure she felt when her sons admired her appearance, to her request that their Christmas gifts replenish her supply of 'good powder, cream, lipstick refills etc'.⁹⁴ Many older women made judgements about cosmetics based on their observations of members of their communities

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.175.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp.175-6.

⁹¹ Ibid., pp.184-5.

⁹² Mass Observation directive, 3981 reply to July 1950 directive (aged 60), MOA.

⁹³ Mass Observation directive, 1015 reply to April 1939 directive (aged 63), MOA.

⁹⁴ Mass Observation directive, 1061 reply to July 1950 directive (aged 60), MOA.

in this way. A retired governess supported her contention that most people looked better without makeup by describing a 'pretty girl' she had watched at a wedding whose ill-advised application of rouge was apparent when 'she became excited and flushed, & the natural colour did not blend with the artificial, which looked like a patch on her cheekbones'.⁹⁵ While this was a critical comment on the beauty practices of youth, the mass-observer also used 'Drene' shampoo on the recommendation of a 'young girl' whose hair seemed particularly 'glossy and shiny and attractive'. The common pattern to these decisions was not a marking of generational difference, but the attention the writer paid to other women across generational lines, and her confident assessments about which beauty regimes were worth following.

Older women applied makeup to counter the perceived effects of ageing and achieve a sense of continuity of appearance, but the perpetually youthful faces of cosmetics advertising did not seem to loom large in their concerns. One woman remembered that she had started to use rouge in her early fifties after being told that she looked unwell.⁹⁶ She sounded self-effacing but light-hearted as she responded to her husband's compliments with the explanation that she had 'put a touch of rouge in the right place'. Likewise, the woman from Lancashire who has already featured here recorded a steady escalation of use: she powdered her face as a 'girl', added rouge after an illness robbed her cheeks of colour, and applied lipstick at 60 to 'disguise' lips that seemed 'leaden'.⁹⁷ This process revealed her embodied experience of ageing and her search for some continuity with the visage of her youth. It also tracked societal shifts in the kinds of cosmetics that were judged appropriate and respectable.

⁹⁵ Mass Observation directive, 1069 reply to April 1939 directive (aged 60), MOA.

⁹⁶ Mass Observation directive, 2252 reply to July 1950 directive (aged 63), MOA.

⁹⁷ Mass Observation directive, 1061 reply to July 1950 directive (aged 60), MOA.

Reflecting its widespread use from the 1920s, powder was seen by older female mass-observers as benign; even the writer who labelled lipstick atavistic and ‘revolting’ conceded that powder was ‘quite tolerable’ as ‘an anti-shine treatment’.⁹⁸ Many older women were comfortable with the use of rouge or lipstick, although often only one or the other, and in moderation. However, eye shadow and mascara remained beyond the pale, belonging ‘on the stage’.⁹⁹ By 1950 older women’s habits of making-up were related to but slightly altered from those of the middle-class readers of *Good Housekeeping* in 1930, of whom 20 per cent used lipstick and 7 per cent rouge.¹⁰⁰ Among the 17 older women who responded to the July 1950 Mass Observation directive for example, just over 20 per cent used lipstick while almost 30 per cent used rouge, which they considered more effective against the paleness they understood as a sign of ageing. In part this reflects a generational attitude to cosmetics — a far greater percentage of young women were wearing lipstick by 1950 — but it also reveals pragmatic responses to perceived signs of ageing, in the more widespread application of blush.¹⁰¹

Despite paler cheeks and leaden lips older women were often proud of their appearances, particularly of their skin and hair, and did not feel that age was an insurmountable barrier to attractiveness. For example, a 62-year-old woman reported that she had only used cosmetics for a few years ‘having been blessed with a fair smooth skin and a good complexion’ and continued to be happy with only a small amount of powder: “‘Of course you don’t need it’,

⁹⁸ Mass Observation directive, 1971 reply to July 1950 directive (aged 64), MOA.

⁹⁹ Mass Observation directives, 631 and 1061 replies to July 1950 directive (aged 63 and 60), MOA.

¹⁰⁰ Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances: Fashion and Class between the Wars*, p.69.

¹⁰¹ Kathy Peiss, 'Making up, Making Over: Cosmetics, Consumer Culture, and Women's Identity', in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, Victoria de Grazia, ed., Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1996, p.245; Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'The Body and Consumer Culture', in *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain*, Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, ed., Harlow, 2001, p.187.

my friends say'.¹⁰² As her story suggests, beauty was a personal concern and a topic of conversation and compliment among these older women. Likewise, a number of female mass-observers — aged 63, 65, and 86 — reported that they found it unnecessary to hide or boost their 'naturally good', clear, and well-coloured complexions.¹⁰³ Beautiful hair was also a feature of women of all ages. A Dorset housewife's short, white hair was 'often admired' and another female respondent maintained that grey hair 'seems to add to youthfulness'.¹⁰⁴ The pleasures of well-groomed and luxuriant locks, good skin, or beautifully shaped hands were both attainable and socially significant for women over 60. These attributes gave older women 'confidence', 'comfort', and the 'uplift of feeling of equality with others'.¹⁰⁵ Such internal satisfactions were gained through attractive appearances and stylish dress because these functioned as visual affirmation that older women were important and valued members of social circles, families, and community life, a visual code that also operated between the covers of British *Vogue*.

Conclusion

For writers in mid-century Britain and for historians looking back at this time, the vision of old women clad in black has symbolised the hardship of their lives and bodies through the visual symbolism of mourning. Horwood has suggested that navy and black were considered the most 'suitable' and 'becoming' shades for older women in interwar Britain,

¹⁰² Mass Observation directive, 1041 reply to July 1950 directive (aged 62), MOA.

¹⁰³ Mass Observation directives, 631, 4693 and 914 replies to July 1950 directive, MOA.

¹⁰⁴ Mass Observation directives, 1538 and 1069 replies to April 1939 directive (aged 65 and 60), MOA.

¹⁰⁵ Mass Observation directives, 1538, 1069, and 1544 replies to April 1939 directive (aged 65, 60, and 66), MOA.

partly because widows were likely to wear black.¹⁰⁶ When Mass Observation workers walked the streets of London's East End to study working-class clothing in 1940 and 1941 they made this symbolism central to their questionnaires and analysis. Their impressions of old and young styles turned on grooming, care, and a sense of mood. Women over 45 were described as 'down-at-heel' and scruffy, wearing 'almost exclusively, brown, navy and black'.¹⁰⁷ In contrast, women younger than 35 took 'great interest' in their appearances and wore high-heeled shoes, unwrinkled stockings and silk frocks dotted with flowers. However, the observers' impression of drab age and colourful youth was not supported by their interviews. Instead, black was the 'overwhelming favourite' colour mentioned by women of all ages, with navy second.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, the organisation's 1941 'colour count' revealed that young women did not favour bright colours more often than older women and that brown, navy, black, and grey were appreciated equally in each age group.¹⁰⁹ The colour divide marked out young from old in people's minds and in stereotypical imagery more often than it did in women's everyday preferences and practice, while the projection of particular pejorative meanings onto colour and composition belied the complex and careful processes that went into older women's management of their appearance.

Mrs Exeter was frequently enthusiastic about sophisticated and flattering dark materials but she also invited older *Vogue* readers into a world of sensual colours and fabrics, and exciting new styles. She described 'very strong feelings' about colour and often chose luxurious

¹⁰⁶ Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances: Fashion and Class between the Wars*, pp.50, 64.

¹⁰⁷ Observation notes, 1 August 1940, Stepney and district, London, Topic collection 18, Personal appearances – observations and on the street interviews, 1/E Observations and overheards, MOA.

¹⁰⁸ Interviews, 25 July 1940, Stepney, London, Topic collection 18, 1/E Observations and overheards, MOA.

¹⁰⁹ 'Colour count' notes, 1941, Topic collection 18, 1/H Colour counts, MOA.

tones such as ‘a rich red, or deep sapphire, or steel grey’ for evening wear.¹¹⁰ In January 1950 she was attired in ‘midnight blue velvet’ and described the pleasure of discovering colours that proved flattering worn with grey hair. Many female mass-observers embraced colour with equal delight. One 63-year-old writer insisted that she ‘must have colour’ in her wardrobe and adorning her body.¹¹¹ She favoured bright blue, loathed black, and maintained that colours were necessary for ‘happiness’ and to the appearances of older women with greying hair. While black material had practical and symbolic value for many older women, we have been wrong to cloak our understanding of old age in its folds. The bright and beautiful colours of older women’s dress help to reflect some of the experiences of ageing bodies which this sombre narrative has kept in the shadows. In particular, these lighter shades refract some of the joy that older women experienced as they made their bodies beautiful and admired the colours and textures of their clothing and jewellery.¹¹²

Writing about this sartorial pleasure opens realms of emotional experience in later life that have not been touched on by British historians. We need to think beyond Horwood’s casting of elderly women as die-hard defenders of rigid, unimaginative, class-bound dress.¹¹³ Neither Mrs Exeter nor older research participants understood their style in this mode; their practices of grooming reached beyond respectability to access some of the power and emotional satisfaction of beauty, sensuous enjoyment, and sexual appeal. A 65-year-old nursery superintendent’s aim to be ‘nice & neat’ — which might be interpreted to show a stuffy disinterest in fashion and beauty — existed alongside her interest in matching or contrasting colours, expensive shoes and hats, and her admiration for ‘elegance’, a term we

¹¹⁰ *Vogue*, January 1950, p.56.

¹¹¹ Mass Observation directive, 1015 reply to May 1939 (1) directive (aged 64), MOA.

¹¹² Mass Observation directive, 3910 reply to July 1950 directive (aged 64), MOA.

¹¹³ Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances: Fashion and Class between the Wars*, pp.64, 165.

should closely align with sexuality and charm.¹¹⁴ Likewise, Mrs Exeter usually wore sharply tailored suits and pearls but also embodied the absolute glamour and desirability of a black velvet evening dress (Figure 29).



Figure 29: How Mrs Exeter wore black. In this photograph, Mrs Exeter’s averted eyes allows the reader uninterrupted access to her body, especially to her décolletage, emphasised by a plunging neckline and draping stole, and her waist, emphasised by the giant rose gleaming white against the black velvet of her dress. *Vogue*, October 1953, p.87.

Not all older women could hope to stand at a table surrounded by glittering crystal and fine works of art, but they could be inspired by the poise and confidence on display in the image above. By taking ownership of even a touch of this sophistication, older women could access some of the ‘assertive and powerful’ female identity it offered.¹¹⁵ This enjoyment of ageing bodies encourages us to think about older women’s experiences of ‘boldness’ and joy

¹¹⁴ Mass Observation directive, 4693 reply to July 1950 directive (aged 65), MOA.

¹¹⁵ Carol Dyhouse, *Glamour: Women, History, Feminism*, London, 2010, p.3.

and whether we might also have underestimated the importance of similar experience in older women's marriages, sex lives, and creative pursuits.

Historians are used to thinking about the ways bodies are inscribed with the markings of class, gender, and race that shape individuals' material context, social interactions, and experience. We need to start paying attention to the central place of ageing bodies in such systems of social classification and identity-formation. Sociologists have suggested age 'becomes an embedded feature of every relationship and situation in which elderly people find themselves — an indelible property which cannot be eliminated, ignored or disguised'.¹¹⁶ Historians should understand the vital significance of age in this way but also think carefully about how ageing bodies have figured in individuals' life histories and self-presentation. Old age is not only a label that is placed upon people by external social categories; scholars have failed to account for the ways that ageing bodies have been comfortably inhabited by individuals and made into symbols of a meaningful later life.

Contrary to the social categories employed by mid-century experts in social sciences and governance, the writing and interviews of older Britons do not reveal that turning 60 — or experiencing any other cultural marker of old age — represented a sudden shift in the way people cared for their appearances, felt about their bodies, responded to cultural ideals, or behaved in their social milieu. Growing older brought new challenges and required people to constantly adjust their relationship to ideals of fashion and beauty, but this was a process that people had been engaged in over the life course. As Graham Dawson has explained, cultural representations are always 'aspired to rather than actually being achieved' and all

¹¹⁶ Hazan, *Old Age: Constructions and Deconstructions*, p.63.

'[i]maged identities are shot through with wish fulfilling fantasies'.¹¹⁷ As Dawson's and Peiss' work makes clear, not looking quite like Lawrence of Arabia or Clara Bow was an aspect of life experienced by men and women of all ages. Older men and women engaged in processes of observing and cataloguing appearances and behaviour they had learnt over their lifetimes, perhaps from the new ways of looking they experienced in the cinemas of the 1920s or from the psychological jargon of 1930s advertising. Their understandings of ideal bodies had always been framed by their own experiences and what they observed about their friends and neighbours. These practises did not encourage a continuous yearning to replicate the flawless images of youthful health and beauty that Britons encountered in advertising and popular culture. Instead, one of the reasons that a male mass-observer reported feeling 'less ugly at 73 than twenty' was that he held himself to different standards as he aged.¹¹⁸ Because this writer compared himself to other older men he was able to celebrate that he had not 'developed a paunch' and that his 'white beard' conferred a new 'look of dignity'. Youth has a seductive glow for older people and historians alike, but the lustre of undimmed eyes and perfectly smooth skin should not blind us to processes of ageing that were more complex than being jealous of, or giving up on, such beauty. Neither should the joys of being young completely outshine the satisfactions of finding that you still are without a paunch at 73, and discovering a new air of dignity in silvery hair. There is time enough in the life cycle to feel both these sensations; there is space on the pages of our histories to record them.

¹¹⁷ Graham Dawson, 'The Blonde Bedouin', in *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, Michael Roper and John Tosh, eds, London and New York, 1991, pp.118-9.

¹¹⁸ Mass Observation directive, 1074 reply to April 1939 directive (aged 73), MOA.

Chapter six

Telling stories about a long life: memory and autobiography

In his second volume of autobiography *Midnight Oil* (1971) Victor Pritchett used two portraits of himself to describe the central philosophical and psychological challenge of autobiographical writing. How could he explain the relationship between then and now, youth and old age?

I have before me two photographs. One is, I regret, instantly recognizable: a bald man sitting before a pastry board propped on a table, and writing. He does little else besides sit and write. His fattish face is supported by a valence of chins; the head is held together by glasses that slip down a bridgeless nose that spreads its nostrils over a moustache. He is trying to find some connection with the figure in another picture taken fifty years ago. He knows that the young fellow sitting on the table of a photographer's in Paris, a thin youth of twenty with thick fairish hair, exclaiming eyebrows, loosely grinning mouth and the eyes raised to the ceiling with a look of passing schoolboy saintliness, is himself. The young one is shy, careless, very pleased with himself, putting on some impromptu act; the older one is perplexed. The two, if they could meet in the flesh, would be stupefied and the older one would certainly be embarrassed.

The embarrassment is the subject of this book.¹

Victor's use of the visual medium of photography to portray the passing of time immediately focused his readers' attention on physical signs of ageing that connoted decline, such as multiple chins and spectacles. Yet the task of creating a narrative out of a life and therefore 'finding some connection' with the self of the past brought other contrasts to the fore.

¹ V. S. Pritchett, *A Cab at the Door and Midnight Oil*, Harmondsworth, 1979 (first published 1968 and 1971), p.217.

Unlike posing for a portrait, writing a life story highlighted the advantages of later life, typically the experience, knowledge, sympathy, and balanced judgment that had accrued to elderly authors. Victor's contrasting images of youth and old age were the source of complex feelings for him. To use Linda Rugg's terms, such photographs capture the 'double consciousness' expressed by autobiographers in their 'awareness of the autobiographical self as decentered, multiple, fragmented, and divided against itself in the act of observing and being; and the simultaneous insistence on the presence of an integrated, authorial self, located in a body, a place, and a time'.² Looking at this pair of photographs made Victor feel stupefied and embarrassed; they raised knotty questions about ageing that he took as the central subject of his memoir, and which I address in the present chapter.

Like many authors, Victor found his childhood relatively easy to retell because its plot and central character were obvious: 'One's life has a natural defining frame. One knows who one is'.³ After the age of 20 this 'frame' became 'uncertain', life's turning points were 'hard to pin down', and Victor became less sure of who he was.⁴ All of the writers in this chapter, who were reflecting back upon their lives from the plateau of having reached the age of sixty or more, found it difficult to shape middle and old age into the narratives of growth and progress that most of them associated with the autobiographical genre. Instead, for many, old age stood a little outside the frame; it was the time when reflective and valuable storytelling became possible. A number of autobiographers claimed that a long life was a basis for interesting stories because it was a connection to the distant past, a setting they considered likely to interest their readers, since it had equipped older writers with wide-

² Linda Haverty Rugg, *Picturing Ourselves: Photography and Autobiography*, Chicago, 1997, p.2.

³ Pritchett, *A Cab at the Door and Midnight Oil*, p.217.

⁴ *Ibid.*

ranging experience and an even-handed perspective.⁵ Welsh artist Augustus John had his first volume of autobiography published in 1952, when he was 74 years old. In it, he defined the ‘consolations’ of his old age as his existence ‘a little apart from the general turmoil’ where he felt better placed to contemplate and accurately judge his life.⁶ Similarly in 1955, when the author and biographer Winifred Peck published an autobiographical volume describing a lifetime of family holidays, it was also the year she turned 73. Peck claimed that the young were incapable of looking back with clarity or understanding and classed the ‘great advantage in being old’ as the ability to remember experiences in a ‘kinder’ and more balanced mode, and to ‘recapture happiness’.⁷ None of these writers asserted that age made them more willing to rescind their existing prejudices, instead they prioritised clarity of feeling about a personalised, subjective past. For these mid-century authors, coming to terms with the events of a lifetime was integral to the autobiographical project.

Of course, the opportunity to reflect on one’s life within this medium was not available to all; getting an autobiography published typically required some combination of exemplary literary skill, public reputation, and the time and money that would be required to live during the writing process. Victor’s 1968 autobiography of his childhood and youth was entitled *A Cab at the Door* in reference to his family’s poverty and his early memories of calling taxis to move between rented flats in and around London with his itinerant salesman father, and mother.⁸ His popular autobiographies were testimony to some of the social changes of twentieth-century Britain that had made his working-class childhood a subject of popular

⁵ Hannah Maria Webster Mitchell, *The Hard Way Up: The Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell, Suffragette and Rebel*, London, 1968, p.37; E. Denison Ross and Alick Denison Ross, *Both Ends of the Candle: The Autobiography of Sir E. Denison Ross*, London, 1943, p.15.

⁶ Augustus John, *Chiaroscuro: Fragments of Autobiography: First Series*, London, 1952, p.277.

⁷ Winifred Peck, *Home for the Holidays*, London, 1955, p.127.

⁸ Paul Bailey, ‘Pritchett, Sir Victor Sawdon (1900–1997)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (online), Oxford University Press, 2007, Available at: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/65704> (28 August 2012).

and artistic interest — an extension of the shift away from a narrow focus on the upper classes which Sarah Newman has recently described in the context of the interwar press, following the professionalization of journalism and the renunciation of male columnists' previously gentlemanly personae.⁹ Victor's example also points to the selectivity of published autobiography as a representation of old age; these sources record the reflections of older Britons who loved to write, and who were often successful literary figures. With this limitation in mind, the changing social characteristics of the authors whose books were published in each decade raises questions about the interaction of the psychological and social dimensions of autobiography; most importantly, who was included in this field of public life, and why did they want to tell their story?

I argue that the answer to both halves of this question changed over the mid-twentieth century and can be traced, at least in part, by the appearance of working- and middle-class male writers recounting their professional and creative success in the 1950s; female authors discussing painful aspects of their past in the 1960s; and the explosion of autobiographies that recreated early-twentieth-century working-class neighbourhoods in the 1970s. Within this chapter, representatives of each new group of authors suggest the expanding the reach of autobiographical writing and literature beyond the world of its upper-class and literary mainstay, the realm in which my analysis begins. However, this chapter's primary purpose is not to track social change for the elderly — which would be difficult with such a relatively discrete source group as published autobiographies — but to explore in more detail the link between ageing and story-telling that has been suggested many times throughout this thesis, usually in the settings of family life and participation in social research. In autobiography, we

⁹ Sarah Newman, 'The Celebrity Gossip Column and Newspaper Journalism in Britain, 1918-1939', Doctor of Philosophy thesis, University of Oxford, 2012.

have access to highly personalised and self-reflexive accounts of the experience of growing older, which can usefully inform our reading of briefer and less explicitly inward-looking iterations of the life course, such as the comments collected by social researchers. The resonances and intersections between these sources — chiefly their shared concern with narratives and lifelong processes of identity formation — make it worthwhile to examine the apparently exceptional life stories that were published.

Here, I explore an aspect of the ageing process that can seem timeless, even ahistorical: the emotional response of individuals to memories of the past, and their desire to make sense of those memories in their old age. Therefore, to keep it anchored in historical chronology, the present chapter is organised by decades and led by a pair of the autobiographers who published in each one: from the 1940s Marie Belloc Lowndes and Horace Horsnell, from the 1950s Harry Burton and Richard Church, from the 1960s Storm Jameson and Catherine Cookson, and from the 1970s Alice Foley and Grace Foakes. My close reading of their texts does not explain the mechanisms that made writing and publishing possible for these different authors; instead, I explore a series of different responses to the psychological and emotional experiences of ageing, each of which illuminates the significance of experiences of ageing within autobiographical projects in ways that historians and literary scholars have not yet recognised. These eight examples were chosen from an initial set of 63 autobiographical volumes, written by 44 authors who were aged over 60 at the time of their text's publication.¹⁰ Not selected as summative of their period's output, the texts that feature most

¹⁰ See the appendix to this thesis for a full list of the autobiographies. My central preoccupations in searching bibliographies, historical texts and library catalogues for references was to note the gender, class, profession and locality of authors, in addition to the publication dates of their texts. To achieve a reasonable representation of female and working-class autobiographers, I selected a greater number of autobiographies from later in the period I study here when social change, particularly the establishment of new community

visibly in this discussion are tools that allow us to consider the emotional and psychological experience of ageing as it was described by individuals with a range of social characteristics. To give a few examples of their diversity, through these autobiographies we read about the lives of many professional authors but also about labour organisers and civil servants; we delve into the cultured lives of the literary upper classes but also into the working-class neighbourhoods of Salford and Wapping; and we consider the sometimes shared, but often contrasting, concerns of older men and women.

Historians of ageing quote from well-known autobiographies when their authors pass judgement on their experience of being old, but have not asked whether these works have been shaped more deeply, at the levels of content, style, and form, by the experience of ageing.¹¹ Social and cultural historians have framed twentieth-century working-class autobiography within the broad social and political changes that evoked nostalgia for disappearing working-class communities.¹² They have mined these autobiographies for evidence of how workplaces, gender relations, or cross-class interactions were experienced.¹³ Scholars have also noted the way nineteenth-century institutions of charity and punishment, as well as twentieth-century welfare services, required certain life stories to be publically-

education and writing organisations, supported the publication of works written by individuals from a broader range of social backgrounds. Thus, around one-third of my sources were published before 1960 and around two-thirds were published afterwards. To fully explore the meanings of these changes for older writers, I extended the reach of this chapter until 1979 in order to draw on the rich seam of working-class autobiography that was published in the 1970s.

¹¹ Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues*, pp.259-70.

¹² Ben Jones, 'The Uses of Nostalgia: Autobiography, Community Publishing and Working Class Neighbourhoods in Post-War England', *Cultural & Social History*, 7, 3, 2010, pp.355-74; Chris Waters, 'Autobiography, Nostalgia, and the Changing Practices of Working-Class Selfhood', in *Singular Continuities: Tradition, Nostalgia, and Identity in Modern British Culture*, George K. Behlmer and F. M. Leventhal, eds, Stanford, 2000, pp.178-95.

¹³ Carl Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives: Women of the Urban Poor in England, 1880-1939*, 2nd edn, Lancaster, 2006; Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-60*; Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family in England, 1918-1950*.

rehearsed and recorded.¹⁴ However, none of these analyses have addressed the relationship between encroaching old age and the decision to write an autobiography. Some have even declared the project impossible. For instance, following his reading of nineteenth-century British diaries and autobiographies, Paul Johnson concluded that ‘Old age rarely seems to be regarded by a writer as interesting in itself’.¹⁵ Unable to employ textual analysis with such scarce material, Johnson asserted that cultural historians would be left to analyse those ‘tropes of old age’ that appear ‘with a certain monotony in texts on health and morals from the ancient world to the modern’, leaving questions of subjectivity to the side.¹⁶ This treatment of autobiographical sources is surprising given the close relationship between the histories of autobiography and selfhood in historians’ explanation of the emergence of ‘modern’ autobiography through shifts in identity-formation after the eighteenth century, and their subtle explorations of both the ‘self within’ and its expression in external and commercial signs of identity during the interwar period.¹⁷ Moreover, as Johnson proposed that they would, commonly-repeated maxims about old age have proved unhelpful in explaining its significance for individuals. As Helen Small has observed, these clichés have ‘in essence, changed very little since classical antiquity’ and have ‘always tended towards extremes of optimism and pessimism, often in close conjunction’, such as the caricatured and contrasting characteristics of rage and serenity; nostalgia and detachment; folly and

¹⁴ Steedman, 'State-Sponsored Autobiography', pp.41-54; Steedman, 'Enforced Narratives: Stories of Another Self', pp.25-39.

¹⁵ Johnson, 'Historical Readings of Old Age and Ageing', p.17.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Matt Houlbrook, "'A Pin to See the Peepshow': Culture, Fiction and Selfhood in Edith Thompson's Letters, 1921–1922', *Past & Present*, 207, 1, 2010, pp.215-49; Harry Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity*, Chicago and London, 2000, p.218; Saler, "'Clap If You Believe in Sherlock Holmes": Mass Culture and the Re-Enchantment of Modernity, c. 1890-c. 1940', p.223; Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930*, London, 1995, p.4.

wisdom.¹⁸ These get us little closer to understanding the emotional texture of late life for individuals.

I depart from this literature to make the argument that despite the infrequency of explicit considerations of old age by mid-century autobiographers, the experience of ageing was central to their texts. To tease out its effects, I employ the methodology of ‘creeping in sideways’ to personal experiences of growing older by analysing the influence of ageing on the way autobiographers framed and wrote about their earlier experiences, especially their descriptions of childhood and youth.¹⁹ Although oral historians have demonstrated the embedding of the present in stories about the past in this way, they have often not displayed an interest in the effects of later life on their material, even after collecting testimony from groups of older Britons.²⁰ Therefore, to better understand the relationship between an individual’s past and present, this chapter connects to the literature established by literary critics, psychologists, historians, and anthropologists around the interaction of memories and understandings of selfhood. As the literary scholar Paul John Eakin has posited, there are ‘two episodes, two pasts, two orders of biographical event in autobiography: the earlier time that is ostensibly the subject of autobiographical discourse, and the time during which the autobiography is written’.²¹ These temporalities intersect in the process of autobiographical writing, as the author ‘negotiates with his former selves, and produces a document which belongs exclusively to neither his past nor his present’.²² For example, Harry Oosterhuis has shown how the nineteenth-century psychiatric practice of collecting case studies offered a

¹⁸ Small, *The Long Life*, p.2.

¹⁹ The phrase is Bronwyn Dalley’s, see Bronwyn Dalley, ‘Creeping in Sideways: Reading Sexuality in the Archives’, *Archifacts*, 2001, pp.35-41.

²⁰ For example in Szreter and Fisher, *Sex before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England 1918-1963*.

²¹ Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*, Princeton, 1985, p.55.

²² John Burnett, David Vincent, and David Mayall, *The Autobiography of the Working Class: An Annotated, Critical Bibliography: 1790-1900*, 2 vols, vol. 1, Brighton, 1984, p.xx.

new format for the long-established practice of viewing the self through narrative, in which individuals ‘continuously reinforce their sense of self by linking their present states, plans, choices, and actions to both the past and the (imagined) future’.²³ Such theories about the malleability of memories and their utility in the present were circulating in the mid-century period; experimental psychologist Frederic Bartlett first showed in 1932 ‘that our memories are not eidetically exact but partially reconstructed, reshaped by the mind at every stage: in initial perception, in encoding, during storage, and in retrieval’.²⁴ Similarly, and employing the model Eakin used to describe the meeting of the self and its cultural influences, I suggest that the experience of remembering a life has resembled a circular ‘feedback’ between the ‘mutually constructing pair’ of the past and the present — a pattern that can be seen in the autobiographies that were penned by old people in mid-century Britain, and which took visual form in the encounter staged by Victor above.²⁵

The 1940s: Familial history and shared practices of remembering

This thesis has frequently highlighted the way domestic conversation and ritual affirmed individuals’ self-image in late life. Hence, my discussion of more formal autobiographical projects begins with a consideration of the way family stories were encoded in habits of domestic life and in household objects alike — so that familiarity and repetition encouraged their preservation — before they were shaped into written texts. This dimension of autobiographical practice also focuses attention on the privileged family backgrounds of

²³ Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity*, p.222.

²⁴ Brian Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 2009, p.153; Alan Collins, 'The Psychology of Memory', in *Psychology in Britain: Historical Essays and Personal Reflections*, G. D. Bunn, A. D. Lovie, and G. D. Richards, eds, Leicester, 2001, p.160.

²⁵ Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*, p.100.

many autobiographers, a social characteristic that was especially dominant among those writing in the first half of the twentieth century. Thus, my protagonists from the 1940s typify the upper-class and artistic lifestyles that were most often recorded in this period. Marie Belloc was born in 1868 in Marylebone, London, to the French barrister Louis Belloc and British feminist Elizabeth Parkes, although she spent much of her childhood in La Celle-Saint-Cloud, then a rural suburb of Paris.²⁶ In 1896 she married Frederick Lowndes, a staff writer on *The Times*. Horace Horsnell was born in 1883 and spent his childhood years in Bath. Both were involved in London's literary scene. Marie was a successful and prolific writer, most well-known for romances or crime novels, especially *The Chink in the Armour* (1912) and *The Lodger* (1913). Her four autobiographies were published from 1941 until 1948, to critical acclaim. The first volume, *I, Too, Have Lived in Arcadia*, was immediately successful; Macmillan's first print run sold out before its publication date and the *Times Literary Supplement* praised Marie for achieving objectivity about her younger self.²⁷ Moving in the same literary world, Horace acted as secretary to H. G. Wells, wrote the successful play *Advertising for April*, conducted a 'varied and notable career' as dramatic critic for the *Observer* and *Punch*, and published several novels as well as his book of memoirs *The Album*.²⁸ Publisher Hamish Hamilton advertised this text as 'full of the past, a cultured, elegant, leisured past' with an 'easy and elegant' style to match.²⁹ The *Manchester Guardian* review of *The Album* praised his depiction of a childhood past for his balance of 'warmth of

²⁶ David Doughan, 'Lowndes, Marie Adelaide Elizabeth Renée Julia Belloc (1868–1947)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (online), Oxford University Press, 2004, Available at: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/39089> (16 August 2011).

²⁷ Susan Brown, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy, 'Marie Belloc Lowndes', *Women's Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present*, (online), Cambridge University Press, 2006, Available at: <http://orlando.cambridge.org/> (16 August 2011). C. R. Methol, 'Arcadian Days', *Times Literary Supplement*, 2071, 11 October 1941, p.509.

²⁸ 'Horace Horsnell', *Manchester Guardian*, 12 February 1949, p.4.

²⁹ *The Observer*, 1 April 1945, p.3.

imagination' with 'adult awareness' and insight.³⁰ These autobiographies were celebrated for their famous characters, literary merit, and upper-class concerns. While their place in the commercial publishing world was earned in part by their authors' age — by which virtue the texts were 'full of the past' — a particular kind of 'cultured, elegant, leisured past' was consistently judged to be of interest to their reading public. As such, these figures demonstrate great continuity with Victorian autobiography, many examples of which narrated the development of a literary career and told a family's story, rather than a tale of individual achievement.³¹

However, while the various rituals of remembering that were described by Marie and Horace explain how they were able to evoke genealogies and stories of long ago — even events that predated their birth — in their domesticity, these practices also remind us that habits of reminiscence were widespread and communal, incorporating a circle of actors beyond the individual autobiographer. For example, Horace's autobiography was structured to mimic browsing through the family photograph album that had been collated by his aunt, and the memories of childhood this activity evoked. While authored in old age, Marie's autobiographical volumes dealt almost exclusively with her early life too. *I, Too, Have Lived in Arcadia* retold the story of her parents' courtship and their brief marriage, and described her babyhood and childhood.³² *Where Love and Friendship Dwelt* was particularly concerned with her French extended family and was meant to dispel 'certain false ideas' about enmity

³⁰ The *Manchester Guardian*, 25 May 1945, p.3.

³¹ Clinton Machann, 'Edward Gibbon's *Memoirs of My Life* and the Genre of Autobiography in Victorian England', *Prose Studies*, 12, 1, 1989, p.40; Clinton Machann, 'Robert Dale Owen's *Threading My Way* and Victorian Autobiography', *Biography*, 15, 2, 1992, p.166.

³² Marie Belloc Lowndes, *I, Too, Have Lived in Arcadia: A Record of Love and of Childhood*, London, 1941.

between France and England.³³ *The Merry Wives of Westminster* described her early married years and her intense involvement in literary social circles.³⁴ Marie chose to write autobiography partly out of conviction that future biographers would be interested in her brother, the writer, historian, and Member of Parliament Hilaire Belloc.³⁵ Thus, for autobiographers who were engaged in British public life like Marie and Horace, twentieth-century interest in psychological development within the home intersected with public interest in well-known figures from the worlds of art, academia, or politics.³⁶

Importantly for this project, these autobiographers' interest in and knowledge of their relatives and family history had been formed through familial habits of telling stories about the past, in the same sorts of ways that working- and middle-class social research participants crafted their less formal life histories. In *The Album*, Horace emphasised the everyday, domestic, and sensual nature of the 'cues' to remember that underlay all these types of autobiographical endeavour:

Unresponsive to urgent calls, yet sensitive to the subtlest whisper, my sense of the past has long been quickened by such simple cues as early morning sunshine on white walls, the flavour of bread dipped in coffee, the conversational twitter of starlings, and the scent of old-fashioned roses.³⁷

Sitting down to write his autobiography would have been an ill-advised 'urgent call' to memory if Horace had not been able to draw on existing quotidian habits of remembrance.

The sudden evocateness of a particular shade of light or sweet-smelling flower ensured that

³³ Marie Belloc Lowndes, *Where Love and Friendship Dwelt*, London, 1943.

³⁴ Marie Belloc Lowndes, *The Merry Wives of Westminster*, London, 1946.

³⁵ Brown, Clements, and Grundy, 'Marie Belloc Lowndes'.

³⁶ See also Thelma Cazalet-Keir, *From the Wings*, London and Sydney, 1967; John, *Chiaroscuro: Fragments of Autobiography: First Series*; Edward Howard Marsh, *A Number of People; a Book of Reminiscences*, London, 1939; John H. Muirhead and John W. Harvey, *Reflections by a Journeyman in Philosophy on the Movements of Thought and Practice in His Time*, London, 1942; Ross and Ross, *Both Ends of the Candle: The Autobiography of Sir E. Denison Ross*.

³⁷ Horace Horsnell, *The Album*, London, 1945, p.37.

autobiographies built on lifetimes that were punctuated by vivid, emotional access to the past, or at least moments that were staged in this way. Further, autobiographers, their families, and their friends, arranged their lives and routines to facilitate these moments of nostalgia: they daydreamed about the past, revisited childhood homes and holiday spots, read diaries kept by younger selves, collated family photograph albums, shared their memories, and debated the past in person and in letters.³⁸ Hence autobiographies grew out of systems of shared familial or community experiences and constructions of the past. Eating bread dipped in coffee or listening to starlings may have been a subtle whisper in the chorus of events that made up a life story, but it was just such domestic, everyday, and communal activities that set the scene for memory and story-telling for many.

Thanks to these rituals, both Marie and Horace knew about their relatives' lives in great detail, including events that occurred before the time of their birth. For instance, Marie's French home was full of the presence of her paternal grandmother, Louise Belloc, the 'living centre of the house', who had died when Marie was nine years old.³⁹ Marie constantly thought about and imagined Louise in this setting, hoping to see her 'tall figure come slowly through one of the doors, or from the white rose wreathed wooden balcony'.⁴⁰ She read hundreds of the letters Louise wrote to her daughter-in-law Bessie and daughter Lily during the Franco-Prussian war, but continued to speculate over the aspects of her grandmother's life that remained unknowable.⁴¹ Marie also described intense discussions of the past with her mother, especially when she had revisited the family's house at La Celle-Saint-Cloud in

³⁸ For example, see: Peck, *Home for the Holidays*; Herbert Read, *The Contrary Experience: Autobiographies*, London, 1973 (first published 1962); Bertrand Russell, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, 3 vols, vol. 1, London, 1967, pp.96-7; Evelyn Waugh, *A Little Learning: The First Volume of an Autobiography*, London, 1964, p.127.

³⁹ Lowndes, *Where Love and Friendship Dwelt*, p.15.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

the autumn of 1895, in the lead-up to her marriage. In itself, this return to the house was part of a cyclical reliving of the past. Marie found it a ‘poignant experience’ to ‘slip back’ into both her childhood and her more recent past, ‘when I had been seventeen and had returned, with a feeling of such intense joy, to the village which contained my happiest memories’.⁴² This doubled immersion in days-gone-by was achieved in an unspoken agreement between Marie and her mother that they would organise their daily life around the routine of Marie’s childhood.⁴³ Then, during the talks that filled their time as afternoon became evening, Bessie often described her life with Marie’s father and, after his death, with Marie’s paternal grandmother.⁴⁴ Both mother and daughter were aware they inhabited a time of transition in Marie’s life, which heightened their engagement with family history as Marie prepared to enter married life and — in their view — begin a new chapter of the family’s story.

Horace’s autobiography was wholly organised by his perusal of a family photograph album and other heirlooms, such as a rosewood box containing the ‘intimate trivia’ that belonged to his aunt Ellie, who died when she was 12.⁴⁵ Further, Horace’s text circled around the contradictory effects of a genealogical photographic project. His experience of turning its pages and perusing its contents was paradoxical because he felt alienated by the outdated technology of the photographs, yet each image’s faded facade was also a gateway to an inner world of clear and vibrant recollection.⁴⁶ For example, the portrait of Horace’s favoured cousin Bertie was ‘passive’ in comparison to the ‘fairy-lights and flowers, the music and

⁴² Ibid., p.234.

⁴³ Ibid., pp.236-7.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Horsnell, *The Album*, p.12.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp.5-11.

implicit gaiety' surrounding him in Horace's memories.⁴⁷ While age and time only bestowed 'enchantment' and glamour on Bertie in Horace's remembrance, the camera 'reduced' him to a 'memorial cipher, having no more depth or idiosyncrasy than a wraith, or a reflection in clouded water'.⁴⁸ In this way, Horace's autobiography reveals that the social function of photographs was much more complex than the initial composition of an image, although this is the aspect of family photography that has been analysed almost exclusively.⁴⁹ Taking, storing, and arranging photographs (in this case to present his aunt's preferred version of family history) were the first steps in the cycle of memory which also required Horace to respond emotionally to the album, and to weave both the artefact and his feelings about it into his stories about the past. Thus, the source of his autobiographical inspiration was analogous to the photographs with which some of this thesis' earlier subjects decorated their domestic interiors, and began their stories about the past. Yet the sense of security within home and family that was communicated by members of both groups who used photographs in this way contrasts with the writing of men who had experienced newfound social mobility during the first half of the twentieth century, such as the protagonists of the following section.

The 1950s: class mobility, professional lives, and creativity

Considering autobiographical texts over a series of decades suggests how changes to the configuration of social class, gender, and cultural norms in Britain also shifted the criteria for the publication of autobiographies and meant that representatives of different social groups

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.103.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Rose, *Doing Family Photography: The Domestic, the Public and the Politics of Sentiment*, p.14.

— such as the men who had been born in working-class homes and subsequently achieved professional success, sometimes outside the literary world — participated in the activity. The framing of the texts authored by such men provides a contrasting example of the ways in which ageing was recognised and given meaning through life histories. While moving through the life course had provided occasions for Marie and Horace to learn and repeat family lore, and had emphasised their movement through time and afforded the life course a generative or cyclical meaning through the turning of the generations, Harry Burton and Richard Church paid greater attention to the inner dimensions of the ageing process. On one hand, they wrote in a literary culture that had increasingly expected memoirs to offer ‘inimitable personal details, subjective internal processes, and self-reflexive accounts of the development of perception and expression’ since the development of this mode of writing within modernist memoirs of the 1930s.⁵⁰ On the other hand, their claim to an audience’s attention was based on more individualised professional and creative achievements; in part because their family lives were not perceived to hold the same interest as that of the families of authors who belonged to the upper classes and literary elite. Taking a different stance on the life course, Harry and Richard explained the effects of their professional and creative journeys by describing a series of their emotional responses to the contrast between then and now, youth and age. Significantly, while old age had not retained the raw joy of childhood for these men, their ageing was not exclusively a story of decline. Rather, the format of their autobiographical writing communicated complex and bittersweet perspectives on reaching old age.

⁵⁰ Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*, Princeton and Oxford, 2007, p.37.

The autobiographies written by Harry and Richard in the 1950s reflected social and political changes that had shaped their lives differently from those of Marie and Horace, as well as their different social backgrounds. Harry Burton was born in a working-class family in Fulham in Southwest London and claimed that the distinctive experience of his generation (which he defined as those born in the last few years of the nineteenth century) and the central narrative of his personal story was access to education and social mobility under the state education system set up in 1902.⁵¹ Harry attended a grammar school and Cambridge University before working as a County education administrator.⁵² Richard Church was born in 1893 into a middle-class family living in Battersea, also in South London, and demonstrated some continuity from earlier autobiographical cohorts, particularly the ongoing commercial interest in the autobiographies of literary figures.⁵³ Richard worked as a civil servant but resented the position's draining of his time and energy. In the 1930s he left the service to write full time, initially as a literary editor with the *New Leader*, organ of the Independent Labour Party. He published verse, novels, plays, and works of literary criticism, as well as three volumes of autobiography in 1955, 1957, and 1964.⁵⁴ Richard's story employed similar categories of intellectual and cultural development to Harry's narrative, but his central plot line was the emotional turmoil stemming from his need to balance earning a living for himself, and later for his family, and his love of writing. Both men wrote autobiographies that were centred on their own subjective experiences and artistic development within the context of opportunities and expectations that shaped the lives of a generation of male professionals.

⁵¹ H. M. Burton, *There Was a Young Man*, London, 1958, p.9.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp.9-10.

⁵³ Philip Hobsbaum, 'Church, Richard Thomas (1893–1972)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (online), Oxford University Press, 2010, Available at: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40883> (17 August 2011).

⁵⁴ Richard Church, *Over the Bridge, an Essay in Autobiography*, London, 1955; Richard Church, *The Golden Sovereign: A Conclusion to over the Bridge*, London, 1957; Richard Church, *The Voyage Home*, London, 1964.

Harry introduced his autobiography as a consideration of the effects of the 1902 State Education Act and scholarships awarded to working-class students. The twinned narrative strands of his text were his educational and professional achievement and his resulting cultural distance from his working-class family. These tales matched Harry's 'typical' experience of educational reform with the inner dramas that accompanied it.⁵⁵ In particular, this autobiographer articulated feelings of confusion and loss as he described youthful experiences that had been undermined by his subsequent education and social climb. Caught between the milieus and languages of differing generations and social classes, Harry struggled to explain how, in his youth, he had felt happy despite financial hardship; had been 'hilariously amused' by jokes that would not 'bear re-telling'; and had been 'far from depressed' in a 'grey and depressing' setting.⁵⁶ Instead, he attempted to achieve coherence of narrative at the levels of national and generational action, by connecting the limited goals and sense of self he had formulated as a young man to the equally prosaic aims of the educational reforms that had so deeply shaped his life. Harry recommended that his own realisation of a meaningful inner existence in later life — through his deep engagement with the arts and high culture — should be written into the parenting habits and educational reform of the present generation of Britons.⁵⁷ These prescriptions went some way to explaining and remedying his internal confusion: in particular, his knowledge of high culture rendered him an insider in upper-class society so that he was no longer suspended between classes.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Burton, *There Was a Young Man*, p.12.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.46-8.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.179.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.53-4. See also James Hinton, "'The "Class" Complex': Mass-Observation and Cultural Distinction in Pre-War Britain', *Past and Present*, 199, 1, 2008, pp.207-36.

As this suggests, Harry and Richard combined their alliance to a cohort of older professional men with close attention to the distinctive and internal dimensions of their experiences. Hence, Richard's sense of moving through time and the life cycle was a key plot line within each of his three autobiographical volumes. His earliest text described his close-knit family life and the dawning of his creative consciousness in childhood, which seemed a 'unique story' of 'fabulous adventures in a dew-glittering world'.⁵⁹ By contrast, the second and third volumes of his autobiography described Richard's adult struggle to both support his family and find the time he required to write, and therefore to feel emotionally fulfilled. In this context Richard wondered how the story of childhood could be continued, for 'who wants to hear of the gradual slowing-down and subsistence of early raptures' as the story's hero 'falls into step with the rest of the breadwinners, worthy but indistinct, for the long remainder of his life'?⁶⁰ His juxtaposition of childhood inspiration with adult drudgery framed his personal battle as part of the life cycle, and was a contrast that resonated with many other autobiographers writing in the period.⁶¹

Richard wrote that he spent his mid-thirties watching 'the fire of youthful enthusiasm dying down into ashes' and living 'mechanically, or like a sleep-walker', with no time or 'freedom' to create.⁶² For him, the toil and sorrows of mid-life delivered the 'knockout blow' that plunged him into depression.⁶³ However, echoing the characterisations of old age which began this chapter, Richard's late life was a time of precarious balance and greater ability to

⁵⁹ Church, *The Voyage Home*, p.104.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp.126-7, 9-30.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.160.

cope with hardship: he had ‘at least risen to my knees’.⁶⁴ His was a heartfelt statement of the value of later life, which did not deny its hardships or ignore the personal joys and special cultural status accorded to childhood. The self-reflexive mode of writing about the ageing process that was employed by these autobiographers in the 1950s was also employed by female writers in the 1960s, whose works were as concerned with the development of personal relationships as with professional careers and, significantly for this chapter, who deepened this attention to the workings of memory, emotion, and psychology in old age.

The 1960s: trauma, memory, and writing

Written in the 1960s, the autobiographies penned by Storm Jameson and Catherine Cookson reflected the further opening up of autobiographical writing and publishing during the mid-twentieth-century. In particular, both women described poverty and hardship as well as former social taboos, such as their experiences of depression and illegitimacy. Providing rich source material for historians of subjectivity, Storm and Catherine’s texts were simultaneously grounded in mid-century public events such as two world wars and the intransigence of cultural taboos against illegitimacy, and built on the postwar psychoanalytic practices of speaking about private perceptions, for instance during counselling and therapy. Informed by psychoanalysis’ emphasis on the formative influence of home and family, these authors also enacted the expository techniques of counselling — the ‘talking cure’ — through their writing. Storm and Catherine were keenly interested in the psychological processes of memory and self-identity, and their writing displayed particularly thoughtful efforts to describe the complexity of ageing and the interweaving of past and present

⁶⁴ Ibid.

experiences over a lifetime. Both women eschewed the idea of penning ‘charming poetic’ memoirs — terms that might easily have been employed in praise of Marie and Horace’s works in the 1940s — in favour of exploring the workings of memory, the ongoing effects of traumatic experiences, and the psychic benefits of writing; each hoped to achieve some sense of ‘meaning’ or ‘peace of mind’ in the process.⁶⁵ Their explicit consideration of these components of autobiography created a different type of source material to the narratives discussed in the chapter thus far; I employ this contrast in order to illuminate personal understandings of story-telling and reminiscence during old age in mid-century Britain.

Storm was born in 1891 in Whitby in the North Riding of Yorkshire, the eldest daughter of William Storm Jameson, a sea captain, and Hannah Margaret, daughter of a shipbuilder.⁶⁶ She won scholarships to study English Literature at Leeds and then London University. Storm was a prolific writer, publishing forty-five novels, as well as pamphlets, essays, and reviews. She also served as the president of the English Poets, Essayists, Novelists literature and human rights organisation between 1938 and 1944. Destined to publish just as widely, Catherine was born in 1906 in Durham, the illegitimate daughter of a domestic servant, Catherine Fawcett, known as Kate.⁶⁷ She was raised by her grandmother and step-grandfather in a devoted Irish Catholic family, and believed for the first eight years of her life that her grandparents were her parents, and that Kate was her sister. Her childhood was marked by her mother’s alcoholism, unemployment, and poverty. Catherine had inherited a

⁶⁵ Catherine Cookson, *Our Kate*, London, 1990 (first published 1969), p.6; Storm Jameson, *Journey from the North: Autobiography of Storm Jameson*, 2 vols, vol. 1, London, 1984 (first published 1969), pp.16, 9.

⁶⁶ Judith Priestman, 'Jameson, Margaret Ethel (Storm) (1891–1986)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, Available at: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/39834> (18 August 2011).

⁶⁷ Kathleen Jones, 'Cookson, Dame Catherine Ann (1906–1998)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (online), Oxford University Press, 2006, Available at: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/70039> (18 August 2011).

rare blood disorder from her father and she left school before she was thirteen because of her ill health, to follow her mother into domestic service. She was already writing by this age and began to educate herself through reading and night classes. After marrying and settling in Hastings, Catherine joined a writers' circle and began to try to get her work published. Her first autobiographical novel, *Kate Hannigan*, was published by Macmillan in 1950. Subsequently her series of Jarrow novels made her famous as a novelist of the social history of the northeast of England, and she eventually published 103 books — 89 novels, ten children's books, and four autobiographical works.

While Michael Roper has described the psychological process of writing letters that would never be sent and which allowed the private calibration of difficult feelings in the face of social expectations, Storm and Catherine wrote versions of their lives that they planned to publish, making their stories permanent and public.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, both women drafted multiple versions of their autobiography, which acted as 'unsent letters' to the self in a similar process to that which Roper has described. Storm wrote every page of her text four or five times; Catherine produced eight versions of her autobiography over 12 years, before *Our Kate* was published in 1969.⁶⁹ Their drafting and re-drafting gave these autobiographers time to explore the private and emotional benefits of writing about a life. Storm attempted to 'collect the fragments' of the self and Catherine found that each rehearsal of her story was 'more therapeutic as I deleted the bitterness from it'.⁷⁰ In addition, both authors recorded the way that writing about their memories had changed them. For instance, Storm regretted that her passion for reshaping the world into phrases had distanced her from it, as the 'very

⁶⁸ Roper, 'Splitting in Unsent Letters: Writing as a Social Practice and a Psychological Activity', pp.318-39.

⁶⁹ Storm Jameson, *Journey from the North: Autobiography of Storm Jameson*, 2 vols, vol. 2, London, 1984 (first published 1969), p.71. Cookson, *Our Kate*, p.8.

⁷⁰ Cookson, *Our Kate*, p.8.

act of writing, of turning pain, grief, joy, into words' created echoes of these feelings which could blur or replace them.⁷¹ By contrast, Catherine celebrated her containment of the past in this way. Writing could 'alleviate' the 'torment' of her unhappy childhood and the shame she felt over her illegitimacy.⁷² Further, Catherine was certain of the emotional function of publication: her 'secret shame' should be made public to complete her autobiographical 'cure'.⁷³

Importantly for this chapter, the psychological activity of remembering was part of the personal process of ageing for both Storm and Catherine. Both women adjusted their expectations of life in old age, and judged themselves to have become gentler in their treatment of self and others. For example, Storm lamented the passing of her youthful strength but dismissed the character traits that had accompanied it, when she had been 'an ignorant clumsy provincial fool'.⁷⁴ In later life, she was more careful, informed, and worldly. Moreover, she revelled in the experiences of recollection that she directly associated with ageing and death. Old age was '[t]ime to settle the account. To arrange to make a friend of the knowledge that wherever you go in the short time left you will find yourself in the same street, the same place, landing in the same harbor.'⁷⁵ Thus Storm welcomed the pull of memory and reflection. She hoped that 'the very last moment' of her life would be 'a pure act of memory'; an immersion in the oldest 'images I carry in my skull'.⁷⁶ Similarly, Catherine wrote that the interwoven processes of ageing and writing her autobiography had brought her to the happiest point of her life. When she began writing, her mind was 'bent

⁷¹ Jameson, *Journey from the North: Autobiography of Storm Jameson*, 2, p.371.

⁷² Cookson, *Our Kate*, p.8.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp.7-8.

⁷⁴ Jameson, *Journey from the North: Autobiography of Storm Jameson*, 2, p.371.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.383.

on retaliation' and with not 'one happy memory'.⁷⁷ Yet in the Forward to the 1990 edition of *Our Kate* she wrote of her achievement of a partial 'peace of mind' that would 'soothe the residue of those sad feelings which still linger, and get me through each day as it comes'.⁷⁸ In all of these ways, Storm and Catherine suggested that their engagement with the past was a distinctive feature of growing old.

Despite the benefits they perceived in later life, childhood retained a special power for these older women through the setting, visions, and sounds that acted as anchors for subsequent experiences. Storm reflected that in this sense 'it is true we only live in one house' all our lives.⁷⁹ In particular, Whitby, the fishing village of Storm's childhood, stayed in her mind through its noises. The chime of the bell-buoys and the calls of children as ships cast off from the dock cycled through her life, evoking the setting of Whitby each time.⁸⁰ She wrote that these scenes had instilled a hatred of domesticity and longing for freedom and independence in her character, attributes that she depicted as having directed her decisions over a lifetime. Moreover, the encoding of her memories in sound ensured that Storm constantly revisited Whitby and renewed these feelings in new contexts; she heard the 'thunder' of the North Sea breaking on the pier beneath the sound of London traffic in her old age.⁸¹ The past and the present — the waves of the North Sea and the London traffic — mutually constituted her memories and behaviours.

⁷⁷ Cookson, *Our Kate*, p.5.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.6.

⁷⁹ Jameson, *Journey from the North: Autobiography of Storm Jameson*, 2, p.28.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.17.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.325.

Storm delivered vivid accounts of the nature of time, memory, and emotional life in old age. She wrote that her memories appeared suddenly and vividly, embedded in her experiences of the present — or not at all. Rather than looking back to recount a linear story, she described living through an endless looping of past and present events, which dictated what was remembered and in what ways. For instance, Storm described her past as an ‘underworld’ through which she was ‘trying to move backwards against the current’, signalling the taxing project of remembering in narrative form.⁸² On this journey she found ‘centres of total blackness’ surrounding moments of cruelty and confusion, yet other experiences remained clear and full.⁸³ In one example, she wrote that her happiness with her baby son in 1917 ‘rings in my head with the sound given out by a flawless glass’.⁸⁴ Visions of her deceased mother also appeared unbidden, when ‘[a] scene, a colour, a sound, split open as I brushed past it, and for an instant she was there.’⁸⁵ Thus, Storm’s ability to remember a scene from the past was related to its emotional content; at least in her public writing, her imagery of happy moments was calm and exact, while traumatic events disappeared in darkness. Moreover, she could not stop herself from seeing her mother — as if she was still alive — at moments which gave the smallest of cues (‘a colour, a sound’) to a memory. For Storm, at least, the process of writing an autobiography was not a matter of sitting down to remember and recreate, but an engagement with aspects of her past which had continuously intruded on her experience of the present over a lifetime.

Like the sounds of the North Sea, people did not stay in the time period they belonged to within Storm’s life. Especially in old age, time was not ‘a succession of events’ but ‘a

⁸² Ibid., vol. 1, p.91.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.114.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.355.

continuous presence' in which the dead 'jostle the ghosts of the living'.⁸⁶ Her description emphasised that, for the old, linear notions of time were meaningless: living people seemed to be apparitions while the dead retained physical presence, embodied in their ability to jostle others. As she had aged, Storm's ghosts had become so numerous that the passing of time was 'not a succession of minutes but a labyrinth where the threads of past and present cross and recross, fusing, separating, turning on themselves, without rest'.⁸⁷ This metaphor signalled a complex and personal version of the feedback cycle between past and present that has been theorised by scholars such as Eakin and Oosterhuis.⁸⁸ Moreover, Storm particularly identified the looping or 'turning' of time with old age. She described her early life as a time when she was confident and brash, and did not look far into the future or the past. The processes of ageing and the accumulation of experience were the mechanisms that made time, in Storm's phrasing, 'circular, a continuous present filled with ghosts and chimeras'.⁸⁹

Many ageing autobiographers gave their memories similarly organic and unpredictable qualities, comparing their visions of the past to wild landscapes and shifting light. For instance, Evelyn Waugh recounted 'uncertain flashes' of childhood memory around which his mind was 'dark', or rather, 'an even glow of pure happiness'.⁹⁰ Augustus John described his past as a 'landscape' and the workings of his memory as the sun. When the light of memory broke through the clouds, it revealed full vignettes of his past, complete with

⁸⁶ Ibid., vol. 2, p.17.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.330.

⁸⁸ Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity*, p.222.

⁸⁹ Jameson, *Journey from the North: Autobiography of Storm Jameson*, 2, p.371.

⁹⁰ Waugh, *A Little Learning: The First Volume of an Autobiography*, p.28.

sounds of laughter, tears, and hymns sung in Welsh.⁹¹ Herbert Read also imagined a ‘shimmering’ picture of the past, when he held a stem of honesty in his hand, and found that it evoked an entire scene from his childhood in a ‘widening circle’ of memory.⁹² Conjuring a more dangerous scene, Richard Church had pictured himself navigating the ‘obstructions’ of ‘[p]reconceived ideas and prejudices’ looming in his imagination ‘like rocks out of the sea’.⁹³ Memory supplied him a ‘defective compass’ for his mental journey into the past. For all of these autobiographers, memory was irregular and embedded in unique sensory and emotional experiences. Therefore Storm’s description of the interloping of emotionally-laden moments from the past into her present was echoed by many other older writers, whose autobiographies offer a complex model for our understanding of personal experiences of growing older, throwing the reductive effects of stereotypical imagery of the old into still sharper relief.

The 1970s: childhood, community, and nostalgia

Such analysis of the psychological implications of ageing has been denied to the wave of working-class autobiographies that were published from the late-1960s to the 1980s, during what Chris Waters called the ‘flowering of working-class autobiographical writing’.⁹⁴ Over these years, local history groups supported the writing, publishing, and dissemination of a great number of locally authored autobiographies. In one example, the company Centreprise opened as a coffee bar and bookshop in Hackney in 1971 and published their first text, written by an English teacher at Hackney Downs School in consultation with his students

⁹¹ John, *Chiaroscuro: Fragments of Autobiography: First Series*, p.276.

⁹² Read, *The Contrary Experience: Autobiographies*, pp.54-5.

⁹³ Church, *The Voyage Home*, p.4.

⁹⁴ Waters, 'Autobiography, Nostalgia, and the Changing Practices of Working-Class Selfhood', p.179.

and set in the local area, in 1972.⁹⁵ Their second venture, a book of poems authored by local schoolboy Vivian Usherwood, began with a print run of 500 and eventually sold over 6,000 copies.⁹⁶ After employing a full-time local publisher in 1973, Centreprise published many of the autobiographies that were given to them by local personalities as well as the texts that were produced in a local history class run by the Hackney branch of the Workers' Educational Association, called 'A Peoples' Autobiography of Hackney'.⁹⁷ In another example, QueenSpark Books began as a 1972 campaign to turn the Royal Spa buildings in Queens Park, Brighton, into a nursery school instead of a casino.⁹⁸ Local residents recorded and shared their memories of the buildings in the campaign's street newspaper, which became a community publisher in 1974 with its production of Albert Paul's *Poverty — Hardship but Happiness: Those Were the Days, 1903-1917*.⁹⁹

As Waters has observed, this wave of publications featured a particular style:

The stories they told about the working-class past are all exercises in 'thick description,' to borrow from Clifford Geertz, accounts of the minutiae of a vanished way of life. Their focus is always on the concrete, the mundane, the ordinary — neighbourhood ties, street life, school days, the corner shop, laundry day, local entertainments, shopping, and the like. They are, in short, archaeologies of the particular and excavations of the densities of everyday life in the traditional working-class community.¹⁰⁰

According to Waters, this cohort of autobiographers wrote detailed description rather than analysis; described the material context of working-class life instead of protesting against it; and evoked a 'lost' way of life without considering its contemporary form. Their narratives

⁹⁵ Ken Worpole and Centerprise Trust, *Local Publishing & Local Culture: An Account of the Work of the Centerprise Publishing Project, 1972-1977*, London, 1977.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Jones, 'The Uses of Nostalgia: Autobiography, Community Publishing and Working Class Neighbourhoods in Post-War England', p.359.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Waters, 'Autobiography, Nostalgia, and the Changing Practices of Working-Class Selfhood', p.186.

certainly revelled in childhood memories and the rituals of early-twentieth-century working-class communities, virtually all of them concluded at the threshold of a different way of life, which was signalled by the outbreak of the Second World War, marriage, or the protagonist's move away from the neighbourhood.¹⁰¹ Yet these attributes should not be interpreted as proof of the texts' superficiality and limited engagement with personal and social change, or politics — as they have been in the existing historiography. Nor should their curtailment, often at the brink of adulthood, preclude analysis of their authors' experiences of old age. While Waters asserts that these autobiographers were 'content merely to reminisce', this chapter argues that there was no 'merely' about it. Instead, autobiographers' choices about the subject matter, presentation, and style of their texts were part of their calibration of the complex feelings that were evoked by experiences of ageing.¹⁰²

By contrast to this reductive analysis of their style, many of the nuances of the production of these autobiographies have been explored. Their nostalgia for a working-class way of life that had disappeared has been placed in the context of mid-century slum-clearance, suburban council estates, growing affluence, and consumerism.¹⁰³ For instance, Ben Jones has argued that these narratives were critiques of the 'dominant stigmatizing representations' of working-class neighbourhoods and their inhabitants, which were posed by Conservative governments in the context of deindustrialisation and a return to high levels of unemployment, and therefore benefit-claims, among working-class families from the late-1960s.¹⁰⁴ In addition, Waters has described 'the ways in which the postwar state stressed the

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.188.

¹⁰² Ibid., p.186.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.182.

¹⁰⁴ Jones, 'The Uses of Nostalgia: Autobiography, Community Publishing and Working Class Neighbourhoods in Post-War England', p.356.

importance of working-class selfhood and encouraged its development and articulation', through social support and educational practices that taught creative writing and self-expression.¹⁰⁵ Importantly, Waters' and Jones' analyses have not traced the workings of subjectivity in these texts or the influence of the ageing process on their presentation of the past, thereby refusing these authors the complex emotional responses to age that are perhaps more easily recognised in the refined literary styles of Storm Jameson and Catherine Cookson.

Yet, despite their infrequent reflection on the process of constructing an autobiography and lack of description of life in old age, the structure and style of the autobiographical texts published by community presses suggest much about the personal priorities of older authors and their social status in mid- to late-twentieth-century Britain. I argue that every one of these vignettes from the past was selected for its relationship to social and political life in the present. Indeed, this implicit comparison between the past and the present — made possible by an author's advanced age — underlay writers' and publishers' claims about the cultural value of the texts they authored and sold. Neither should we ignore that, both at the time of this 'flowering' and earlier, reflecting on the working-class past had significant popular and personal appeal among the British public, in part due to the joys of reminiscence it offered to the old. For example the publication of Walter Greenwood's *There was a Time* (1967), a memoir of growing up in Salford, Manchester, garnered at least 44 letters from his readers. Most of these letter-writers had spent their early life in the Manchester area, and many noted that they felt compelled to write after finding themselves 'so moved' by his account of the distant past, which they shared with him by dint of their

¹⁰⁵ Waters, 'Autobiography, Nostalgia, and the Changing Practices of Working-Class Selfhood', pp.182-3.

own advancing ages.¹⁰⁶ These writers frequently thanked Walter ‘for reminding me so forcibly and entertainingly about my own life’, as well as quibbling with his recall of the geography and inhabitants of Salford, and reciting their own stories of life in the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁷ This community engagement with autobiography intersected with Walter’s fictional and historical writing, and his texts’ representation in other media; he invited autobiographical information from older Britons in his mid-century radio broadcasts, newspaper articles, and in the final chapter of his popular history of Lancashire, receiving 125 letters in response to the latter example.¹⁰⁸ This enthusiastic and detailed correspondence suggested a widespread enjoyment of reminiscence among older Britons, many of whom were reminded of their memories of youth as they listened to the radio or read newspaper articles, even if they did not publish the account as Walter had.

To explore this further, let me introduce the autobiographers Alice Foley, who was born in 1891 in Bolton, and Grace Foakes, born in 1901 in Wapping, East London.¹⁰⁹ Alice was the youngest of six children of Thomas Foley, a boiler stoker in a cotton mill, and his wife, also Alice. Alice’s childhood was austere, and her family survived mainly on the money her mother earned by taking in laundry. She stayed in school until she was thirteen because her father thought the half-time factory system was an exploitation of child labour. Afterwards, she worked in local mills but continued to attend evening classes at her school, and proceeded to secondary education. Alice developed a strong interest in socialism and joined the Labour church and the newly established Socialist Sunday School. She became active in

¹⁰⁶ Letter written to Walter Greenwood by L. Hulmes, 13 October 1967, Walter Greenwood Collection, 2/15/9, Clifford Whitworth Library, University of Salford Manchester (CWL).

¹⁰⁷ Letter written to Walter Greenwood by Priscilla Pagden, in 1970-1971, Walter Greenwood Collection, 2/15/39, CWL.

¹⁰⁸ See correspondence and newspaper cuttings, Walter Greenwood Collection, CWL.

¹⁰⁹ Carol Jenkins, 'Foley, Alice (1891–1974)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (online), Oxford University Press, 2004, Available at: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/71614> (22 August 2011).

the weavers' trade union and, after seven years of factory work, she was appointed as sick visitor by the Bolton Weavers' Association. Alice established and served in many community roles, especially in women's labour organisations, over her lifetime. For example, her long involvement with the Workers' Educational Association began in 1918, when she attended a summer school in Bangor, North Wales. In 1923 she won the Workers' Educational Association Cassel scholarship to attend Manchester University for a year. Alice's voluntary efforts for workers' rights and adult education were recognised with a Member of the Order of the British Empire in 1951 and an honorary Master's degree from Manchester in 1962. Grace, the second of her parents' five surviving children, grew up living in poverty in a two-roomed tenement.¹¹⁰ When Grace was in her early teens her mother fell ill with the cancer that would kill her, leaving Grace to shoulder the burden of housekeeping. After her father remarried and moved away, Grace lived with her husband and their baby daughter in the same tenement flat she had grown up in until, aged in her early thirties, she requested and was allocated a London County Council house in the estate at Dagenham in Essex, the public project that was discussed earlier in this thesis as the subject of a social survey in the mid-1930s.¹¹¹ Grace's autobiographical writing was motivated by the immense differences she noticed between her own childhood and the observations she made of her grandchildren's lives in the 1970s, a contrast she particularly noticed at open days at their school.¹¹²

Alice and Grace's writings key into the registers of nostalgia and political comment discussed by Waters and Jones. While Alice recorded a story of politicised working-class life, in many

¹¹⁰ Grace Foakes, *My Part of the River*, London, 1974; Grace Foakes and Dinah Dryhurst, *Between High Walls: A London Childhood*, Oxford, 1974 (first published 1972), p.2.

¹¹¹ Young and Becontree Social Survey Committee, *Becontree and Dagenham: A Report Made for the Pilgrim Trust*.

¹¹² Foakes, *My Part of the River*, p.1.

ways Grace's autobiography was exactly the nostalgic replaying of the past described by Waters. Moreover, the elements of her story that suggested 'a breakage with the past, a world frozen in time that can now be recaptured only through writing' were carefully flagged on the covers of her book.¹¹³ The front cover featured a sketch of a sweet-looking child surrounded by elegant hand-writing (Figure 30). This imagery suggested the intimacy of a diary but hid the financial hardships and lack of privacy that would have made it impossible for Grace to dress and write in such an idealised early-century style during her childhood. The blurb on the back cover further depoliticised and simplified Grace's autobiographical activities by suggesting that her writing offered a 'child's uncluttered observation' of the past. This text celebrated Grace's memories for their 'little details — Saturday shopping in Watney Street market, men waiting for work at the dock gates, the inside of the tenement flat which for her was home, the sights and sounds and smells of East London', ignoring the darker elements of violence, longing for green spaces, and death that also featured in Grace's story. Alongside this text, two portraits of Grace emphasised her old age (also below). Her younger portrait was sepia-toned, partially faded, and presented a formal pose and hairstyle, evoking a far-off world. Positioned to contrast with a contemporary photograph, this image visually emphasised the passing of time, while Grace's grandmotherly appearance in the latter image encouraged readers to view her as a representative of the older generation, and perhaps of their own grandparents.

¹¹³ Waters, 'Autobiography, Nostalgia, and the Changing Practices of Working-Class Selfhood', p.186.

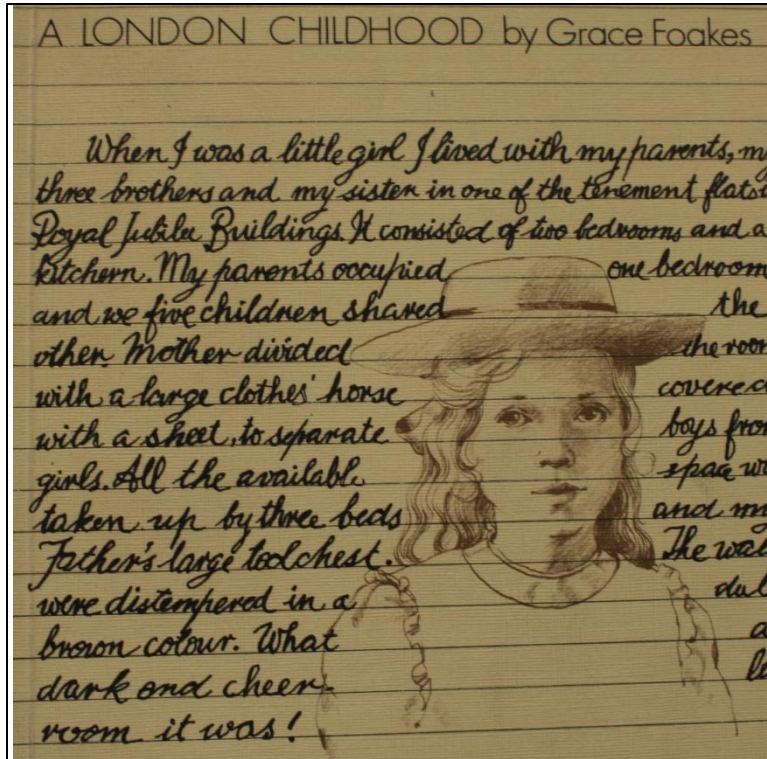


Figure 30 and Figure 31: 'A London Childhood'. These images were chosen to emphasise intimacy, authenticity, and the passing of time — all attributes that appeared to be straightforward on the book's cover, but operated in more complex ways within its text. Grace Foakes and Dinah Dryhurst, *Between High Walls: A London Childhood*, Oxford, 1974, (first published 1972), images from front and back covers.

Looking beyond the marketing of her memories, I argue that Grace's text expressed a shifting and nuanced relationship with the past that was not advertised on its own cover.

Giving a flavour of this complexity, Grace wrote of Wapping that,

even as I recall the poverty and the squalor which there were amid the hustle and bustle, the noise and dirt, the narrow streets and dark alleys, I feel a great sense of nostalgia for this unlovely place, for there as well were to be found comradeship and happiness.¹¹⁴

Like other many older writers, Grace was attracted to dwelling on the past but expressed complicated feelings about the nature of her childhood and its 'unlovely' settings. In a similar tone, Harry Burton had described Fulham as an 'undistinguished suburb' of London whose only fields featured mainly 'unidentified rubbish and the sharp smell of river-mud'.¹¹⁵ Harry wrote that '[b]y no flight of poesy, no ecstatic prose, could the little streets of Fulham be made to glow' as the village and countryside settings of famous autobiographies did, and yet he insisted that 'I remember it all vividly after nearly half a century, that I like remembering it, and that if I am anywhere near it I am unable to resist the temptation to revisit it'.¹¹⁶ These autobiographers shifted the emotional tone in which they discussed different aspects of their past, reflecting the function of childhood in memory, narrative, and the ageing process, as well as its nostalgic and politicised potential. Grace's memories of the past, powerfully encoded in street scenes of Wapping, were so different from the present that she confessed, 'I sometimes wonder if I have dreamt these things'.¹¹⁷ She wrote her autobiography to explain this 'bewilderment' to younger generations, and also to close the gap created by time, by describing, 'a world of people who were just as you are but without

¹¹⁴ Foakes, *My Part of the River*, p.107.

¹¹⁵ Burton, *There Was a Young Man*, p.15.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Foakes, *My Part of the River*, p.1.

opportunities or knowledge'.¹¹⁸ With this characterisation, Grace made a simultaneous plea to value individual memories of the past and the communal and political projects that had raised standards of living in the present.

Thus, in this text we glimpse Grace's attempt to integrate conflicted feelings about a world where her family had happily gathered around the fire at Christmas and yet her mother had died in poverty, and her father had beaten his son 'black and blue'.¹¹⁹ Her idealised descriptions of family celebrations existed in relation to these memories of violence and squalor, complicating the psychological and social message of her nostalgia. Like other older autobiographers, Grace described the community spirit and neighbourliness of the past in order to make sense of her experiences of pleasure amid what seemed — from the vantage point of her late life in postwar Britain — a 'miserable existence'.¹²⁰ Alice, too, wondered at the contradiction between her present and past assumptions: how could she assimilate her memories of 'harsh poverty, unemployment and countless frustrations' and contentment? She concluded that the answers lay in the condition of being young ('we were very young, the world seemed young also') and in the hopes for social justice that existed before two world wars.¹²¹ At once, Alice communicated her personal experience of ageing and disillusionment, the importance of socialism and the world wars to her generation (a point that was also stressed by Storm Jameson), and the improved social conditions she had witnessed in later life. These layers of experience did not align in one narrative of

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p.85.

¹¹⁹ Foakes and Dryhurst, *Between High Walls: A London Childhood*, pp.58, 20, 8.

¹²⁰ Foakes, *My Part of the River*, p.107.

¹²¹ Alice Foley, University of Manchester Department of Extra-Mural Studies, and Workers' Educational Association North Western District, *A Bolton Childhood*, Manchester, 1973, p.73.

improvement or decline over time, requiring Alice and other mid-century autobiographers to constantly recalibrate their regret, nostalgia, and criticism as they described the past.

In particular, the lives of Grace's grandchildren and their generation provided the context which threw the details of her Victorian and Edwardian childhood into clear relief. Indeed, she occasionally addressed them directly. 'You', she lectured the young readers she wrote for, could not imagine the 'thick and yellow' London fogs; the ache of fingers after washing a family's laundry; the excitement of a single peach to be delivered to a sickbed; the noise of the street; or the poverty of the homeless in the past.¹²² While she did not demonstrate the authorial reflexivity of Storm Jameson or Catherine Cookson, Grace used these moments — both in composing her text and during everyday life — to judge contemporary practices and to calibrate the course of her own life: when she sewed she heard her father congratulating her on her hard work and domestic skills; when she ate a peach she thought of running through the streets with a single fruit for her ailing mother.¹²³ Her description of the past did not deny the present, but offered a personal take on the relationship between the two temporalities.

Historians have interpreted the abrupt endings of many working-class autobiographies as evidence of their authors' resistance to narratives of complexity and change. Yet mid-century autobiographers found the notion of childhood meaningful beyond its empirical details, in a way that has not been recognised in this historiography. I suggest that, by setting their texts in childhood, Grace and Alice also communicated important point about their experience of adulthood, especially the major decisions and ethical commitments that had

¹²² Foakes and Dryhurst, *Between High Walls: A London Childhood*, pp.3, 9, 25, 30, 3.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp.6, 25.

shaped their lives, and the awe and confusion they felt looking back across a lifetime. The lifelong significance of youth was emphasised in several strands of mid-century scientific and psychological thought. In the most famous example, Sigmund Freud's theories and their multiple iterations in British popular culture emphasised the enduring influence of childhood experiences on the adult subconscious.¹²⁴ Later, especially with the full articulation of cell theory during the middle years of the century, medical text books and child-care manuals revealed the way that each human cell's decline and death was pre-programmed from its beginning, illustrating that 'we are ever dying — ever mutating — ever changing' in a biological model of the life course that 'more closely elided the beginning with the end, the child with death'.¹²⁵ Drawing on the popular significance of childhood, Grace's many descriptions of her youthful longing to be free of the 'high walls' surrounding Wapping set the scene for her later decisions to hector the London County Council into allocating her young family a house on the estate, so that she could move away from the neighbourhood of her birth. The text's constant comparisons of the close, dark streets by the docks and Grace's childhood fantasies of the countryside — for instance when she had stood on Green Bank Street and imagined it transformed to a meadow that would live up to its name, and in her determined efforts to give her family's tenement flat a window box garden — anticipated her eventual emotionally-loaded decision to live in Essex.¹²⁶ Likewise, Alice suggested the fulfilment and success she would find in her adult voluntary work by conflating her enjoyment of youth and the inspiration she found in socialism.¹²⁷ The end of her narrative, which described her youthful experience of the Workers' Educational Association's Summer

¹²⁴ Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930*, pp.12, 77.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.74, 12.

¹²⁶ Foakes and Dryhurst, *Between High Walls: A London Childhood*, pp.17-8, 23-4.

¹²⁷ Foley, University of Manchester Department of Extra-Mural Studies, and Workers' Educational Association North Western District, *A Bolton Childhood*, pp.68-9.

School, communicated the emotional purpose and satisfactions of her later life, with no need for description of their convoluted politics. As Alice put it, “The spirit of the W.E.A. was to sustain and accompany me through long years of humble toil.”¹²⁸ While historians of the life course should continue to grapple with the question of why it has been so difficult for these autobiographers to shape their experiences of later life into a linear narrative, it is no longer sufficient that we conclude only that old age has been of ‘no interest’ to its inhabitants.

Conclusion

Scholars such as Eakin and Oosterhuis have argued that narrative genres have shaped ‘the way individuals practically experience and organize their lives’ within their different disciplines and subject areas, yet historians of old age have not yet pointed to the significant connection between this process and the experience of growing old.¹²⁹ This chapter has engaged in a close reading of published autobiographies in order to explore the ways that remembering the past and anticipating the future supported a ‘stable, continuous sense of self’ and enabled a ‘sense of unity, orientation, and directedness amidst the confusing versatility and complexity of daily life’ within this literary genre.¹³⁰ It has further argued that these practices — restricted as they were by class, profession, and skill — were an extension of quotidian habits of remembering that were enjoyed among social circles that reached far beyond individual autobiographers, and were more inclusive than the canon of published works considered here. Therefore, I propose, analysis of rich autobiographical sources can

¹²⁸ Ibid., p.92.

¹²⁹ Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity*, p.222.

¹³⁰ Ibid.; Jeremy D. Popkin, *History, Historians, & Autobiography*, Chicago and London, 2005, pp.51-2.

illuminate many of the personal dimensions of growing older and deepen our understanding of the whole process.

In particular, I have flagged the connection between ageing and childhood as a feature of the mid-century literary scene as well as the mental life of many older individuals. While autobiographers struggled to explain the precise meaning of their fascination with scenes of youth, historians could do more to reframe the simplistic notion that old age has been a 'second childhood', which has been too often invoked in both mid-century and twenty-first-century commentary.¹³¹ By contrast, I have suggested that memories of childhood operated as a way of registering personal growth, the nature of memory, and the meaning and direction of a life, and therefore have much to offer historians of subjectivity and the life course. Likewise, this chapter has brought the keen interest in personal expression, creativity, and story-telling that was shared among its ageing protagonists to the fore. I suggest that greater attention to explorations of selfhood in this and other genres, including participation in social research projects, will make our historical conversations about old age both more interesting and truer to the experience of a great number of the Britons who grew old in the mid-century.

Therefore, by introducing the genre of autobiography to this thesis, the present chapter has been able to affirm the relevance of narrative to the process of ageing across social groups and cultural forms. Even without the prompting of interviewers which began many of the stories that were recounted earlier in this thesis, families and acquaintances developed

¹³¹ Hendrik Hartog, *Someday All This Will Be Yours: A History of Inheritance and Old Age*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 2012, pp.149-50; Jenny Hockey and Allison James, 'Back to Our Futures: Imagining Second Childhood', in *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick, eds, London and New York, 1995, pp.135-48.

cultures of story-telling which helped to crystallise memories and make sense of ageing amid its many challenges. In revealing the unruliness of recall and the laborious nature of composing an apt life story, but also the strong desire to do so regardless of these difficulties, autobiographies written by the old suggest some of the pleasures and frustrations of life narrative that went unrecorded by social scientists, but informed their interactions with ageing Britons nonetheless. This interplay of ageing and autobiography highlights the importance of each for historians of mid-century Britain. Autobiographers' passion for reflecting on the past and their willingness to struggle with the obfuscations of overlapping versions affirms the significance of the interlinking and life-long processes of ageing and identity-formation for our historical subjects. Thus, when I encourage historians to think seriously about ageing, I do not only mean that we should pay attention to a particular group of people designated by birth dates or chronological age, but that we should find better ways of accounting for the intersecting and shifting temporalities that people inhabit as they remember their past and attempt to understand their present.

Conclusion:

Ageing as an emotional process

Writing the day after his seventieth birthday, in January 1946, a railway draughtsman made his age the central point of his reply to Mass Observation's inquiry about his morale as a new year began: 'How do you FEEL about 1946?'¹

I was 70 yesterday, so personally I feel I am now 'elderly' and need not feel so rigidly that I must be always BUSY. I wonder whether we shall have visitors, and how they will affect our lives. I shall no doubt be busy in the garden, and in fetching boughs from the woods and chopping; I am not too old for any of these activities.²

This mass-observer played on mid-century expectations about old age throughout his reply; he proclaimed that reaching the age of 70 had made him 'elderly' but, by presenting the term inside scare quotes, he disowned its immediate connotations. In particular, he was careful to differentiate his feeling that he need not always be 'BUSY' in old age (a statement that is perhaps best understood to mean he was no longer so interested in formal employment or career advancement) from his active social, physical, and home life — even noting that he would 'no doubt be busy in the garden' just two sentences after he renounced the whole concept. Contrary to the public image of an elderly man, he was 'not too old' to chop wood or debate the state of contemporary religious faith and international relations, as he went on

¹ Mass Observation directive, December 1945-January 1946, Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex, (MOA).

² Mass Observation directive, 1095 reply to December 1945-January 1946 directive, MOA.

to do. Moreover, the ageing process had delivered personal gains to offset its costs. ‘Now that I am 70’, the mass-observer wrote, he had decided not to worry: ‘Life is calm and peaceful; I enjoy many simple pleasures, and look forward to old age with interest.’³

Throughout this thesis, I have approached later life with the same feelings of curiosity and scepticism about whether becoming ‘elderly’ always meant what its public definitions implied. Like this 70-year-old writer, I have found that the emotional dimensions of the ageing process — such as his decision not to worry about anything — have been as important to its reception by individuals as its manifestations in the public and political life of the nation. Further, ageing has emerged from this study as a process of change and adjustment which meant that one could be ‘elderly’, ‘not too old’, and looking ‘forward to old age’ within the same moment. To develop this central argument, this thesis has visited a series of communities in which Britons encountered and formulated ideas about their old age. Its three sections address the national context and constructions of old age, local communities in later life, and ageing and self-identity. These sections marked the movement of my attention and analysis through the treatment and experience of emotional dimensions of ageing in public life to aspects of private life and selfhood. They signpost the broad sweep of the project and its engagement with the varied and often conflicting influences on older people’s senses of self and feelings about growing older. I use the conceptual limits of this structure — such as its apparent separation of national debate, community, and private life — constructively, in order to emphasise the interplay of public and private attitudes to ageing, and the formative influence of the language of the individual on the philosophies and policies of collective life in mid-twentieth-century Britain.

³ Mass Observation directive, 1095 reply to December 1945-January 1946 directive, MOA.

Old age emerges from this study appearing more expansive and richly textured than it has often seemed in its historiographical literature. I argue that, in order to capture the complexity of this time of life, we need to understand how ageing has been experienced as a personal process as well as how it has been the basis of a set of social ‘problems’ and political interventions. The dominant employment of the latter frame has created a closed-circuit for discussions of old age between the mid-century experts who diagnosed and treated its ‘problems’ and the historians who have used their literature and policies to describe the story of Britons’ increasingly humane treatment of those issues. Stepping outside that discursive structure, I have highlighted some of the aspects of ageing which lay beyond the purview of experts, such as working histories and marital relationships, in order to assess their influence during the mid-century with greater clarity. While I agree with the majority of historians writing on old age that we should pay attention to mid-century efforts to improve the material lives of individuals who reached old age, I argue that we must adopt a more critical view of the aims and methods of those who claimed expertise over ageing in this way, in order to clearly delineate the implications of their work. Reading social research data and organisational literature that addressed old age for its agency in processes of cultural and institutional change, I have identified legacies of mid-century expertise that have not been apparent in the development of governmental policies and medical specialities targeted at the old, including a set of reductive assumptions about older people’s emotional lives on one hand, and the cultivation of habits of introspection and story-telling among older individuals on the other.

Growing old in mid-twentieth-century Britain was part of a lifelong process which featured a set of characteristics that informs my reading of the personal experiences of the elderly during this period. First, the past and the present had a more flexible relationship within the lives of individuals than it is easy for our historical accounts of change over time to convey. Not only influenced by the accretion of experiences and ideals over a lifetime, older Britons also described how aspects of the past were embedded in their apprehension of the present, and vice versa. As well as adding an additional layer of complexity to our notion of the way people have remembered their lives this meant that older men and women did not define themselves only, or in some cases at all, by their current social characteristics — be it in the status of their health, appearance, employment, or living arrangements — but asserted a version of self-identity that also took account of their past behaviours and achievements. This resulted in more frequent expressions of pride and contentment than we might expect given the preoccupations of historians and sociologists. Narratives about the past supported an alternative set of meanings for the ageing bodies and scraping poverty which so worried mid-century experts, but which were also asserted as proof of the enthralling trials and achievements of a lifetime.

This function of story-telling contributed to the second characteristic of ageing that has featured prominently in my analysis: Britons' adjustment to the 'problems' of old age over time and their ability to make sense of its frustrations and tragedies within the context of their individual biographies. Perhaps best illustrated by their frequent dismissal of health problems ranging from sore feet to cancer, older Britons regularly proclaimed their robust health 'in myself' for as long as they could fulfil the social roles and responsibilities that were

most important to them.⁴ Just as a seventieth birthday did not make someone ‘elderly’ with all of the term’s connotations, a damning medical diagnosis and lower income was not summative of an individual’s life — and the continuation of personal relationships and personality traits often meant more. Perhaps especially obvious in the delight with which many older men and women embraced elements of mid-century fashion and style, this aspect of the ageing process reveals some of the commonalities of people’s experience over the life cycle. Chapter five of this thesis suggests that elderly individuals developed this approach to emotion and identity through a lifetime of not quite matching up to public ideals of beauty and success, which became increasingly ‘spectacular’ in their visual and commercial iterations — sometimes moving out of the reach of the elderly — over the twentieth century.⁵

Underlying both of these patterns in emotional response was a third characteristic of ageing and perhaps the most pervasive theme in this thesis: the importance of different forms of story-telling — ranging from family anecdotes to social science interviews, and published autobiographies — in the recognition and interpretation of old age. Narrative was the conduit through which ideas about the past and present intertwined, and feelings about growing old could be managed and shaped. Vital to our understanding of old age in the mid-century, the story-telling of old people was also frequently the basis of their value in public life, whether as participants within social scientific research project that newly interpreted their testimony as a sign of intellectual authority (albeit to the advancement of the researcher and his or her theories) or as the protagonists of autobiographies that were

⁴ See chapter three.

⁵ Saler, "'Clap If You Believe in Sherlock Holmes": Mass Culture and the Re-Enchantment of Modernity, c. 1890-c. 1940', pp.599-622.

variously judged to achieve greater literary merit, emotional potency, or clarity about the British past through the advanced ages of their authors. Importantly, this thesis is not only a story of stoicism and strength in the face of adversity but also what could be gained with advancing age, a list of possibilities that included a more intimate marriage, a new basis for social authority, a better perspective on life and, perhaps most relevant of all for understanding emotional experience in the mid-century, the bittersweet pleasure of remembering a long life.

From a methodological angle, this analysis marks out a boundary line where the insistence of cultural historians that modern life, even in its most material forms, has been interpreted through the lens of language and narrative ceases to apply, and we must listen to the cautionary rejoinder made by others that some experiences have eluded all forms of coherent expression and perhaps even cogitation.⁶ Inspired by a literature that has most often described trauma and violence during war or torture, this thesis suggests that some of the more quotidian and widespread consequences of ageing, such as ill health and limited mobility, could destroy language in the same way. This indicates the limits of this technique of emotional composure, in the extreme, though less dramatic than the examples given by other historians, hardships of age.⁷ Therefore, while this thesis presents a more positive view of old age than much of the literature that informs it, I have not made a call to correct the hazier parts of the social scientific and historical vision of old age by donning rose-tinted spectacles. Instead my analysis connects the sometimes dire results of age — typically registered through disabled bodies, popular ageism, or the deaths of coevals and loved ones

⁶ Roper, 'Slipping out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History', pp.57-72.

⁷ Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, Chicago, 1996; Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War*, Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*.

— with a more personal and complex story in which the things that a person had to lose suggest the value of their life, as much as they betray its risks.

In taking this approach to old age, I also challenge the ways in which historians have understood the welfare state in this formative period of its development. In particular, this study argues that the trajectories of the social, psychological, and political sciences in the mid-century spurred expert interest in the feelings of individuals and spawned a raft of methods and professional practices that aimed to understand and influence them, including new analyses and academic and political uses for personal narratives of old age. As well as suggesting that the middle of the twentieth century deserves greater attention from historians of emotion and subjectivity than it has yet received, this proposition has implications for our interpretation of the mid-century welfare state. My research supports the claims made in recent scholarship that mid-century state activity was more multitudinous and less monolithic than its most enthusiastic advocates and critics have implied, especially by tracing the uneven provision of residential care for the elderly among the voluntary, private, and local authority institutions which the state relied on to enact its welfare policies for the old.⁸

In so doing, I draw attention to the agency of the individuals who acted as researchers, administrators, business owners, workers, and clients within this diverse landscape of social care.⁹ To fully understand the influence of welfare policies in the lives of individuals, I suggest, we need to reveal the interactions between the people who provided and received these services and find ways to account for the influence of their various working histories,

⁸ Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History*.

⁹ A project that is also being explored in Selina Todd's current research. Selina Todd, 'Postwar Problem Families', Paper Presented at the Modern British History seminar, Oxford 2011.

world views, material surroundings, and daily routines. For instance, by applying this approach to the provision of residential care for the elderly, I demonstrate that the mid-century social values which ostensibly changed the treatment of old age — as proclaimed by mid-century academics, political representatives, and health and welfare professionals — did not dominate public institutions to the extent we have assumed and, instead, were the subject of much debate and resistance on the ground. While this gives another reason to expand the scope of our histories of old age beyond the activities of the state, it also provides evidence of the wide range of the insights that can be reached through the methodologies that are often used in histories of emotions, which can tell us as much about public life and political projects as they have about the nature of affective life and subjectivity in the home and family.¹⁰

These conclusions set a number of challenges for historians as they interpret the sources and subjects that inform our narratives of twentieth-century history. The first is simple: older people deserve to play a larger role in the history of modern Britain by dint of their fascinating and varied experiences and what these can reveal about the priorities and mental structures of the time. In particular, this thesis has demonstrated that a consideration of old age is vital to developing a fuller understanding of the meanings of work, the body, marriage, and death in mid-century social life. Secondly British historians, who will no doubt continue to pore over the rich source material provided by social surveys and sociological texts as they compose their accounts of modern life and culture, must pay closer attention to the methodologies and disciplinary traditions that shaped this literature's conclusions about the British population and take account of the way these aspects of intellectual life influenced

¹⁰ See also Francis, 'Tears, Tantrums, and Bared Teeth: The Emotional Economy of Three Conservative Prime Ministers, 1951-1963', pp.354-87.

the political life of the nation, and vice versa. This thesis has analysed some of the alternative stories that can be found in the interview and observation notes which informed these texts; but there is more work to be done in the archives to explain the experience of participation in social research and how it has influenced individuals' lives and worldviews. Finally — and most challenging within the boundaries of current historical practice — historians must experiment with how to take greater account of the process of ageing, in all its complexity, within our narratives of change over time. If we can find the techniques to write not only personal biography, but also the frequently disconcerting experience of living through time, into our histories, we will have established a way to account for the intersection of material life, cultural perceptions, and subjectivity in the lives of historical subjects, and we will have developed a true historiography of emotion.

Appendices

April 1939 Mass Observation Directive questionnaire: Personal appearances

1. Make as honest a confession as you can of your own attitude to personal appearance in yourself and others: how much trouble and expense do you find it worth to devote to it, and what are your main conscious reasons? Are there factors which make it difficult for you to keep up to the standard you consider desirable?
2. Do you notice other people's hands and how far does it affect your judgement of them? Write notes on your attitude to rings, finger-nails, dirty finger nails. What steps do you take for the care of your own hands?
3. If a woman give your reasons for using or not using make-up or other cosmetics on your face? If you use them, how much do they cost and how much time do they take up? At what age did you start to use them and under what circumstances? On what occasions do you take special trouble with your face? How far do you find that cosmetics actually do your face good? What is the attitude towards make-up of your male friends, husband, or fiancé?

If a man describe your shaving routine, what it costs you, your reaction to unshaven or badly-shaved faces, the reaction of your female friends to this, your views on moustaches or beards.

4. If a woman how often do you wash or shampoo your hair, by what method and at what cost and why? How often and for what occasions do you have it waved or permed; say how you came by this procedure. What other steps do you take for the care of your hair?

If a man what are your feelings about (a) having long or untidy hair; (b) going bald? How often do you have your hair cut? Are you particular about the way it is done? Do you put anything on your hair; if so what, and why?

1939 May (1): Clothes

Having thus to some extent exposed the male, it is now the turn of our female Observers to give us the fullest possible information on the following points. We would also be grateful if male observers would try to get answers from a female friend or relative.

1. What is your yearly budget on clothes?
2. What did you last give (a) for a best dress or costume, (b) for a coat?
3. What do you spend on hats, gloves, shoes and stockings? How long do you make these articles last?

July 1950: Personal appearances

1. Make as honest a confession as you can of your own attitude to personal appearance in yourself and others: how much trouble and expense do you find it worth to devote to it, and what are your main conscious reasons? Are there factors which make it difficult for you to keep up to the standard you consider desirable?
2. Do you notice other people's hands and how far does it affect your judgment of them? Write notes on your attitude to rings, finger-nails, dirty finger nails. What steps do you take for the care of your own hands?
3. If a woman give your reasons for using or not using make-up or other cosmetics on your face? If you use them, how much do they cost and how much time do they take up? At what age did you start to use them and under what circumstances? On what occasions do you take special trouble with your face? How far do you find that cosmetics actually do your face good? What is the attitude towards make-up of your male friends, husband, or fiancé?

If a man describe your shaving routine, what it costs you, your reaction to unshaven or badly-shaved faces, the reaction of your female friends to this, your views on moustaches or beards.

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