

Women's LIVES

In the West End of Newcastle



"Visiting the past is something like visiting a foreign country: they do some things the same and some things differently, but above all else they make us more aware of what we call "home"."

John Arnold: "History: A Very Short Introduction"

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Introduction

The 20th century saw enormous changes in people's lives. Two world wars, the welfare state, universal free education and healthcare, rising prosperity, and the increasing availability of new consumer goods from televisions to motor cars were among the major developments that affected everyday life across Britain.



For women in particular the changes were profound. What was the situation for women a hundred years ago? The average married woman could expect to have ten pregnancies, and the average family would have six children. The most common job done by women was as a domestic servant, and women were excluded from many occupations and paid less than men for the jobs they did. In most ordinary family homes, women had to take care of the cleaning, cooking and childcare without the benefit of electricity, hot running water or any modern appliances such as washing machines, vacuum cleaners or food mixers. And a hundred years ago, women did not have the vote and could not stand as members of parliament or hold important public positions.

For the west end of Newcastle, the 20th century was a period of major change in other ways. A hundred years ago, this was still a relatively new urban area having been within a living memory largely a place of green fields and large estates with some scattered industrial and coalmining activities. By the beginning of the 20th century, the west end had become one of the foremost industrial areas in Britain, at the cutting edge of technology and producing goods for export throughout the world. During the coming decades, however, this industrial base collapsed, taking with it many thousands of jobs. Meanwhile major programmes of new house-building and clearance transformed the places people lived in and the ways they lived.

This book is about the everyday lives of some of the women who lived through these times. Spanning an age range from 57 to 85, their personal stories illustrate some of the huge social changes that have taken place within the lifetimes of local older women. However one of the striking features of the picture that emerges is the diversity of women's experiences. The common factor is that all of the older women who contributed their memories to this book now live in the west end of Newcastle. Beyond this fact, their life experiences have been very varied. Most of the women were born and brought up in the area but others came from elsewhere, including some from distant countries. Some remember happy childhoods characterised by vibrant family and community life; others have much bleaker memories. Financial hardship was a common backdrop to childhood, but levels of poverty and material deprivation differed. Whilst women in general were disadvantaged in terms of employment and domestic relationships in comparison with men, particular personal experiences of work and married life were hugely variable.

Women's lives

The Women's Lives Project



The Riverside Women's Group is a group of local women from a range of different communities, ages and cultures who meet regularly to share experiences, support each other, run activities and events, and campaign for better provision locally for families and children. They meet at the Carnegie Centre (formerly the Benwell Library building) and are supported by the Riverside Community Health Project

During 2009 the Women's Group carried out a special project looking at how women's lives had changed during the 20th century in the west end. They identified a range of issues that they wanted to explore, such as paid and domestic work, education, family, and leisure, and the particular experiences of older Asian women. They then set out to gather information from local older women about their memories and experiences. Some of the members of the Women's Group undertook a short training course in research skills to equip them to take part in the research.



Younger and older women took part in events where they could talk to each other and share experiences, and visited Preston Park and Beamish Museums together to see scenes and objects from daily life in the last century. Interviews were carried out with older women from across the west end. This book is the outcome of that project. It contains the older women's own stories and memories and photographic images.

Women's lives

Mothers, aunts and grandmothers

As well as their own experiences, these women's stock of memories include stories about the lives of a previous generation of women who lived in the west end in the 20th century – their own mothers, aunts and grandmothers. Queen Victoria died in 1901, signalling the official end of the Victorian age, but the lives of many of these women were reminiscent of Dickensian tales of grinding poverty, slum dwellings and childhood labour rather than of a modern era.

Alma Wheeler's aunt, Bella Dodds, was born in 1917, one of twelve children. Because her mother was blind, Bella was expected from the age of twelve to take care of the family, responsible for the cooking, baking, cleaning and washing. Her father was a miner who worked until the age of 71 in order to provide not only for his own family but also the family of his brother who was killed in the 1925 Montagu Pit Disaster.



My aunt had eleven brothers and sisters. Seven brothers who were all down the pits, and they used to come in off shifts. They only had two bedrooms – girls in one bedroom, boys in another. Seven lads sharing a double bed. So there was like four of them in on the day shift and three of them in the night shift. And they used to top and tail. And the bed was still warm when the night shift went off and the day shift came. Off with the sheets every week, washing. Lads coming in from the pits, setting the bath, heating the water, getting them a bath, washing their backs because the lads was superstitious – they wouldn't wash their own backs, they had to have someone else. Because they believed that if they washed their own backs there would be a pit fall. So they were very superstitious about washing their backs. In fact, some miners didn't allow you to wash their backs. They would let you rub it with a cloth, they wouldn't let you wash it because they were superstitious. And of course they used to come in, and off with their clothes. The lasses used to wash their clothes and get them ready for the night shift. They never ironed their pit clothes, but they washed them, sossed them, and got them ready for the lads that went off for the night shifts. They didn't have any "Oh they're mine. They're my pants". They just shared. They just all shared the clothes. And they went down the pits. They

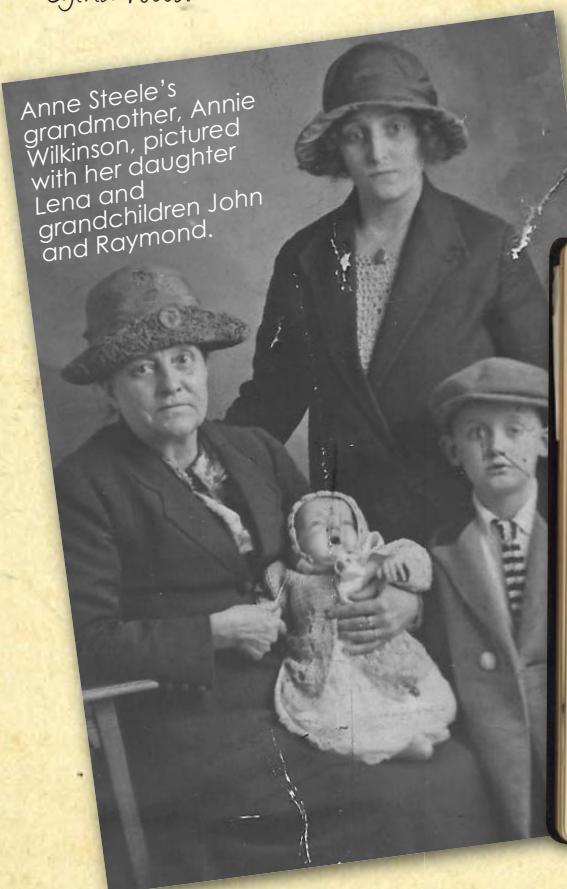
used to come in, and she had to cook for them. And of course our Bella had to look after all the family, baking and cooking for eleven kids. The lasses worked on the land, tatie picking and digging up the fields, and they were really hard lasses. Bella was in the house and she never worked, never had a job where she earned money. I says "How did you live?" The lads used to come in and say "Here you are, Bella, here's some money for you". So that's how she got her money.

Sylvia Wood's grandmother, Emma Hallett, lived in a tenement flat until it was demolished in the 1950s.

She lived along Railway Street which was along at the back of where they had the shunting yards, not far from the city centre. She brought up four of a family in two rooms with no water at all. The water had to be brought from the yard, down the stairs, and carried upstairs in tenements. And there was six of them lived in two rooms. The thing that used to get me, there was a two-roomed tenement there and a two-roomed tenement on the other side, and my gran used to scrub that staircase every week. There wasn't a light on or anything, and it was a wooden staircase. The tenement flat downstairs was the best because being on the flat, you had more living space. But she lived above.

There were three coalhouses, because you had to keep your coal separate. And one toilet - they had a hut in the yard - but that was for everybody. And one standpipe, one water pipe, in the yard. And you had to carry all your water upstairs. And she used to carry it upstairs, and she used to have a little cupboard at the side of her fireplace, and she had an enamel bucket full of water, and that was what you used for drinking. And she used to bring the tin dish, and on the top of landing they had a shelf, and there were two dishes on there, one was for that flat and one was for your flat, and all you had was a dish, a piece of soap, and a towel hanging there, and that was where you got washed. So that was her life.

Sylvia Wood



Anne Steele's grandmother, Annie Wilkinson, pictured with her daughter Lena and grandchildren John and Raymond.

The distinction between paid work and housework was less clear-cut during the earlier years of the century. Anne Steele's grandmother supplemented the family income by selling home-cooked broth.

Railway Street, 1950s, prior to demolition



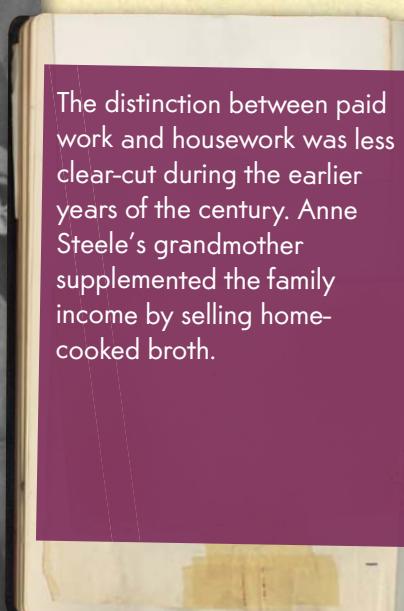
During the earlier decades of the 20th century, the average working class family lived close to subsistence. Poverty and hardship were common themes in the family stories.

I remember my mam told me this story about my nanna that, when my granddad's family used to come for tea on a Sunday, every Saturday they used to pawn the sheets and everything that could be pawned would go to the hock shop to get money for this tea on the Sunday for the best of everything for me granddad's family. And then on the Monday morning, it would all go back and the sheets would come back.

Dorothy O'Shea

My grandmother had nine children. She made broths - she was a lovely cook - and she sold them. People would come and buy a bowl of broth. That was common. When people think there's a depression on now, it was absolutely nowt like what happened years ago. People did literally live in poverty.

Anne Steele



Free education was not available for all children until 1891, and then only for children up to the age of 10. In 1899 school attendance was made compulsory for children up to 12 years of age. Not surprisingly many women living in the west end during the early years of the 20th century had had little or no education.

I had a grandmother who was illiterate because she had been one of the youngest in a big family, and her mother had died when she was eight, so basically she didn't have much schooling at all. From eight years old she was made to look after the family, do the cooking and the washing. She knew money because she had to buy, and she knew her basic name, and that was it. Apart from that she had had no schooling at all.

Sylvia Wood



Anne's mother Jane Hanlon on her wedding day

Sylvia's grandmother, Emma Hallet, with her husband Jimmy



A hundred years ago, the most common job done by women was domestic service. Although it was generally seen as a cut above factory work, the work was hard, the hours long, the pay was poor, and life as a servant could be lonely and harsh. Anne Steele's mother was in service in Gosforth before her marriage. Her experience was happier than many.

My mother had been working in a big house for a family of horse dealers. She went in cleaning fireplaces and everything when she was just a bairn. Then she worked her way up to what she called she was "in her black and whites". She would answer the door and take people in. The lady of the house had trained her. She handed on clothes to her, so my mam would be well dressed all the time - lovely clothes.

Anne Steele

Women's lives

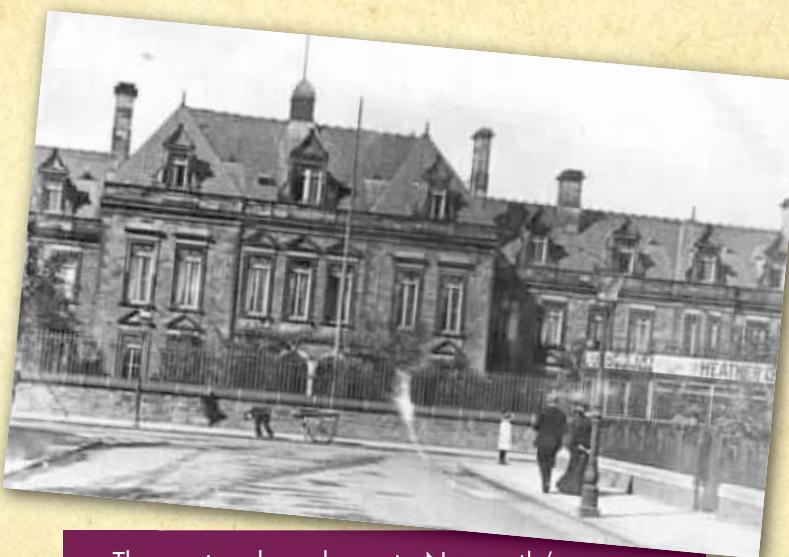
Childhood

The oldest of the women who contributed to this book was born in 1925, before the abolition of the workhouse system, before there was free healthcare, and before all women had gained the right to vote. The youngest was born in 1953, several years after the founding of the welfare state with its promise to defeat the evils of poverty, unemployment, disease, ignorance and slum housing.

Jean Lockey was born in the interwar years when the harshness of the means test, sharpened by memories of the workhouse, made the experience of unemployment and poverty one of fear and stigma. The assumption was that men were the family breadwinners, and women were not entitled to unemployment benefit.

My father always had a job till he died. He worked in Vickers. When he died my mam had to go on the Parish, because they would have nothing. And they used to give you little vouchers for sugar, for margarine, and some for something else. That was the rations. I went to the Parish with my mam. I was only a bairn. They used to come and open the cupboard doors and see what you had to eat. If you had a clean table cloth on your table, they used to go mad about that. "You had money for to buy this!" Oh, they used to be awful people. They were cruel. We hadn't much. We used to have a press bed - you used to put it down and make a bed and the five lasses used to sleep in one bed and the two lads in the other bed, and they had two rooms.

Jean Lockey



The west end was home to Newcastle's workhouse. This was on Westgate Road at the front of a site later to become the General Hospital. The workhouse system was officially abolished in 1930 but the stigma associated with poor relief lingered on.

Betty Ruddick was one of a family of five. Her father was unable to work because of lung problems caused by exposure to poisonous gas during the First World War and the experience of being a prisoner of war.

He was on the means test because he never really worked. We didn't have pocket money, and you used to get gill bottles of milk at school for a halfpenny but I never had it.

Betty Ruddick



Alma Wheeler was a child in Scotswood during the 1940s and remembers widespread poverty tempered by the hard work and creativity of the women in the community.

‘ Kids used to go to school with no shoes on. The lads round the back ran to school in their bare feet, and you couldn’t imagine how awful that would be. I used to think how degrading that would be, because they were poor kids and their mams just couldn’t afford shoes, and they just went to school with no shoes on. Raggy pants with great patches on their backsides. I had all cut-down clothes, because my mam was such a dab hand. And every skirt I had was one of my mother’s cut down. I used to think “Oh no, not that skirt again”. She was a knitter. She could knit anything. So I had lovely jumpers but she knitted it all by hand. She was so clever. They were clever, weren’t they? Baked cakes and stotty cakes and broth and rabbit pies. And come home always to the lovely smell of food cooking. ’

Alma Wheeler



During the 1940s and 1950s Dorothy O’Shea’s mother supported her family with a variety of hard manual jobs.

‘ My mother, when we were little, worked. And she done the crackers at Christmas, and she went out first thing in the morning delivering post. And I can remember us all going along to Scotswood Dene with a two-wheeled bike and she used to get the slack – the bits of coal – and come home. She kept that house going with us four for years. My mam always provided proper home cooking, because she was brought up like that. A proper home-cooked dinner. You had to. No convenience foods then. But my husband – there was nine of them, and his father was a heavy drinker. And the night the pay was due, they were always really, really hungry, waiting for him to come in, because there was nine of them and the mam obviously couldn’t work. Whereas mine, she was always a worker, she did everything she could to get money in. She just used to go out and do the post, three or four cleaning jobs, everything, because there wasn’t a safety net like there is now. You had to find your rent and things like that. ’

Dorothy O’Shea



Sylvia Wood was born in 1940 just after the outbreak of war.

‘ I was lucky in one respect. I was an only child. So I wasn’t vying for whatever food there was. And you’d find most of the women, a lot of the men, but most of the women would go without themselves to feed their family. But if you had say a family of nine that was pretty nigh impossible. I know my mother was so hard up at one time she took a pair of curtains off the window and made me a dress. And she sewed it all by hand. ’

Sylvia Wood

Childhood homes

Newcastle had some of the worst housing conditions in Britain, with a high proportion of homes lacking basic amenities. As late as 1951, a third of all houses in the city - almost 29,000 homes - had no baths.

Joan Coulson was born in 1936. The family lived in a series of furnished flats in the west end until they moved to a council house in Denton Burn in the late 1950s.

One of the flats we had, the tap was in the back yard, and there was no electricity, it was gas mantles. And you had a flat iron and you put it on the cooker to heat up before you could do your ironing. The first time I had a house with electricity, I was nearly 21. It was a two bed-roomed house in Denton Burn. And I kept switching lights off and on! Couldn't get over it. My dad fixed it so I had a bedside lamp, because you never had bedside lamps and things like that before. And I had blue wallpaper with stars on. It was the first time I'd had a room on my own. I was sleeping in a big room with my parents and I was 20 before I got my own room. I got married at 22, and we lived with my parents at first in Denton Burn. I used to work seasonal in hotels, and I was working in Windermere in the Lakes when I met my husband. He was a porter and I was a chambermaid, and that's how we met.

Joan Coulson

Inside toilets and hot running water were rare in these childhood homes. Central heating was unknown. Alma Wheeler lived in Scotswood Village.

We were lucky. We had gas. We were posh! Me mam and dad moved out of where we lived in the cottages where they just had lanterns and lamps, and they moved into Robert Street in 1930. They had gas, so they had gas mantles. You got the match and you hit the mantle and the damn thing used to break - and me mother used to go crackers because you had to go down to the shop and buy them, and they weren't cheap. So you had to be ever so careful. But you came in in the dark when you were kids, and you had to pull this thing, and, you know, pure gas! Whoof! - if it took you a long time. We didn't have gas cookers, we had coal fired ovens. And of course those coal fired ovens did your cooking, and of course it also did the heating of the beds, because me mam used to put bricks in the oven at night-time, and we had a bit of old blanket and she used to roll the brick



Joan pictured at Windermere with a fellow worker from the hotel

in the old blanket and put it in your bed - because your bedrooms were freezing cold. You had one fire in the whole house. You used to go into the bedrooms and you could see your breath. And we used to get up in the

The former Scotswood Baths pictured in 1983



morning in the really cold weather, and we had all the windows were covered in beautiful patterned frost.

We all had outside loos – netties, as we called them. They were flushed netties, but they were outside and it was freezing cold at night. Light a candle – no lights outside, and out you would go and sit on the toilet, and you would get freezing cold, and you would look up and there was no paper. All it was newspaper, with a little hole in the corner. Mam used to do it religiously – another one of her chores. And my brothers were wicked. They used to lock the back door when I was out in the dark, and they would be going "I am the ghost of old..."

The local wash-house. We always called it the baths, because none of us had any baths. It was the baths where you could go for a bath. Men who were working came in and had a bath in a tin bath, which your mam boiled the water and put it in front of the fire. But your dad couldn't very much have a bath in front of all the kids, so he used to go up to the swimming pool where there were baths, proper baths. And they were lovely. Huge big baths, with lovely hot soapy

water. A lot of women didn't have the facilities for washing – hot water and things like that – so the local baths was the wash-house as well, and you used to go once a week. It was a meeting because they all used to meet up there and do all their washing, and they had those wooden boards and they used to wash and scrub, and have a good old natter. And most of the counselling of women who were in trouble or having problems would be sorted out in the wash-house because you were all talking all about "The old man beat us up last night". "Oh, you want to pick up the poker and fell him one". That was the kind of counselling that went on in the wash-house. But those were the good times that they had in those days. And I suppose it kept them all sane. ‘’

Alma Wheeler

Such housing conditions were common until the major slum clearance and improvement programmes of the 1960s and 1970s. In the early 1950s Dot Tweddle moved with her family from Gateshead to Scotswood Road near Cambridge Street School.

We were a family of seven. There was three families living in the particular house at that time and we were in the middle floor. We

had two rooms, one where my mum and dad slept and then the rest of us, seven of us, slept in another room in one bed – three sisters and the others brothers. No electricity. Old gas lamps that you had to pull a chain from the ceiling. No cooker, we cooked on a range. And no bathroom. Toilet was outside down the back yard, and we had a tin bath. We never used the toilet during the night because the place was roaming with rats and mice and everything else you could think of. ‘’

Dot Tweddle

Palace Street and Elswick East Terrace 1935



School Days

It was not until the end of the Second World War that secondary education became compulsory for all children up to the age of 15 and also became free. Although all girls now received a secondary education, they were still disadvantaged. Going to a grammar school was the only way of achieving academic qualifications but, although more girls than boys actually passed the eleven plus examination, a system of positive discrimination towards boys was in operation which limited the number of girls going to grammar schools. There were also costs associated with going to grammar school that could make it difficult for children from poorer homes to attend.

Mary Kelsey was born in 1925 in Herbert Street near Scotswood Road. She left school at the age of 14.

When you passed the eleven plus, if your family couldn't afford a uniform, you just had to leave school and help support the rest of the family.

Mary Kelsey

Anne Steele, born in 1936, also left school at the earliest age.

I used to love learning but I was a bit of a rebel. When it came to taking the eleven plus there was about seven of us and we decided to have a meeting and we decided that we wouldn't do the exam. As far as I was concerned there was absolutely no way, my mother says no way, I'd be going to any colleges because you had to buy all this stuff. We knew our families couldn't afford for us to go. You had to buy things like sports stuff and you had to have the uniform which cost a canny bit of money. We decided none of us were going to wear those pisspot hats. So I just stayed on at St Michael's.

Anne Steele

After the war, primary education in the west end was usually mixed but, until the 1960s when a comprehensive school system was introduced in Newcastle, many secondary schools were single-sex.

At Whickham View Secondary Modern it was separated. Boys were on one side and girls on the other. It wasn't mixed classes at all. There was the alley way in the middle which was the invisible line between the boys and the girls. You weren't allowed to cross at all. That was my experience. And I've just got really, really happy memories of being at Whickham View Secondary Modern School. I cried the day I had to leave there. It was one of the first schools to have swimming baths so we learned to swim there.

I don't know what the boys did because we were in different schools. They would do wood work, I suppose - we didn't - and metalwork. But the girls did cookery and washing. You cooked one week and the next week you did washing, and you had to make your apron and cap the year you started the school before you could start the cookery



Whickham View School

lessons. And you got sewing and knitting. That was the kind of things they taught, because you were expected to have to be able to do all these things when you got married.

Eileen Mackinnon

June Scott was one of the first pupils to go to Whickham View School. During the war, most school cleaners were diverted to other types of work, and the pupils were required to clean the school themselves.

When I started the school was just open. The Queen Mother – she was the Queen then – she came up and opened it. We had to make our own uniforms. And we had to keep it clean. And Friday afternoons that was our job. We polished the desks and everything. When it first started, Friday afternoon was our cleaning day. We kept our desks highly polished. If there was a mark on it, you were in trouble.

June Scott

Shamshad Iqbal came to England from Pakistan with her family in the 1960s. She left school at the earliest opportunity as a result of parental pressure.

I was eleven when I came to England and I left school at 15, so I only had three years of schooling in this country. I really wanted to stay longer at school but I wasn't given the option by my father. He said it would be better if I left because in a few year's time I would be getting married so what was the point in studying. But he also wanted us girls to be independent so he took me to look for a job in a factory. I would have a skills in life so I would never be short of money. So I have always been able to turn back to sewing.

Shamshad Iqbal

Joan Miller went to Rutherford School.

I went to a girls school. The boys were at Bath Lane. We were in Maple Terrace at first, and then we got the new building on the West Road. We still never ever had anything to do with the boys. Totally separate. We had the same swimming pool, which was built on the West Road, but they had different times to us. So we never saw the boys. They came out at different times.



Joan and friends on school trip to the Roman Wall, 1950s

Joan Miller

Mary Kelsey worked part-time in a butcher's shop before leaving school.

When I was getting on for 12 years of age, I did four mornings a week and all day Saturday I worked in a butchers. Nobody wanted meat on a Monday because they had the big joints on a Sunday. This was before I went to school. There was a big family and I volunteered to do it. Got my hands dirty doing everything, but I loved it. I used to do the deliveries and go to school. I only got tuppence a week for ages, but the butcher used to sometimes give us a little bit of meat or some sausage for my mother. And on a Saturday I would be there in the back shop mixing up the ingredients for the sausage, and putting it in the machine, and I could link it and everything. I used to do the mince, put the trays in the window. I was there for a long time. It worked out I had 10 pennies a week – and 12 pence was a shilling. I asked for a tuppence rise and he said "No". And he did without us for a week, and he came and knocked on the door and said to my mother "Let her come back". And I used to buy stamps. You had a book from the post office, and it took 12 stamps. When you got 12 stamps – that was a whole shilling – you could put it in your bank book . TSB on Benwell, corner of the street, one of their first customers. And I saved it up until I had enough money and I bought a dress at Marks and Spencer's – very posh. There was some occasion coming up. It was plain green and it had an imitation bolero attached which was white. I had it for years. I was the bee's knees, and I was the best dressed lass in Benwell. But I had saved up all that time.

Mary Kelsey

While still at school, June Scott worked for her uncle during the 1940s. One of her jobs was to hand pies over the factory wall to workmen at Vickers.

My Uncle Ted had a little shop on the bank. And, of course, we were very close to the Vickers factory. And they used to order deep mince pies, and I had a little stool and I used to stand on this side of the wall, pass over the mince pies. And if they wanted cigarettes, I used to go back and get them the cigarettes. And you know the two cigarettes and two matches in the machine? I used to have to fill them. They were like a green packet and I used to put the two Woodbines in and two matches, and fill the machine. And I got sixpence a week for that. I'd done that from about ten, but I didn't get sixpence at the beginning – I probably got about tuppence for a Beano.

June Scott

As a child Margaret Tweedy was expected to help with household tasks.



Margaret as a child (standing on right) with her family at their home on Abercorn Road

Anne Steele's mother had been in service in a big house in Gosforth before her marriage, and organised her own household in Joseph Street along similar lines.

She run us like a little army. Mealtimes in our house, when we used to come in from school, we all had our job - setting the table, washing the pots, we all had our own individual jobs. My mother would prepare all the dinner and we had to set the table, one on set, one on clear, one on wash, one on dry. We all had napkins. Anything that got worn out, like a table cloth or sheets, when it got worn out, we had to sit and cut them down and embroider some of them or do fancy stitching round the edge. So there was a lot of jobs and preparation that you had to do. We all had our jobs. The same with swilling the yard and keeping the yard clean, and donkey stoning the step. I always had to clean the brasses and I hated it. We had to come in the back way though the back yard. We couldn't come in the front door. There was a stair carpet, and that had to be swept down and you had to unscrew the brasses that kept the sides of the carpet down and polish the brass. And then the step had to be scrubbed. And you'd see everybody in the street scrubbing, because it was a

I worked before I left school but I didn't get paid. When I was about 12 year old, I was expected on a Saturday morning, when I got up, to clean the fire out, lay it, and light it. My mam would have a kettle on, getting it boiled on the gas. I'd get washed, have my breakfast. I'd take two shopping bags, ration books, money, told what to get - it wasn't written down, I had to remember everything - walked to the Co-op, got all the stuff at the grocery shop - the fat, flour, all that kind of stuff, everything off the ration books. Come back down, collect two more bags, and go up and get a stone of potatoes, veg, fruit, something for a fruit tart on a Sunday, then go next door to the butchers and get the meat, bring it down. And then, when I'd finished that, I was expected to clean down the front stairs, brush them all down, brush the passage, wash the paintings down the side and the skirting boards, wash the passage floor, wash the doors, scrub the front step - put the donkey stone on it - and swill the front path. On a Saturday morning, and I was 12. But my mother expected it. And when I got a bit older, I was expected in the afternoon to go along and get my grandma's bread. There used to be a bakery shop opposite to where Search is now. I used to have to go there, get the bread, and walk back, and walk along to Abercorn Road to take my grandma's bread. ,

Margaret Tweedy



Anne and friends in Joseph Street, 1940s

bit of a show-off whose front door could look best with the letter box polished and the handle. And then the last job was to scrub the step clean and then do it with a donkey stone. It was a gingery brown stone. And everybody done their step on a Friday. That's when everybody got paid. And people came round the doors to collect the debt. ,

Anne Steele

War-time childhoods

West Newcastle was a target for air raids because of the engineering factories along the riverside, and especially Vickers armaments works.

There was an air raid shelter in our back lane but nobody ever used it because it didn't have a door on and the men used to use it for a toilet when they were coming out from work and that. My mam and dad got a couple of mattresses and they put them in the cupboard under the stairs, because we lived in a downstairs flat at the time. And there was a chair at the bottom for my mum to sit on. And we would go to bed in our own bed and wake up the next morning under the stairs because there'd been an air raid warning and my mam or dad would pick us up and take us into there. And you would wake up and there was my mam sitting knitting. How she ever saw what she was doing, I don't know, because the door was shut. The only time we ever went in an air raid shelter was across Delaval Road where Mr and Mrs Potts had an Anderson shelter. And my dad used to do the ARP when he wasn't on shift work at night, and he came in on this night and said to my mam to get us out and across to the air raid shelter because this was going to be a big raid. And I think it must have been the night that the Forth Yards was done – down where the Arena is now.

Margaret Tweedy



Sutton's Dwellings, Benwell

I remember, and this is the God's honest truth, we were living in the Dwellings and the air raid siren had went. And everybody was running. And of course I, lackadaisly, just took me time. And I could see through the skylights in the attics, and all the searchlights on this plane. I got a box and put it on a chair, and I was looking out of the window and this plane was going round and round, and I even saw it drop the bombs on the goods yard and it burst into flames. I started to get frightened then. It was terrible that night, the Co-operative Goods Yard. You could smell the sugar and the fat burning.

Pat Riley

There were air-raid shelters built in the street, the front street, which was strange. Nothing was done in the front street in those days. You kept your front street clean. Your front door was kept spotless. These shelters went in the street, and it was strange going out your front door when there was an air-raid.

Sylvia Wood

‘ We were one of the first to move into Suttons Dwellings, when it was finished in 1937. We had a flat on the top. Five rooms for 12/6d. They were lovely. Brand new. Everybody enjoyed being in here then. It was lovely. Had lovely gardens. There was just three of us, two sisters and a brother. We went to school and come back and that was it. And then the war started, we got evacuated, went to Cleator Moor. Didn’t stay in Cleator Moor very long, I’ll tell you. It was in the Wilds of Wanny! We got evacuated to one of the oldest farms, like an ancient farm from the olden days. It was nice enough but we just couldn’t bear with it. My mother looked after ten of us, ten children, seeing that we were alright and that. Anyway we came back and just went to school again. ’

Pat Riley

One and a half million mothers and children were evacuated to the countryside during the war. Many children from the west end were evacuated either alone or with other family members. Some stayed away for several years: others returned to their homes, preferring to risk the bombs rather than remain separated from familiar places and people.

‘ I was born in Delaval, just off Delaval Road. During the war I was evacuated to Haltwhistle. I wasn’t going to go, but everyone else was going, so my mother and father let me go. I think I was there about six months, and then I came back. It was a house and they were older people, so there was no children, and I was not on my own but lonely. And you were so far away. ’

Irene Lucas



Maureen McDade lived with her family in Cranbrook Road, Denton Burn during the 1930s. When war broke out, Maureen and her twin sister Lilian, aged seven, were evacuated to Longtown in Cumbria. Both her parents stayed behind in Newcastle as her sister and brother were too young to be evacuated. Maureen remained in Cumbria for five years, returning home at the age of 12.

‘ We lived in a big house in the village. The lady had grown-up children and there were other evacuees in the house. We were not really happy. We were made to feel not part of the family. We felt we were evacuees. ’

Maureen McDade

Women's lives

From Asia to Britain

The four Asian women who contributed their stories had spent all or most of their childhood in other countries. Two had come to England from Pakistan, one from Bangladesh and one from India.

Those who came over as wives often faced isolation and loneliness at first. Resham Kaur Khan was married at the age of 15. She was 18 when she came to live in Cruddas Park in 1957 with her husband and two year old daughter. It was to be twelve years before she was able to visit India again.

What is there not to like about England? What could I not like? I missed, you know, things like - everything! Everything. I missed everything about India. The warmth, the weather, the openness, I missed things like that about India. I missed everybody. I missed my family and I missed my country. It was nice there. I missed my family. My father died, my mother died, my grandmother died. What can I do? I've got no choice. I love India, but I've got no choice. My husband had a dream. He'd say to me that six months we would live in India, six months we would live in England, but that dream never came true.

Resham Kaur Khan



A Bangladeshi family's back garden in West Newcastle. Some of the older women fill their gardens with herbs and other plants from back home

One of the women had come from Pakistan in the 1960s. Pregnant and friendless, with her husband absent from their home much of the time, she felt helpless and isolated during the early years of her life in England.

I used to be very worried. I didn't know where the bus stops were or which buses to take. One year I struggled a lot. I used to cry nearly all night. I used to think if I ever fell ill or something happened to me, I wouldn't even know how to make a phone call. I wouldn't know who to contact. I didn't know where the doctors were, where the hospital was.

Anonymous

Another woman had come from Bangladesh during the 1960s.

Racist abuse and attacks were also part of some women's experience of living in the west end.

It was very dark and dull and I didn't like it. There was no people nearby where I lived and there was nothing apart from the house I lived in. I didn't like it. My husband had work at night in a factory. He used to go out in the evening at 6 or 7 o'clock and he used to come back in the morning at 8, 9 o'clock. My days passed with a lot of sadness and hardship. He used to come after work and all he used to do was sleep in the day. All day he used to sleep. I used to sleep and get up and do some housework and cooking. He would sleep the whole day. Work time would come and he would go to work. Did I know anything to go anywhere? If I went out anywhere, if anyone saw me, what would happen? Later I met a lady from Bangladesh and with that lady I used to do a little shopping. That's how I learned shopping. I did not know any of this.

Anonymous

Both women found friendship and support within the white community.

At first I didn't have any friends. I was very lonely. There wasn't anyone from my community. The white people were very nice. I had tenants who lived upstairs and they were very nice. The children used to really enjoy being with each other. They were very nice to me. When my husband used to beat me, she would come downstairs and stop him.

Anonymous

Shamshad Iqbal was able to find help and support when she moved to Newcastle from Leeds in the 1970s.

It was hard because I'm from a big family from Leeds. But I think my life changed coming here to Newcastle. I moved here and I had two children already. I had a boy and a girl, and when I came here I was pregnant. So it was hard and the bit that was hard about it was not knowing anybody, and not knowing where to go and who to approach and things like that. And it was hard settling. I met some really nice people when I came here. The nursery my son went to, the teachers were really supportive and they led me to the right places.

Shamshad Iqbal

Once in Hull Street an incident happened. I was just coming and they dropped hot water from the top. I ran and they ran after me. It was boiling hot water and they threw it from the top, but I was not hurt because only drops of it fell on me. I went to my house and they came after me and they were hitting me. The police came but I said there's no use doing anything or passing judgment on them. "Whatever has happened, has happened." They hated us. They used to call us "black bastards". It's better now.

Anonymous

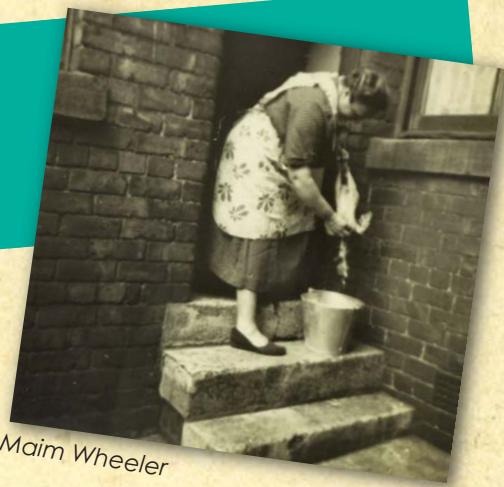
There was an English lady who helped me. She used to see me cry and she helped me. She used to come round and drink tea with me, and we used to sing songs.

Anonymous



Women's lives

Looking after a home



Mairi Wheeler

Looking after a home and family was a hard slog in the days before washing machines, vacuum cleaners and easy-care fabrics were common. Even when labour-saving appliances were available, they were prohibitively expensive for most families. The first vacuum cleaner, known as the "hoover", was invented in 1908 but it remained a luxury item until after the Second World War. In the 1920s a new washing machine cost between £45-60 – an enormous amount of money in those days – and by the start of the war only 4% of UK households had a washing machine. As late as the 1970s, more than a third of households had no fridge. Housework was made harder by living conditions that included open fires and no hot water on tap. It has been estimated that the average housewife spent at least 13 hours a day on her routine tasks of washing, cooking and cleaning

After the war, Jean Lockey lived with her husband and children in Elswick in a small area of streets built by the Richardson family for the workers at their leatherworks.

We lived at Water Street. Water Street and Shumac Street belonged to the leatherworks. They were beautiful houses, lovely houses. I lived facing Vickers Armstrong where the tanks come out under the bridge. The toilets was in the back yard, and we had a big mangle and a copper boiler. You used to make a fire underneath to make the hot water for your washing. Hard work in those days. But good though.

It would be the seventies they was knocked down. We were there until they were knocked down. Then we went to Rye Hill, when they were brand new. They were made specially for the leatherworkers but not many went. They didn't want to go there. They went to different places. The community was gone when they moved. It was a proper little village, where everybody

knows everybody and you could leave your door open. You trusted them. Nowadays you don't know your next-door neighbour. They used to have trips for the children, you know, there, twice a year. And in the evening they used to knock on my door – "Jean, Jean, are you coming out?", because I used to play football with them, and rounders.

Jean Lockey



Back street of Shumac Street and Water Street, c1930

Elsie Marshall, born in 1936, has seen big changes in the technology of housework during her lifetime.

I think myself and people of my age have been through just about every aspect you can think of in cleaning and washing.



I started with the poss tub when I was a child. My mother wasn't particularly well after she had my younger brother, and everybody had to join in and do things. And because we lived in an upstairs flat, the poss tub was carried downstairs and into the back yard. It wasn't very often we did it outside in the winter, but definitely in the summer. And you carried buckets of hot water downstairs, because your boiler was in the scullery, you heated all your water in the boiler - with no hot water, no inside toilets - carried all the hot water down the stairs and filled your poss tub. And you just worked from there. You did the whites first, and then they were put through the wringer which was also in the yard. You poss tub was stood so that the water came from the wringer back into the poss tub. Started with the whites. They were put into a huge big dish. You put your coloureds in next. They were possed and put through the wringer. And then your dark clothes came last, and the same process, and then that water was emptied out and you started again.. You always did two washes, and three cold rinses. And that was how - I would say from being about nine - I helped with that.

You were on the whole day with a poss tub. Seven o'clock. You started very early, especially in the summer

months, and you rushed to get finished for teatime so you could have a meal ready. Because you had washed your table cloths, Monday was usually newspaper on the table. You had to scrub the table, but you weren't allowed to eat it on this lovely scrubbed table, so they put newspapers on for your tea on a Monday. So Tuesday was spent ironing.

In those days you had to work to a routine. Washed on a Monday, you did your ironing on Tuesday, baked on a Wednesday. And Thursday you went right through the house, Friday was shopping day, and then baking day again on Saturday.

It was jolly hard work. And then of course my mam went upmarket and got one of these gas washers. So everything was done inside. There again you still had to heat the water, but you heated it in the washer. The gas was underneath the washer, so it heated the water. There was a tap on. You had to fill it up from your boiler, but there was a tap on to empty the water. And then you had the wringer on the back of that. We called the mangle one that stood separately, with big wooden rollers. The little thing was the wringer - more polite!

And then from that we must have gone upmarket again and got an electric washer. Oh, I thought that was fabulous, that. But there again it was just a small one. It was the Hotpoint Princess. And there again everything was washed in there. You just pressed the buttons.



And the wringer on the back – once again the electric wringer, which made work a lot easier. And I had a one of those when I was married.



After I married, I went to Denton Burn, Dorset Road, and that was how I washed there. And I was in Dorset Road for about six years, and then I moved into Westerhope. And when I went into Westerhope I got a twin tub. That was fabulous, that. You still stood all day with it. It was fabulous. And then, of course, from there I graduated to the automatic. The first one we got, I remember my husband and I sat all night watching this washer working because we thought it was fabulous.

When we first moved up to Westerhope – we'd been there about six months – and the lady further up the street said to me, she says "Well, you've been accepted in Westerhope because you put a perfect wash out". But you were. You were judged by your washing and your windows and things like that.

People of our age, you've been through everything. Your irons. We started with a flat iron on the fire, and then, when you got your modern fire, it went on the cooker, the gas ring. And then there was an iron that had the gas thing in. You put the gas tube in. The gas iron. Same as a gas poker. I don't know how we survived.

No vacuum cleaner. You'd shake the mats. And we had oilcloth which had to be washed. No you didn't have carpets. If you had a square you were very, very lucky. But what you did with a square of carpet, you saved your old tea leaves and that was spread on your carpet, and then you got down on your hands and knees with a hard brush. And it was all swept, swept onto the oilcloth and then picked up. They were damp tea leaves. And that was the best thing for cleaning your carpet.

Elsie Marshall

Maureen McDade and Elsie Marshall raised their families in the 1950s and 1960s.

And, if you talk about babies, it was all napkins that you had to wash – terry towelling napkins. We had no disposables, nothing like that. And there was nothing looked better than a row of white nappies on the line. We were trained, weren't we, to put white napkins out? You couldn't put them out if they looked a bit off, or anything. They had to be white.



Elsie and children with grandmother-in-law outside the house in Dorset Road, 1950s

You didn't have the rubber panties then that went over them. They didn't come in for a little while after that. And you had to change everything. There was nappy, nightie (because they were in nighties until they were about three month old – the long white cotton night-dresses) and the whole lot had to be changed.

Maureen McDade and Elsie Marshall

When we were little we didn't have soap powder. We didn't buy soap powder. It was all white Windsor soap from the Co-op, and we used to grate it, and swirled it round your hot water, and you just possed your clothes.

The dolly blue was a little bag, a muslin bag, and it looked like blue billiard chalk, but you never took it out of the bag, and you used to put it in your last rinse for your whites, just your whites, and you swirled it round that and they came out a lovely blue white.

Elsie Marshall

My mother just had a poss tub in the yard. A poss tub was a big barrel. You could get them wooden but my mother's was sort of zinc, and it was sort of like metal roofs, corrugated, like a barrel. And you had a poss stick. A lot of them had the wooden pieces like that, and they were solid pieces of wood with a split, like hot cross buns, with handle on. And you just possed. You put your cold water in and you did all of the possing with all your stuff in the water, then you got rid of that. And then you used to have to boil hot water either on a cooker, but some of the houses had a pot that was built into the back kitchen and it was brick built up but the lining was metal, and it had a lid on, and it had a little fire underneath. And you used to light the fire and it used to heat it up, and you could put the hot water into a bucket and take it into the yard.

Sylvia Wood



Resham Kaur Khan first moved to England in the 1950s.

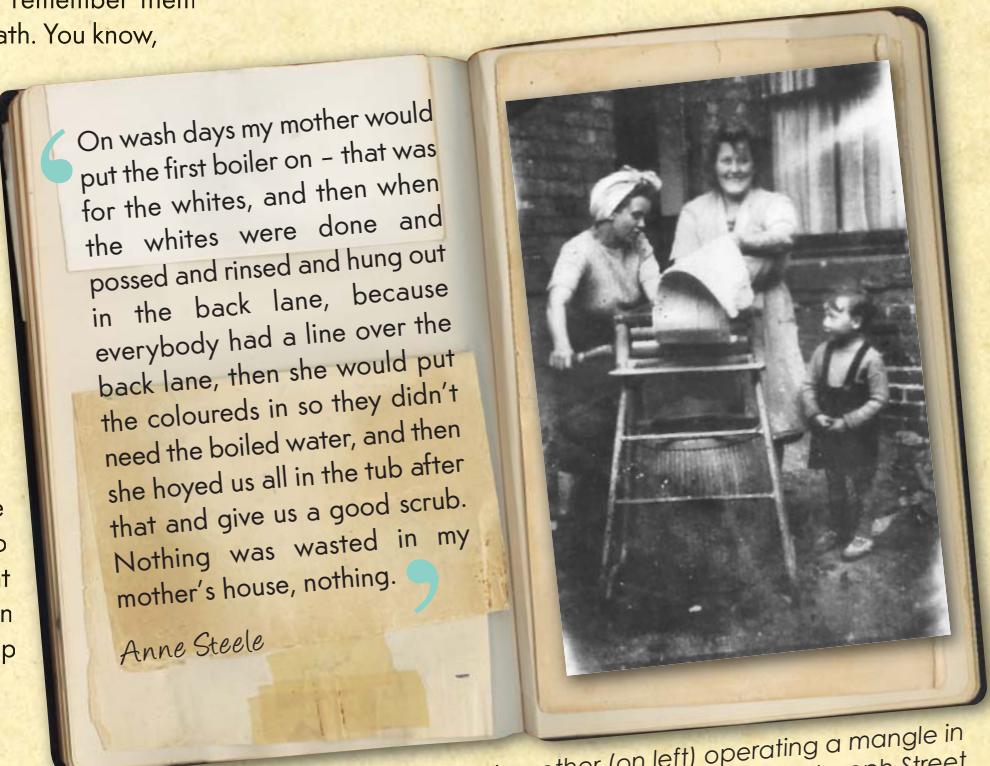
I had a really good life at that time. Sometimes when I sit down with my friends now, I talk, and remember them days when we used to go and have a bath. You know, in Scotswood Road there was a bath, and people used to go every week, take their clothes, and wash it over there. Wash it over there, dry it over there, and then bring it back. There was no washing machines, nothing.

At that time, there was coal fires. People used to get up in the morning and put on the coal fire. One fire kept the whole house warm. People in those days, in that one room, they used to even put the bed. So the living room was the bedroom also. Now people have settees. In those days they used to put beds in front of the coal fire, and that was what it was like. These days children want one room each. We used to sleep one room all the family.

Resham Kaur Khan

On wash days my mother would put the first boiler on - that was for the whites, and then when the whites were done and possed and rinsed and hung out in the back lane, because everybody had a line over the back lane, then she would put the coloureds in so they didn't need the boiled water, and then she hoyed us all in the tub after that and give us a good scrub. Nothing was wasted in my mother's house, nothing.

Anne Steele



Anne's mother (on left) operating a mangle in the backyard of her home in Joseph Street

Sylvia Wood remembers queuing at the butchers.

The butcher didn't cut the meat until you told him what you wanted. And all the meat was hanging up. And if anybody came in for a rabbit, he used to just do it in front of you. I could skin a rabbit because I've watched them skin that many rabbits.

Sylvia Wood

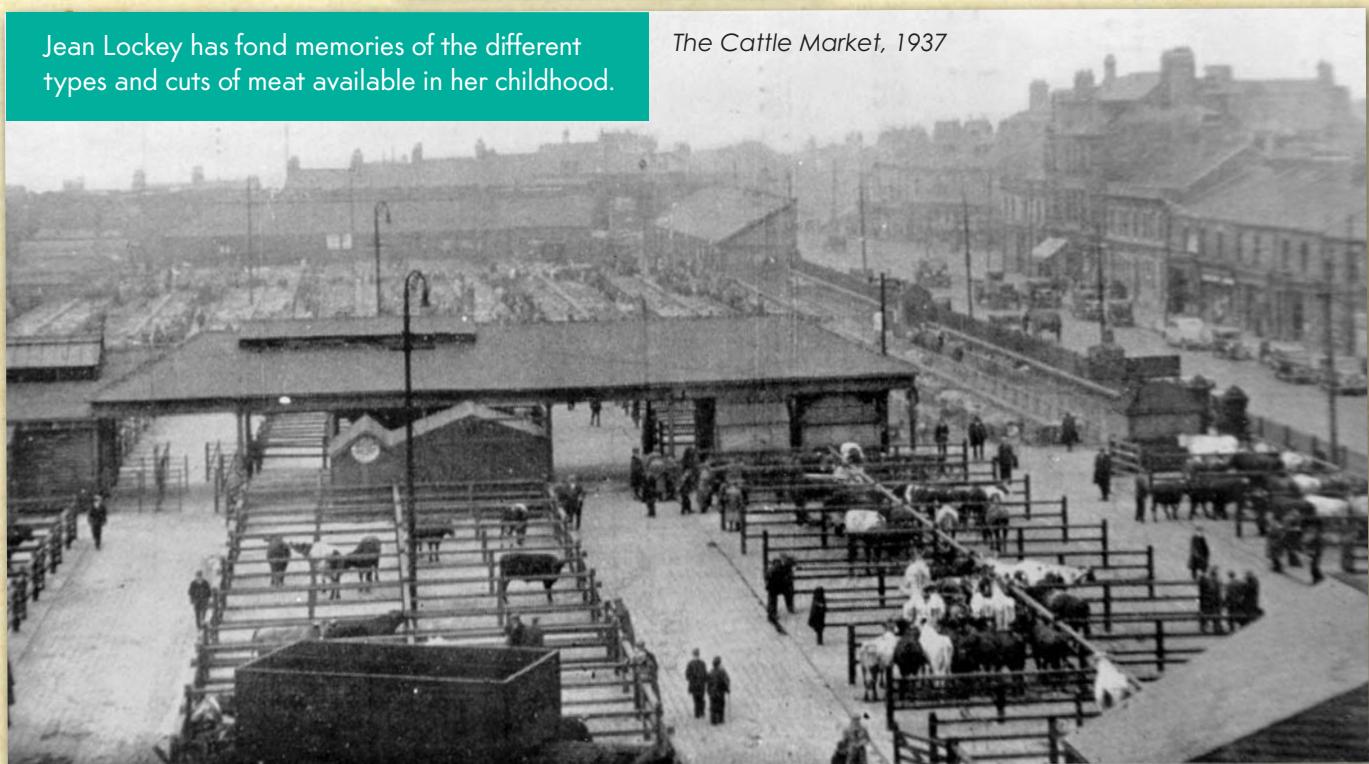
Never had much money when I was young but we always had a dinner. There was seven of us - two lads and five daughters. And there was always a dinner on the table. Me mam used to make bread every day - fresh bread. She used to cook and put the stotties on the window sill outside. Never got pinched.

Jean Lockey



Jean Lockey has fond memories of the different types and cuts of meat available in her childhood.

The Cattle Market, 1937



Pigs heads - lovely! You've got to boil the head, and you scraped the brains out from the head. And you can make broth with it. My mam used to buy sheep's heads as well. They had a great big black pan. It was heavy, very heavy. And she used to put it in there and boil it up, take the brains out, take the tongue out, makes a lovely meal. You had to press the tongue, with a big thing on it - an iron thing. It's like a suction - it turns and presses down. You can do anything you want with the brains. They taste lovely. Horse flesh - that's nice. There used to be a shop down Marlborough Crescent would sell horse flesh and whale meat.

Jean Lockey

SOUPS.

BONE SOUP.

INGREDIENTS.

1 oz. Dripping. Bones (cooked or uncooked).
1 oz. Flour. Carrot, Turnip.
1 Onion. Salt, Pepper.
1 quart Water.

METHOD.—Peel and slice the onion. Melt the dripping over the onion, and brown it. Add the water and bones with a little salt. Simmer for about two hours. Prepare the carrot and turnip and cut them into small dice. They must be added three-quarters of an hour before the soup is required, and the onion must previously be strained out.

NOTE.—Gravy soup may be similarly made, using half a pound of gravy beef cut in dice, and fried before trying the onion. Herbs and celery improve the flavour.

GREEN PEA SOUP.

INGREDIENTS.

1 quart prepared Pots. 1 tablespoonful Salt.
½ pint Peas. 1 bunch Mint.
1 quart Water. ½ pint Milk.
1 dessertspoonful Sugar. A little Soda.

METHOD.—Let the water boil, then add the salt, sugar, soda, peas, pea pods, and mint. Boil until tender, pass through a sieve, and return to the saucepan with the milk, and cook, but do not allow to curdle. Take out the mint, before sieving. Serve with toast or fried bread.

13

Anne Steele pictured with her "cobbler's last" for mending shoes

Before the National Health Service was set up in 1948, there was no free health care and illnesses often went untreated. In the 1930s, being a women was a risky business, as childbirth was still dangerous and the rate of maternal deaths was still rising. Abortion was illegal but many women resorted to it in desperation, and an estimated 500 women died every year as a result of abortions. It was not until the 1930s that the government allowed women to be given advice on contraception, and even then only where their health would be endangered by further pregnancies. And it was not until the 1970s that contraception was available through the NHS.

‘ An old lady in your street would be the one that did all the nursing. And there was Granny Robson’s salve – she lived in Scotswood and she had this potion. It was just like a white ointment. God knows what she put in it. But it was for your cuts and wicklows and all the kinds of daft little things you got. And we used to pay 6d a week – or was it a month? – for the doctors. You had to pay for your doctors, and that was a lot of money for those days but you had to do that. ’

Alma Wheeler

‘ Me mam used to lay out the dead. Anybody that had died in the street, she used to wash them and lay them out. ’

Jean Lockey

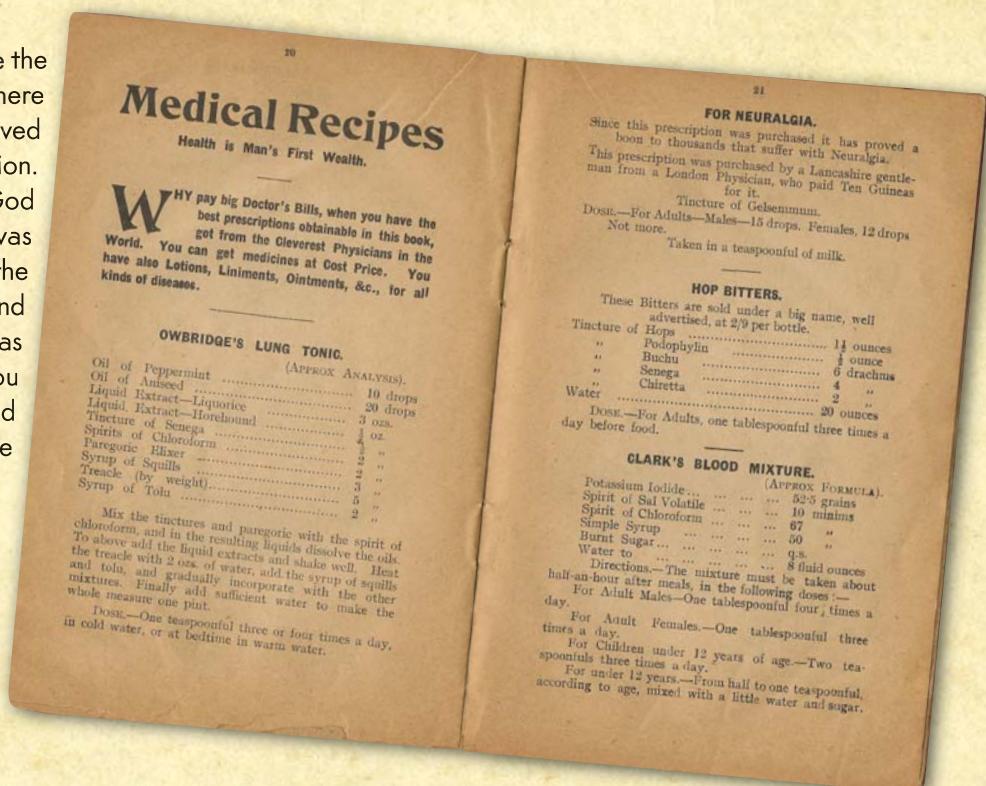
‘ Some used to do abortions. It was well known who they were. Lassies off the streets used to go to them, and what they used to do God only knows, but half of them landed back in hospital. ’

Pat Riley

After the Second World War, the advent of the welfare state brought measures to tackle childhood malnutrition and poor diet.

‘ I remember when we were at school after the war, a lot of children – big families – just didn’t get the food, and a lot of children were getting what’s called rickets, because they didn’t get the vitamins and things. Then the schools started to do milk, to give milk to children to help their bones. But just at the end of the war, we used to have what you called National Baby Food, and the tins were the size of electric kettles. And you used to take them to school and you used to get powdered chocolate, cocoa – that was great. I used to eat it from the spoon. It wasn’t just cocoa, it was a mixture of other things, because it used to have a certain amount of milk and vitamins in. ’

Sylvia Wood



Sylvia Wood and friends in Maughan Street, c1946

Women's lives

Working women

Newcastle for most of the 20th century was an important commercial and financial centre as well as being home to a variety of manufacturing industries. Women's employment experiences ranged from heavy manual labour to office work.

During the 1930s, Mary Kelsey found work in a laundry at the age of 14.



Joan Coulson
working as a
kennel maid
at Gosforth
Stadium in
the 1950s

I left school at 14 officially and went to work in the Woodbine Laundry. I wanted to be a nurse but you had to wait until you were 16, so I had to find work for two years. Wanted to be a hairdresser like my sister, and I couldn't because them days you were paying them to train you. It was just coppers. Anyway that's how the job came in the Woodbine Laundry. Filled the form in and went up and seen the boss. Saville and Redhead were the owners and Stembridge was the bully -spinster through and through. And then I had to go and see Miss Newby, the head one, and she looked at me over the counter - "Eh, but she's too small! Can't come in here." She insisted I was too small, and they couldn't employ us. I remember my mother, she'd just been widowed on the 5th of May and it was in May when all this happened, and there was no money coming in the house, no money at all, widow's pension or anything. Nothing. You had to wait three month before it come through. You know what she did? My mother said "Surely you'll give her a chance. She won't always be this height." So I got the job - two weeks trial. Got a box to stand on, there's boxes different

places to get off and on. And I only stayed seven years!

At the beginning I had to help the girl that was in the woollens machine. There was bars came down with clips, and you had to shake out the woollens. You remember the long johns and things? They were the woollens. And you had to peg them on, and when that was full it automatically moved, and by the time it got to the other end you had to go and fish them out. That was all automated. But, oh, you got burned, because it was red hot. And when they were pressed by the machines, you got the job of folding them - standing on my box and folding them. Well, I don't know if you remember them long johns? There wasn't the hygiene then. And you know the crotch, it used to get stained and it was stiff as a board. You laid the trousers down and that always popped out, and you had to hurry up and get another one on top. It was terrible. Then you graduated and you went right through, and I done every job there was from them going in dirty to them coming out at the end.

Mary Kelsey

The period after the Second World War was a time of full employment.

I left school when I was 14 in the July. I started work straightaway the next Monday.

And I always wanted to be a nursery nurse. I always wanted to look after kids. But me mam and dad said "No, you'd be better off going in an office." So I ended up in an office, with a company that was a wholesale provision merchants. And the office was on the top floor of St Nicholas's Building opposite the cathedral, and you had to go up all these stairs. And when you got the top, you had to clock in. So I was the office junior there, and I was there about two years until I moved on. And at that time you could just say "I'm going to a different job", and

you went, and you got one. And I moved on and on to different office jobs through my life really.

Eileen Mackinnon

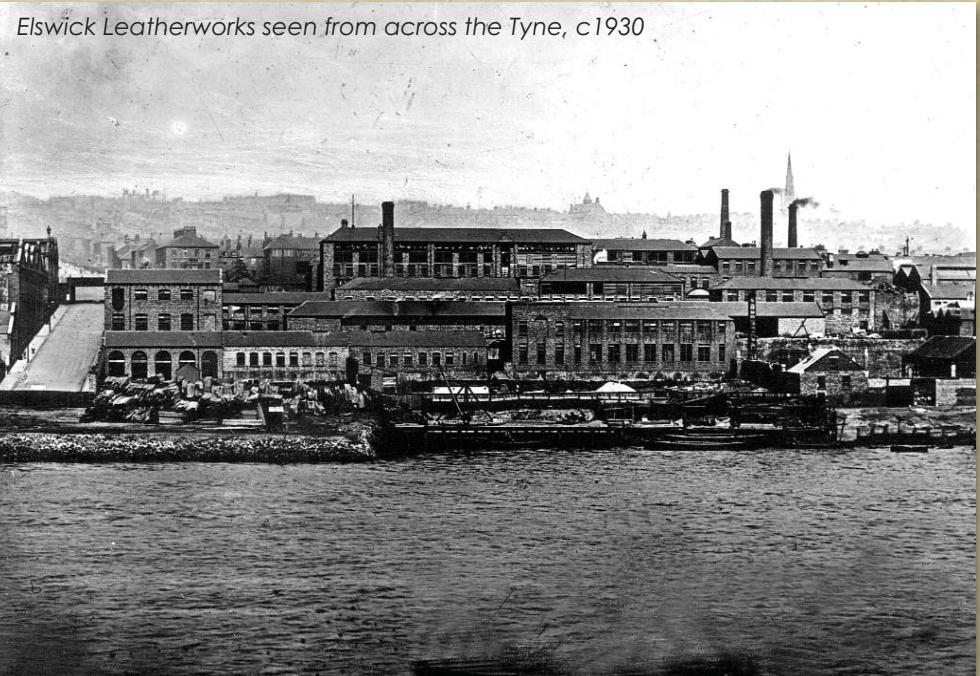


The growth of heavy industries such as engineering, shipbuilding and coalmining during the 19th century had created sectors employing predominantly male labour. Even here however women were still in evidence.

Jean Lockey worked at Richardson's Leatherworks in Elswick for several years after the war.

I used to be a paddler. You get the hide and it had skins on and hair, and the chemicals take the hairs off. When the hairs come all off, us, the padders, we'd have a big huge bench in front of us, and we have one of the hides – and they were heavy, you know – and we'd fling them over, and we used to get what looked like a big lump of lard and put it all over the hide and let that melt in and go over the hide. And then after that you'd have a basin with brown stuff that they put on – and this is the undercoat you put on top of the lard as I called it. And you put that on and you covered it. Then that goes away into a big place to dry out. Then when that's finished the wooden horse comes and they fetched them back to you, and you throw them back onto the bench, and that first one was like the undercoat and this one was like a lovely gloss. And when you put the padding on – the gloss – you could see your face in it. It was beautiful. It was heavy work. I like heavy work. I enjoyed it anyway.

Jean Lockey



During the 1950s Resham Kaur Khan found a job working for a clothing factory on Scotswood Road making dolls clothes at home.

There were some shops on Scotswood Road. I used to go there all the time. There used to be a place where there were weddings and things like that, so one day I decided I'd go and have a look what happens in there. So I went and knocked on the door and I asked – "Do marriages happen here? Is this a church?" "No" he said, "No, this is a factory". So I said "Do you want to give me a job?". He said "Yes, I'll give you a job, but you have to work from home". So he gave me a sample of a dress, and said go and make it and bring it back, and then you got 50p for twelve dozen. Those days that was a lot. I was chuffed with the 50p.

Resham Kaur Khan

While jobs were plentiful, the choices open to women were often quite limited.

At our school, Rutherford, you either went into the Civil Service or you carried on and went into teaching. I left at 16 and went to work in the Ministry of Health. It was boring but it was quite well paid so I stuck it. I started there in 1960 and I stayed five years. £16 a month.

Joan Miller

Liz Vasey started working at Parrish's department store in Shields Road in 1965 as soon as she left school. Although the job was poorly paid, she enjoyed her time there.



Liz Vasey

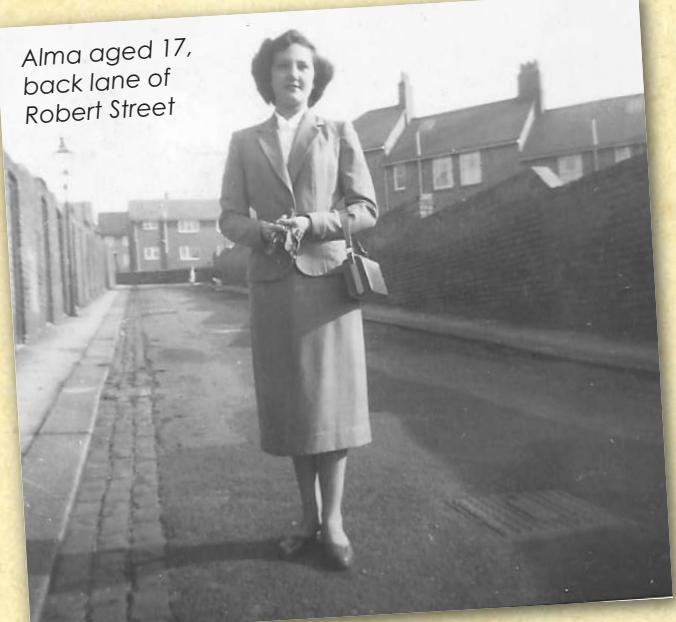
June McDonald was born and brought up in Blyth, but moved to Newcastle in 1968 to train as a nurse and settled in Scotswood after marrying.

Liz Vasey and her workmates from Parrish's department store in Byker on a day out in the 1960s. The various departments used to organise day trips on their Wednesdays off.

Alma Wheeler was one of several women who found their first job through friends and relations.

There was a lady in our street who worked at Bainbridge's, and she said "Alma, do you fancy working at Bainbridge's as a clerk at the office?". So I left school on the Friday, had the interview for the job, and I started work on the Monday. So I was never out of work. And most of the kids who left school at 15 when I did got a job the next day. Now kids have got no opportunities.

Alma Wheeler



June McDonald

Brenda Hamilton's first job in the 1950s was arranged for her by her mother.

I was made to go to the job I went to. My mother knew the manageress, and she said to her "Are there any jobs going? Would you take our Brenda?" And I was told that I was going to work at George's on Northumberland Street, and I had to go on the Monday, and there was no ifs or buts. I wouldn't have dared say to my mother "I'm not going". I had to go, and I did. And I was the gopher. I hated it. It was an exclusive gown shop. And it was above Martin's Bank, where Marks and Spencer's are now. It was above the shop, and I had to dust and I had to hoover, and I had to do the windows, and I had to clean the great big showcases. And I got £3-6s a week, and I gave my mother £3 and she let us keep the 6s for myself.

Brenda Hamilton



Brenda

June Scott refused to take the job found for her by her mother.

The job my mam got for me would have been forced on us. And it was my aunt was in charge of Goldbergs, dressmaking. And I thought "There's no way I'm going to dressmake, no way." So I went myself and got a job in the town at a printing works, and just told my mam I was starting. I finished school on the Friday and started work on the Monday. And that was it. I said "I'm not working for my aunt." And I loved the printing.

June Scott



Aged 16 on roof of George's in Northumberland Street

It was not until the 1970s that it was made illegal to pay a woman less than a man for doing the same work. Women like June Scott working in the 1950s and 1960s earned less than men even when they were doing the same job.

Printing was supposed to be the best paying for a girl. It was supposed to be equally paid, but it didn't work out like that. We used to say that there was no point in saying "equal pay" because we don't get it. The men got definitely more. Equal pay's a funny thing, because you couldn't expect someone doing a different job from you getting the same, but if you were the feeder of a machine and a lad was the feeder of a machine next to you, and they were getting more, that was wrong.

June Scott

Work, marriage and motherhood

Contrary to the traditional myth of the breadwinning husband and father and stay-at-home woman, many women worked outside the home. In the early years of the 20th century, almost three-quarters of single women were in paid work. Until 1920 women were largely excluded from many better paid jobs, such as doctors and lawyers. After this became illegal, many employers introduced a marriage bar which had the effect of limiting the jobs available to women. The civil service and local government were among those that refused to employ married women and forced women to resign when they got married. Teaching and nursing were among the jobs affected. The official marriage bar was in operation until after the war. Many private companies also operated restrictions on employing married women or mothers.

However, as the century progressed, more and more women went out to work. By 1961 women made up a third of the workforce. More than half of these were married women.



Vickers Armstrong's women's cricket team, 1938

Even after the Second World War, many employers would not accept married women.

During the First World War women went into the factories and helped out in what they called man's work. And yet between the two wars, if you were a woman and you were working and you got married, you then lost your job automatically. You couldn't work if you were married. Which is why the likes of my mother all they could do were scratty little cleaning jobs. But they were just on the side. It wasn't official proper work.

Sylvia Wood

I worked at T&G Allan's right up until I got married. I absolutely loved it. And the week I went back after my honeymoon I was called into the office and she said "I'm sorry but we're going to have to dismiss you." And I was just gobsmacked. I said "Why? Have I done something wrong?" She said "No. You got married." I was dismissed because I was married. This was about 1960.

Brenda Hamilton



Big Alma's off to the Gulf

By PETER CUNLIFFE
Industrial Correspondent

A CONVOY of tank recovery vehicles built on Tyneside is due to set off at first light today on the 3,000 mile journey to the Gulf where they

will be used to assist in the recovery of the vehicles in the Gulf in being studied by analysts.

Chairman and chief executive Gerald Bunn said: "We like to think management will take everything into account when making these decisions, the performance of the tank, the per-

formance of the vehicle, the long-term co-

operation of the vehicle."

Picture: PAUL NORRIS

Some employers would accept married women in the workforce but drew the line at employing mothers. Margaret Tweedy worked for the Co-op in the 1950s.

I left school when I was 15. And I got a job in Carrick's bakery at the bottom of Westgate Road. I was there for a month. I went for the interview and the fellow said to us, "If I had 2/6d and I went into your shop and I bought this for this price and this for this,



Blandford House built in 1899 and formerly the headquarters of the CWS is now the Discovery Museum



how much change would you give us?" And I said straightaway, and he says "You've got the job." I was there for a month and then I got an interview for the Co-operative Wholesale Society at Blandford Square and I was there for ten and a half years. In the offices - clerk. Then the girls started by sorting out all the orders that had been filled and paid for, and filed them all up, and the boys started in the postal office. And then you worked your way up into the office. I was a stock-taking clerk. Used to have to go up all the stairs - you weren't allowed to use the lift, by the way - and collect big ledgers from all the departments, and take them back down to the office and add up how many pairs of shoes and stuff like that they'd sold, or how much groceries, and all that, and keep them on stock cards. And then I went over to

I answered an advert and I had just been divorced, and reading the paper, "Only single and divorced, widowed women need apply for this position". So of course I was divorced and I thought "I can do that". So I went down and I had an interview, and that was on a Friday, and they said "When can you start?" I said "When do you want us to start?" So I came Monday, and there was no references taken up or anything like that. And I went in and I got the job.

It was a huge black horrible factory. I worked there 35 years, and I can remember the first day I went into it and I thought "My God, this is horrible". It was dirty and it was really rough - and honestly I never enjoyed myself so much as I did at Vickers. I was in the personnel department.

Alma Wheeler

checking the orders. Girls could go into the typing pool, if they wanted to. But it was men who were bosses. There were men in the office but they were higher grade than the girls were.



Me mam left work when she got married. She wasn't allowed to stay. She had to leave when she got married. When I got married, I asked permission if I could stay on. You had to get written permission to stay on from the boss in the office. But when you were pregnant, you could work up to about six, seven months and then you had to leave. That was it. You didn't have any choice.

Margaret Tweedy

Employers' attitudes to employing women varied.

Pat Riley worked in the Cremona toffee factory on Benton Road.

I had a spell in the toffee factory, Cremona on Benton Road. It was canny there, making toffee. We used to tip it out when it was boiled, and let it cool on the slabs, and then cut it and get it ready for packing. Many a time I burned myself. I've got big marks on my leg from the boiling toffee - and you had to put oil on, and you could see it sizzling on your leg! No gloves, nothing like that. After that I just settled down. Some of the people wouldn't take women on with children. The toffee factory was alright. A woman owned that toffee factory and you didn't have to leave when you got married.

Pat Riley

It was not only employers who thought that women with husbands and children should stay at home. This view was shared by many husbands. After her children had grown up and left home, Anne Steele's mother finally rebelled against her husband's insistence that she stay at home.

‘ My mother gave up work when she got married. That was it. That was the thing in those days. My father wouldn't let her go back. Until we were all grown up, and my sister worked in as a cook in the Breweries and she asked her to go in temporary and she stayed for years. That was her only paid job, and she loved it. She was defiant against my dad, because he didn't want her to go. ’

Anne Steele

Even after the Second World War, there was a widespread expectation that married women ought to be full-time housewives and mothers. Many found part-time jobs outside the home that enabled them to combine their domestic duties with earning extra income.

‘ I left the Leatherworks because I had a family. My husband said "Stop working", so I stopped working. But when the bairns got old enough to understand, I got a job at Pendower School washing dishes, a dinner lady. But I was always in time for the bairns from school. My man wouldn't let me do it any other way. The old-fashioned type, you know. ’

Jean Lockey

‘ You didn't have a choice. It was expected you would stay at home and look after your baby. I stayed at home until my youngest started school in 1972, and then I went to work in the schools, because it fitted in with taking them to school and bringing them back at night-times. And at holiday times I was off all the and a half, and I got £2 a week for that - for seven and a half hours. And I did that for nine years and then I was put in charge over the yard ladies, and I got fifty pence extra. But then I went into serving the meals, which was longer, and I got a bit more. And then I went into the kitchens. I was there from 1972 to 2000. Twenty eight and a half years. ’

Margaret Tweedy

June McDonald moved to West Newcastle in the late 1960s to work as a nurse. She worked part-time after her children were born, and shared the childcare with her husband.

‘ I did three nights a week. I did the Friday, Saturday and Sunday so that I had the week free for the kids. My husband looked after them on the weekend. I had a break until the youngest one was about 18 months then I went back part-time. But if you were part-time you couldn't go in the pension scheme. You weren't allowed to pay superannuation or anything like that. Going back to work full-time was just not an option really. I can't think of any nurseries, and they certainly didn't have crèches like they have now to put our kids. It wasn't really encouraged if you had kids. I mean, you were more or less told if they were bad with the measles or whatever, you can't take days off to look after them, you've got to come into work. But neighbours was good, and I was off through the week, and my husband was there at weekends, so we coped. I think my husband knew that it was because we needed the money. He was a roofer so he didn't have a big wage, so you needed the two wages. The women were going out to work because they needed the money to help the family. Especially in the nursing profession that was what happened, because it was the only way that women could get out to work. ’

I went full-time when they went to university and college, to help pay for their fees. I wanted them to have a better life than I had. I'd struggled all my life to pay for things. We were never really short, but it was a struggle to get things. And I didn't want them to have the same sort of struggle. I wanted them to have a bit better sort of life. ’

June McDonald

Resham Kaur Khan started her own business, first making things at home and later opening a factory.

‘ A few years later I started a business. I made pram sets. I used to keep myself busy at home. I used to make pram sets to keep myself busy, and then I opened the factory. I think it was '73 or '74 when I opened my factory. I employed people, English women, I employed them. First I started my factory from home. My husband he used to do night duty, and my kids were little so I did it in partnership with someone. At least it helped me pass my time. ’

Resham Kaur Khan



Working women in war time

In the First World War, women were needed to maintain industrial production while men were away fighting. Although they were doing men's work, they did not get the same pay. And at the end of the war, as the men returned and unemployment rose, the women were pressured to give up their jobs.

During the Second World War, women were again called on to help with the war effort. Almost a million were recruited into heavy manual jobs previously believed to be unsuitable for women. They did heavy factory work, drove big vehicles, and worked on the land, often working long hours in hard and dangerous conditions. Day nurseries were set up to enable mothers to take up jobs. Then, after the war ended, women were encouraged to return to what was seen as their natural role as home-makers.

In Newcastle during the Second World War, women tramworkers objected when they were refused a bonus that was being paid to their male colleagues. They successfully went on strike.

During the war women worked in the factories. Doing men's jobs because the men were away. A lot of women had a great time in the war, because before that you were just a drudge. But in the war a lot of women got their independence. A lot of women enjoyed the war.

Dorothy O'Shea

During the war there was something like 45,000 people who worked down in the factories, and something like 30,000 of those were women. And they weren't allowed to be skilled – which was a stupid idea, but this wasn't equality. And they used to have gaffers and foremen who were the ones who trained them on their jobs. But they were doing capstan operating and they were doing all the kinds of work, turners and all this kind of work on metal that made guns and bombs and tanks and they were doing entirely the same job as men but they had to have it passed, so this was keeping them at bay. They could never consider themselves to be skilled people. They were semi-skilled workers. But they worked all kinds of hours – sevens in the morning till God knows what time at night, and coming home and then starting to look after a family as well. So really hard, hard times. And coming home and having to start scrubbing floors and polishing black leading fireplaces. I cannot imagine what it was like. And also keeping a family together in such fearful times. You can't imagine. You'd be in bed and the sirens would all go and you would have three or four or five or maybe



Judith Green's aunt, Freda Green, worked at a nursery in the west end during the Second World War.



six kids to get out of their beds and then go and look for a shelter, and put the kids in the shelter for safety whilst the bombs were dropping.

Alma Wheeler



World War One women munitions workers from Armstrong's works, posing next to the fountain in Hodgkin Park

Margaret Tweedy's aunt was one of those sent to do a "man's job" during the Second World War.

Auntie Minnie was about four foot ten, she was born 1911, she was never married, and she used to be a cleaner in the schools. But when the war came, they took all the cleaners out of the schools, or most of them, and put them on to other jobs. And she was put on to be for the telephones, going up the telegraph poles and mending the wires and things like that. Up to that time it wasn't thought to be a woman's job. I think she quite enjoyed it, because it was something that she wouldn't have been considered for before that time. It would be about '39, '40, when they were starting to call people up for the Forces, and she did it for about five, six, years. But when the war ended, she was taken straight off because the men were coming back from the Forces and needed jobs, so she went back into the schools.

Margaret Tweedy



Pat Riley worked in Brandling Laundry in Jesmond during the war.

The war was on. We did military work. Washing – the great big machines and that – for the soldiers. Many convoys used to stop and say "Will you get these done for such and such a time? We're going over". And that was it. Used to have to work until 9 o'clock at night. I was only 14. That was starting at 8 o'clock in the morning. I had to get there on the tram car. Hail, rain or shine, you had to be there. I was there for years and years. And then I progressed and I went on different things and at the finish I was a collar machinist. And the Navy used to send all their dress shirts there and I used to get 1s 11d bonus for each shirt I did. You could buy a pair of knickers for 1s 11d! I was there right through the war. And we used to get the prisoners of war from Haltwhistle used to bring their washing in, and they used to make toys at Christmas for cigarettes for us to buy, and they used to sell them for cigarettes.

The RAF liked their collars nice. And they all sent letters, sweets – "Will you put a nice polish on these collars, I've got a date on tonight" and things like that. I used to get all kinds. They used to come in from Wolsington and give you rabbits on the side. It was funny.

I was the age for the call-up but I was exempt because I was doing war work. It was all machinery. Great big washers, and then there was dryers. And can you imagine a company of soldiers' towels, vests and unders going in one washer?

In the war, there was loads of washing – soldiers coming and going, and Army and Air Force used to come in. And Merchant Navy ships used to come in, and their washings was terrible, but we did them. Because they had never been properly washed for months when they had been at sea.

The fellow that owned the place had a canny thing, I can tell you. I think the military paid for the soldiers' washings, to get one of everything washed a week – towels, shirts, pants, socks, vests, things like that.

I went to their dances. Dances at Ouston, and they even had a place down at Park Road. And along here where the Co-op funeral parlour is there was a big military thing there – soldiers billeted there. Oh yes, we was overrun with soldiers then.

Pat Riley

During the war, more than 80,000 women joined the Women's Land Army which played a vital role in food production. Jean Lockey volunteered to join the Land Army as a teenager during the Second World War and worked as a land girl until it was disbanded in 1950.

I had no parents so I put my hand up and said I would. So they sent me to a farm at Greenhead, Carlisle, and I was there for three months. Out in the wilds, and I was the only girl, and there was him and his wife. And I didn't like it, it was too lonely. So I wrote a letter to Miss Clement - she was the head one - saying I loved working on a farm but it was too quiet for me. On my own by myself on a night-time. So here's a car rolls up at the farm and Mr. Wates shouts "Jean!" I was in the barn. He was the one I worked for. And he says there's a lady here to see you. I seen her coming out of the car - a big posh car. It was Miss Clement, and she said "I'll get you transferred", and she transferred us to Walton, in between Morpeth and Belsay. I'd ride a bike to Scotswood, on the weekends. I was an energetic girl! In fact if I had the brains to go in an office, I wouldn't go in an office. I like being in the fresh air, I don't like being clammed in. From Walton to Morpeth, to Morpeth right up Ponteland Road to Clumber Street - I used to do it every weekend.

I loved the work. You had to do men's work, men's work. Picking eight stones of potatoes and throwing them on the trucks, and driving a tractor, everything like that. In fact the first time I drove was a horse, you know, the plough horse, and do the ploughing. That was the hardest job. You had to keep it straight, you know. You had to turn the horses round.

I also did threshing, milking cows, everything that's on the farm. There was no men. The only men we had was prisoners of war - German and Italians. It was a good job. It was heavy but I loved it. I really loved it.

Thirteen cows he had. I was learning how to milk a cow, and the cowman he says to me, "Jean, when you milk a cow, tie its tail to the side." You know why? When he started to learn how to milk a cow, he never tied the tail, and the tail went in his eye and had his eye out.



Jean Lockey (right) and Pat Riley at Women's Lives event 2009

And I was on the pigs. I loved the pigs. When they were babies, they're gorgeous. I really thoroughly enjoyed the Land Army. I was there right until the end of the war. I wouldn't go for a medal. You know why? They didn't recognise us when we were doing the hard work. That's what I couldn't understand, me.

Eight years I was in, working on the farms. Penzance was the last farm I worked on. I was there a couple of years. It was nice there, and we had a big house, just like a mansion, all the Land Army Girls. There was four or five Land Army girls from each section, and they wanted the best workers. We had a good time there. There was five hostels together. That's where I worked with the pigs - lovely! Cornwall - different class to here where pigs are concerned. When you go to Cornwall you see these beautiful fields, you see the beautiful little huts, and everything was lovely, and the pigs used to roam all over and go and lie down in there, lovely and clean. Here they never did that. I did everything there - pigs, threshing, pulling spuds, turnips. It was very rare in those days to have machines. When the tractors come on the scene, they learned me how to drive a tractor. It was heavy, very hard. There's not a job on the farm that's easy.

Jean Lockey

Women's lives

Family life

The pictures of family life painted by the women of the west end are remarkably varied. There was no such thing as a typical "family".

Alma Wheeler has lived in Scotswood Village since just before the war, and looks back on a life characterised by strong family and community ties.

I was born in Robert Street, Scotswood, a lot of years ago. My dad lived in Scotswood and my grandparents lived in Scotswood, so I've got a history of ancestors living in Scotswood. Born, bred and enjoyed every minute. I still live in Scotswood. I've lived in the same house all my life. Mam and dad bought a house in Scotswood in the early 1930s for £500, and so of course I was born there and I lived there, and all my brothers and I all grew up in Scotswood. And it was pulled down just about three weeks ago. It was a family home, not just a house. It's a place where you enjoyed all your childhood and you'd lived there all your life, and your mother did all the cooking, and you had all those happy memories of a house. And of course you move out – gone forever. So it really was the saddest day of my life.

I've got to say that mine's been the happiest and the most charmed life that anyone could ever have. I was brought up in a huge family. My father had eleven brothers and sisters, and my mam had eight brothers and sisters, so I had a huge amount. I had 38 aunts and uncles, and

thousands of cousins. And we all lived in Scotswood, which was great. And of course even people who weren't your family in those days were classed as family – neighbours were your aunties. You never called anybody by their first name. It was either Auntie Lena or Mrs Hepple. Your neighbours were your family and you all grew up together.

None of us had anything. We all were very, very poor. None of us had any money, but we all had things that you could give, even if it was just love and attention and caring. You all had these kind of things that you gave to your neighbours. We took care of our old people. Your grannies and your aunties and old uncles and things, they were just part of your family, and they just came to stay with you or lived with you. We had a two bedoomed house. We only had one bedroom for three of us – two lads and a lass. So we all slept in one big bed. It was great fun. Really smashing times.

Alma Wheeler



Maim and Bill Wheeler



Robert Street under construction, c1908

At the end of the Second World War, there was a big push to get women back in the home to concentrate on being mothers, wives and home-makers. This image of the ideal family did not match the real experience of many girls and women at the time. In particular, thousands of children lived in care homes or were sent abroad away from their families and communities. Born at the beginning of the 1950s, Dot Tweddle first went into care when she was three years old.



Things started to go wrong in the family. From what I've been told, my dad was a very heavy gambler. The two of them were forced to get married when she was 16, and she kept leaving the family with my dad and going off, disappearing for lengths of time, then coming back. And that's why we were originally taken away. At the time I didn't know what because I was so young. I'm the second youngest. We were all put into different care homes, and we were there for a short time and then we came back home again. And there was talk about going to Australia. I don't know whether it was the government that paid for your passage as a family to go, but it cost £10 at the time. Everything had been sorted ready to go when one of my brothers – he was eleven – got himself into trouble and he was sent to Axwell Park Approved School, so we were turned down. We couldn't go to Australia.

So from there myself and my sister Lilian we were taken into Nazareth House, which wasn't a very nice experience, and it's something I don't talk about easily. We were abused both mentally, physically, sexually and it wasn't a very pleasant experience. Then Lilian was moved to Jesmond Dene boarding school which I believe was for children that were slow at learning or they believed they come from difficult homes and situations. My other brothers were sent to a place which I believe is in Gateshead somewhere. I stayed in Nazareth House for quite a long time, and then I was transferred to a school in Sheffield which was a boarding school for girls. That didn't work out because I just didn't fit in. I knew at

the age of six that they were all people mostly with money that went to this boarding school. From there I spent a lot of time back and forward in different children's homes, foster people, and then eventually I ended back up in Nazareth House. And things just went from bad to worse. I was there till I was about 13, and then I ran away and travelled – London, Reading, a place called Corby in Northamptonshire – until I was old enough to say I can stop running now because they can't touch us, they can't take us back to court and send us back to Nazareth House.

I lived on the streets, in cardboard boxes, anywhere I could find a warm place. When I needed to eat, I'd go through dustbins, go up behind shops and look in their bins to see what they'd thrown out. I worked for a while on a market, which didn't bring very much money but I was allowed to take fruit. But most of the time it was very difficult because sometimes when you went looking for food, you couldn't eat it because it was so rotten with maggots and things like that. So most of the time you went hungry, you were filthy, you smelled. I used to go in the underground toilets to try and have a wash and wash my underclothes. Couldn't wash my outer clothes because that was all I had to stand up in. And then I was told about this halfway house in London and I went there. They allow you to have a bath and a shower, they give you clean clothing, they give us a sleeping bag. But you could only stay there one night and then you had to move on because there was so many people went in and out of the place. And they gave you ten shillings, which was a lot of money then and that was for a week's board and lodgings, if you could find somewhere like the Salvation Army to sleep at night. But if you didn't get there for 8 o'clock at night you couldn't get a bed because the beds went so quickly. But I spent most of my time on the streets.

Then when I was 16, I got a job on the dustbins, and I was on the dustbins for about a year. Then after that, I started to go to the Salvation Army. I was just going to their meetings and stuff to keep warm, and they used to give you a cup of tea and a biscuit. And they were saying that they needed people for working on different homes that they had, so I went to work at a retirement home and I was there for 18 months. We were just used. We were paid £5 a week. We had one half day off a month. We used to have to be up at 5 o'clock in the morning and we were lucky if we got to bed 11 o'clock, 12 o'clock at night. But there again it was warm and we had our food.

But the abuse was still going on even there. I used to think it was me that people just liked to slap around. I thought that for a long, long time. And then I left there and I was transferred to a children's home which was run by the Salvation Army and I was there for about six months, and then I received a letter from a friend in Newcastle saying that she had found my mother. So that's why I came up to Newcastle - to look for her. But she had disappeared from the house she was supposed to be at, so there again I was without a house, without a job, no money, back on the streets.

And then I just went from one place to another looking for jobs, but it was very hard when you were dirty and you had no clothes to go for interviews. So then I went to live in the Girls Hostel which used to be down Gloucester Street in Newcastle. I was there about two years. Then I found my mother, lived with her for a very short time, and after that I went to London and just constantly went around.

And then in 1992 I received another letter asking if I would come back to Newcastle, and I came back up. My mother had had a stroke and she had cancer, and she just wanted us to look after her. So I did. I thought it would give me a chance to find out about my family - where they'd gone, where my brothers and sisters were. I did that for three years, and then when she did die I ended up back on the streets again, because it was a council property and I was given a week to get her stuff out. From there I went to St Vincent's Orphanage on the West Road, which was run by the Catholic Society, and I was a house parent. I was there for two years and then it closed down. But they made sure I wasn't going to go back on the streets, and they worked with the council and got me a flat in Westerhope, which I believe is all pulled down now. I had a slight breakdown and I went to Collingwood Clinic. I was there for about three months. My flat had gone, and I didn't know what I was going to do.

To be honest, I'm 59 now and I wouldn't say I was even settled now. Too much has gone under the bridge for me to be able to say that this is my home. It's not my home, it's just somewhere where I live and I can go to bed at night and know that nothing's going to happen because my doors are locked, my windows are locked, and nobody can get in because it's my little box, if you like. I think it all boils to my very early childhood, being moved from one place to another, and really mostly down to Nazareth House. Not knowing where you come from, not knowing till you're nearly 50 something that you've got brothers and sisters. I was three and my sister was four. I can remember sleeping in a bed with seven and they were all children, but I didn't know whose children they were. I didn't know they were part of my family. In my own memory I just thought it was another home - a foster

home or a children's home. I have no family memories.

I found my sister Lilian three years ago. Through the childhood she had, she had mental health issues and spent a long time in St Nicholas's Hospital. And the only way I found her was reading the obituaries in the paper. I went to her funeral the day after finding it in the paper. Then at her funeral somebody came up and asked if I had a brother. I said I believed so but I couldn't be 100% sure, and he gave us this number and as soon as I said hello this person on the other end started to cry. He said "I know who you are - you're my baby sister Dot". We've talked about a lot of things, about what happened to him, and it turned out that he had more abuse, sexual abuse, every kind of abuse you can think of, than what me and my sister had. I think that was the hardest thing, because I always thought that, when I started to hear rumours that I had brothers and sisters, that they were very happy, they were brought up different to me, and I was the one that was being punished for some reason. Even now I sometimes sit and think could I have done something really bad for me to have been put in the home in the first place and put up with all this abuse.

I only know about myself, my sister Lilian, and my brother. The rest of them I just honestly don't know because I haven't traced them. I don't know where they live. I don't know anything about the others at all.

One of the things that came out of Nazareth House was you don't ask questions. As far as they were concerned, you had no family when you went in there. You were put in there because you were evil. You were put there because you had the devil in you. They made sure that you felt as though you were no-one. Nobody could see you. You couldn't speak. Once you hit those doors that was it, your life was ended. They didn't tell you nothing, absolutely nothing. I remember there was a little girl come in. She would be about four. And she had beautiful long red hair. And she was only in the door when one of the sisters took her off and I knew what was going to happen, and they shaved all her hair off. That's the first thing they did was shaved your hair off. It didn't matter what length it was, it was shaved off. They made the excuse it was for head lice and things like that, but it wasn't. Because they used to drum into you about vanity, and your hair was one of your vanities that had to be taken away from you. You just - I can't even think of a word - you just existed from day to day, and you didn't question is there somebody out there that can help. All you thought about each day was there's nobody. You either put up with the abuse, the punishments, or you were buried in the ground and that would be it.

Dot Tweddle

Until the end of the 19th century men had almost total control over women's lives. Women were seen as the property of their husbands, and by law the husbands owned all the property and money even if they were not living together. Until the middle of the 19th century you needed an Act of Parliament to get divorced, until the 1920s a man could divorce his wife for adultery but she could not do the same to him, and it was only in 1969 that reform of the divorce laws allowed divorce by consent. It is not surprising that men's attitudes and behaviour within marriage often reflected the dominant assumptions about family life.



Sylvia and husband Jimmy at Whitley Bay, 1950s



Sylvia's father with granddaughter Linda

My dad had great respect for all women. When my mother was told not to have any more children because she was very ill after having me, he made sure she didn't. He used to take to task other men who were told their women shouldn't have children any more but went on and let them have babies. A lot of men were selfish. "It's the women that had the babies – it was nowt to do with us, I'm having my rights." That was the line.

You got no help with family care, home care. He went to work. You had to work – I went to work as well – but I got no help whatsoever in the house.

Sylvia Wood

He was out there enjoying himself and me mam was the home-maker. That was the way things were in those days. My dad used to come home and he used to bring her a bunch of flowers – this women in a pinny, and she was a big lass. "By Maim, you're the bonniest lass in Scotswood".

Alma Wheeler

During the first half of the 20th century it was common for babies to be taken away from women who were unmarried or unsupported.

They took the babies off them. Many, many years ago, they used to take the bairns off them. A friend of mine, her mother had a baby, and because she had no man to look after her, nothing, they took the baby from her. She wasn't cruel to the bairn – she couldn't keep the little lad.

Anne Steele's parents fitted the conventional picture of a family with the man as breadwinner and woman as mother and home-maker. Within her extended family however were several examples of quite different lifestyles and experiences.



That was my Aunt Lena. She managed the Portland, Mill Lane. It was really a nice pub years ago. She managed it, and she was a very stern woman, very abrupt and in command of the situation.

She wouldn't stand for any nonsense in the pub.

My Aunt Cissy managed what is Balmbras now, in the Bigg Market. It was called the Carlton Hotel. It was a gambling place, had all the billiard tables in. My Aunt Lena managed the Portland, my Aunt Cissy managed the Carlton. They were good-looking women, very smart. But my Aunt Cissy became pregnant, and she had our George. My mother brought him up, because my Aunt Cissy had to work. This man had two people pregnant. He was a businessman in the town. He was going to do the right thing, but my aunt said absolutely not when she knew there had been someone else. It was very unusual in those days to have a child without being married. It was a shame. She was a woman before her time. Very strong. She earned canny money because she managed the business, but my mother did all the looking after our George. All the kids in the street used to wait for this big car coming on Christmas Eve, because my Aunt Cissy would come with chocolate and things for the kids in the street – things they weren't used to getting. So she was a bit of a fairytale.

Now this is another tale in my family. My Uncle George was in the air force and he came home with one of his fellow servicemen. They called him Les. And when my gran saw him she really took a shine to him. She encouraged him to marry my Auntie Emma, and then my Auntie Emma had two children with him, and she couldn't take any more, because she didn't really want to be married to him. And she ran away to Manchester and she married bigamously and had quite a family to him. Now my granny took over the two kids as if they were her own.

Anne Steele



The Gables maternity home had a section for unmarried mothers. Later known as Hopedene, it closed in 1975

There was many a one went in there for to have their bairns. You wouldn't talk about it much.

Jean Lockey

Women's lives

Asian women's experiences

The Asian women who feature in this book all had arranged marriages. Some were married in their home countries and then came to Britain to face life in a strange country with a husband they hardly knew. Some created good lives for themselves in the west end: others found unhappiness and pain. A Bangladeshi woman described her early experiences of life in Britain during 1960s as she struggled to bring up a family with an unsupportive husband.

Another woman endured a violent and unhappy marriage for many years after arriving in England from Pakistan during the 1960s.

I was 19 years old when I first came to this country. My husband went to Pakistan, he stayed there six months, got married and after six months he brought me back with him. I was pregnant with my oldest son then, I was three months pregnant. When I first came over here I had so many problems. For one year I didn't know anything about my husband. He just kept me inside the house for one year. I was pregnant and I used to vomit so much, I was so weak. And my husband all the time all he would do was argue and fight. In Pakistan he was different. But in Pakistan he's my uncle's son, and my uncle wanted him to marry me and he agreed to the marriage. It wasn't forced. He chose to marry me. After coming here, he changed. He had lived here seven years before he went to Pakistan. He had a white woman and he used to stay with her, and he would just keep me inside. I didn't know anything. He used to lie to me. If I asked him for anything or said anything to him, all he would do was just hit me and abuse me and punch me. I used to sit in the room on my own and cry. In Pakistan I had a very big family. Here I had nobody. I used to wonder "Is this England or is this jail?"

My husband never used to let me go out. He was scared, I think, that somebody else would tell me what the law of this country is and I would learn something. When I used to go to town he would always be behind me, checking me just to see if I was talking to anybody. He never used to let me go anywhere. He was very suspicious. I used to take the kids to school, but that was a lot later. When I first came I didn't know anything.

He didn't let me go to Pakistan for 13 years, and then only for two weeks when my father was very ill - and I

didn't see him, I only saw his dead face. He said to me if I didn't come back he would divorce me and terrible things. Divorce is seen as a bad thing and a terrible thing for honour.

One day he hit me so much I was ill for two weeks. I was hungry for days. I couldn't cook anything. Then a social worker came and she helped me. She took me and my daughters away to a refuge. She called the police and they weren't believing me, and she said "Look at her. Look at the way she looks, how much he has hit her and abused her". I had marks and bruises all over my body. She said to me "How many years are you going to remain with him?" We lived in the refuge for seven weeks and then we got a house. I didn't divorce him because I thought "I'm not going to get married again".

Anonymous

My husband would get his wages and not much money was spent on food. It was just gambling. I used to get food on credit from the shop. My eyes never saw any money. I didn't know how to calculate money. I had five children but I never had any money from him. He would get a little shopping for the house and the rest - gambling. He never won. I had no people, I had nobody. What can I do? Where would I go?

Anonymous

Shamshad Iqbal came to England from Pakistan as a child in the 1960s. Her parents arranged her marriage with a cousin when she was 17. Her experience has been positive.

My family is from a rural area from Pakistan. We were brought up in that area, and then we came here. I was the oldest daughter of seven sisters.

For my generation, I know for myself and loads of other friends or people in the family that went into a marriage that was an arranged marriage but, looking back at it, I would say that it wasn't an arranged marriage as far as the girl's side was concerned. I look back and I think it's the way we were brought up, because you're conditioned, you're brought up that way, you don't know anything different. For example, when my dad said to me "You're getting married next month". I'd kind of heard vibes in the house from my sister-in-law a few months before that my cousin and his mother had been coming around. And one day I turned round and said "Why do they keep coming every weekend? We have to do so much housework." You had to do so much cooking, then afterwards you'd be cleaning, and I used to get fed up with that. She said "I think they are up to something. I think they might be coming for your marriage." And I said "I'm not marrying him. He's horrible." Honestly, it was just like a joke with my sister-in-law. And the next thing is my father says "You're getting married." And I didn't say anything. I said "OK". Because to me that's how I was brought up. I never knew anything different. At that time I did not know of anything different. It was only after getting married and after moving away from home, that it hit me what's happened to me. And it was having to go and live with the in-laws. I thought "What has happened to me?"

The way it worked generations ago, that is the tradition to marry within your extended family. For our parents, it's about being more secure and happier than to give her outside of the family who might treat her more badly. That is the way it's looked at, because they have more say within the family.

I had a lot of support from both sides of the family, whereas some arranged marriages don't have that and they are put into a situation where it doesn't work. For me, an arranged marriage can break up and a love marriage can break up, any marriage can break up or have its difficulties or problems. For myself, I don't think, looking back at it, I could have made my marriage work if I didn't have the support of both sides of the family.

Initially I didn't have support from my husband. I feel that within the communities there's a lot of differences. For example, from the Pakistani community which is where I'm from, you get people from the city side who their views and their thinking is very different because they support

women in having an education in their own country, where if you come from the more rural areas, like myself, and their way of life has been different in Pakistan. And it's the same in India and Bangladesh. It depends on which areas you've been brought up in and which background of the families you're from. I'm married to my first cousin. Initially when I moved to Newcastle he didn't support what I was doing, even me just getting involved as a volunteer in a nursery. He was saying "Why can't you just stay home? Why do you have to go there?" I used to work at home as a machinist and I used to stitch suits, and to him he was comfortable me being at home and everything. And I talked a lot to him, and one of the things I found was the fear was that by me doing things our marriage will finish. So in a way it meant putting more into that marriage side of things and just to prove that not every woman stays at home. And as time went on he just changed his views. He started supporting me, not just in doing my work, but at home with the kids and doing the housework, which got me more and more out and doing things. He's a brilliant cook. I would go home and everything would be done, and that was so nice. And I really respect him and support him in that because one of the things he always did was make sure the kids were fed. He'd cooked and the kitchen would be upside down, but I didn't mind because he'd fed the kids and that freed me up to go back to a meeting at 7 o'clock or be campaigning at the Civic Centre for something. And because of his support, my own brothers started looking at it in a different kind of light.

Things have changed a lot. The village that I was born, 15 years ago there was no schooling for girls, but now there has been schools all over set up where the girls are allowed to be educated, and it's a must that they're educated at least up to the age of 14 and now the schools are trying to develop into having a higher than 14 set-up, so there's been a lot of movement for women's rights in both Bangladesh and Pakistan from women themselves.

Shamshad Iqbal



Women's lives

Leisure time

A common question asked of older women is "What did you do before there was television?"

Alma's father, Billy Wheeler, organised trips to the seaside from Scotswood.

He used to hire a train – a full train – and he used to shunt out of the station, go right across the bridge. And it was huge amount of carriages – couldn't get it all on the station. And that used to fill up. And a trip used to go down to South Shields, and we used to spend a whole day, and there's photographs all over the place of them all enjoying egg and spoon races on the beach, and them all plodging in the sea, and men in their suits (because men never went out without suits and caps on their heads) all with their pants rolled up and plodging with their suits on. It's really a strange set-up when you think of when we were young and what is young now.

Alma Wheeler



Boarding the train for a day at the seaside



Billy Wheeler ran a dance hall pictured (on left) at the time of the Blaydon Races Centenary Celebrations

Local churches played a major role in social and community life for many people in the west end in earlier decades. Elsie Dixon has been involved with St James' Church in Benwell since the 1930s.

In my young day, we relied on the church for most of our social life. A lot of people did. There was a men's choir, a very good men and boys' choir, when I went to church when I was young. And they had their own social life. They used to put socials on and invite people to them. Then you had the great Sunday School outings which don't happen these day. Ryton Willows was a favourite place, and Cullercoats, or the Long Beach at Tynemouth.

My social life focused round the church when I was a teenager. There was always a dance in the parish hall on a Saturday night, which one of the curates ran, and any special time we would have a dance - like St Valentine's Dance or a Harvest Dance and that. To be a member of that club you had to be associated with the church, but you could bring a guest along. And we had a youth club which we used to run in the hall. And mostly I went to the dances and the youth club. Then when I was 18, I went to the Forces so I was missing for about three and half years. That was 1945 till 1948. And when I came back I joined the Benwell Players. Now that had been going since the time when there was a vicar called Mr Knyvett and he went on to be a bishop. And his wife formed a drama group and in her day they used to do Shakespeare - they were very ambitious. The Benwell Players were very well known.

I joined the Players, and when I'd been in a few years it celebrated its 25th anniversary, so it had been on quite a while. We went on for a lot of years and then it disbanded. Then we formed another drama group but we didn't call it the Benwell Players, we called it the St James' Players, and we did mostly pantomimes and one or two sketches and musicals and that. I wrote a lot of them. I've got some of the scripts still. They were very popular. I remember the first pantomime, we did Cinderella. We had no stage, we used the blocks, and we rigged up some kind of curtain to get across. And we had very little props and no lighting, and it was one of the most successful pantomimes we ever did. We had to turn people away from the hall.

Before the war, the church would be packed out on a Sunday, with the three aisles. Evensong was a great thing



Elsie Dixon
aged 19 in the ATS



Elsie as a
pantomime
dame

in those days. The church was packed at half past six. It was a very different atmosphere from what there is in church now. Everybody went in their best. I wouldn't have dreamed at one time of going to church in my trousers, and not dressed up - with your hat on and everything like that!

In the sixties and seventies a lot of people disappeared from the congregation. A lot of people just moved. It was a shifting congregation. But it was always a church that had quite a lot of activities. It was a great hub of social life at one time. But the advent of television and other things, people didn't need the church for their social life, did they?

Elsie Dixon

Dancing was also a very popular pastime.

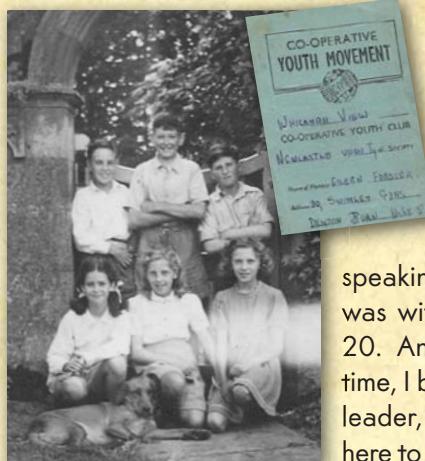
There was a lot of dance halls that's not there now - the Brighton and the Oxford, the Embassy up on the West Road, and the Plaza - there was dance halls all over. There was the Savoy - bottom of Beech Grove Road. And on Saturday night we used to go to one or the other. It was a really good time. You never had any trouble with fights or drugs or anything. It was ballroom dancing - the foxtrot, quickstep, tango, all that kind of thing, and the cha cha cha - that was my favourite. They were huge places. There was always standing round the sides. There was seating areas upstairs, café, but there was always most of them standing at the bottom round the ballroom. We used to dance together sometimes, two lasses, then the lads would come and split you up, and you'd end up dancing with the lads. We never stood around.

Joan Coulson

The Co-op - "The People's Store" - was an important feature of life in areas like the west end. Originally set up in different communities during the 19th century by working people who got together to provide good quality, unadulterated goods at reasonable prices, the Co-op became a major retailer. People who became members of the Co-op received a regular "dividend" based on the amount they had spent in Co-op stores. The Co-operative movement also had a number of organisations which offered social, educational and other activities. The Co-operative Women's Guild had more than 66,000 members by 1930. Eileen Mackinnon's mother was involved in the Guild, and she introduced Eileen to the movement at an early age.

My first introduction into the Co-operative movement was a youth club, so that goes back to 1945. My mum was a Women's Guild member, so I had to go to the Co-op Youth Club. When I was 11, my mum said "You'll have to join the youth club", and it was called the Pathfinders. That was for 11-15 year olds. So I was taken along to Benwell High Cross, where the Co-op was, and up the stairs to the room above the Co-op, and left there. And I joined, and I went there till I was 15.

Every week on a Wednesday night I went to the Pathfinders. We used to have mainly games, but we had a Pathfinder pledge that we learned. You did games that were called co-operative games, and we had a dance teacher come in and learned us tap dancing, and just activities that was good - happy times. And we did go out on social events, and we also went on holidays to a place called Dalston Hall in Cumbria which belonged to the Co-operative movement. Like a summer camp it was. A great, great experience, and it was all subsidised. The Pathfinders was boys and girls. It was only for children of Co-op members. You had to show your check number to say you were a member. And that's where I was until I was 15 when I moved on to the Co-operative Youth Movement - in the same place, in the same hall, but later in the evening. When you became a youth member, you joined the Co-op in your own right. And there we used to do other practical work and learn more educational work, learn about the Co-operative



Whickham View Pathfinder group at Dalston Hall

friend Joyce.

And I did that until I got married in 1959.

When I think about it, I've never been out of it! That was my younger years until I was over 20, and then I moved in to the Co-op Women's Guild with my mam, and then eventually I moved on to the National Guild. So that's my Co-operative history.

In 1954 when I was 20, we went to Switzerland with the youth club, and it was an International Co-operative Youth Rally. We got on a train at Newcastle, travelled down to London, went over on the ferry from Dover to Calais, then we got on an other train and went right the way through Belgium to get to Switzerland. And we stayed in a camp in Switzerland. It was an old army camp with these huts all in a row, and there was co-operative youth people there from Switzerland, from Yugoslavia, from France, and other European countries. That was absolutely the

greatest thing that happened in my life. We met all these young Co-operators. It was absolutely great. I had a few different boyfriends in four days!

They were happy, fun, jolly memories but you still had it in

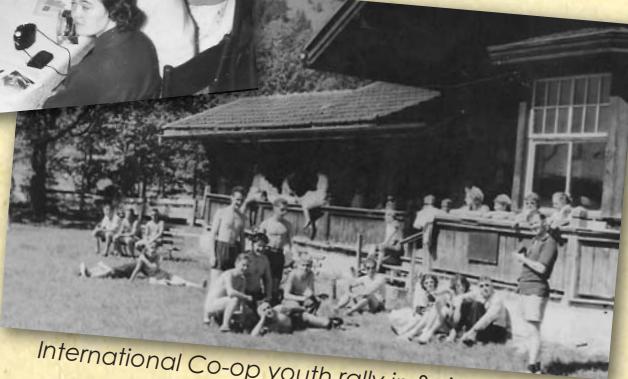
your brain, whatever you were encouraged to do, you had to "co-operate" - that word was there constantly in your mind.

I think it affects your personality, where you try and always think logically and work with anybody together.

Eileen Mackinnon

movement, and do quizzes, projects, and things like that. I went to Co-op College with the youth club, went into public

speaking contests. And I was with them until I was 20. And in-between that time, I became a Pathfinder leader, and came down here to the Whickham View Co-op and started a new Pathfinder group with my



International Co-op youth rally in Switzerland. 1955

Alma Wheeler has happy memories of family and community life in Scotswood where she has lived for more than seventy years.

Most people had a religious background when I was a kid. We were all involved in church. All the kids went to Sunday Schools. And some of us only went to Sunday School because we thought we wouldn't get on a Sunday School trip if we didn't go, because you had to have so many stars on your card. If you didn't get enough stars, you weren't allowed to go. The Sunday School was in fact a terrific

place to go because all the kids were in the Cubs, the Scouts, the Boys Brigade, Brownies, the Girl Guides, and they were all run by local community people getting involved with kids and making sure they were kept off the streets. And it was great fun.

Because women weren't out, they didn't go out to the pub and leave the kids. In fact women didn't walk into pubs. I still have this thing about walking into a pub on my own. And that's a throw-back from my mam saying "You can't go into a pub, women don't do that sort of thing". And they didn't. Women sat in the house and men went into the pub.

We had loads of parks as well round here, you know. We had Hodgkin Park, we had Denton Dene which we used to go on a Sunday afternoon and watch the men pitch-and-tossing – and that's illegal, it was gambling. But we used to go and warn them if the police were coming. And Hodgkin Park had bandstands. And on a sunny weekends, out would come the bands – pretty amateurish bands, but they used to entertain us. And there were tennis courts, bowling greens, all sorts of things that went on. All sorts of things you could really enjoy when you were kids. Places were full of pansies and flowers and there was a parky. And kids used to play in the streets with their mams sitting on the doorsteps with their neighbours on the cracket. Because we all had lovely crackets that the men made for their wives to sit outside, with a hole in the middle so you could pick it up and take it outside. And my mam used to sit outside and do her knitting and chat to the women.

The fortunate thing about being born in those years was that we were taught from a very early age how to bake



and sew and knit. And making proggy mats. We used to do one every year so that we had one for Christmas, so that me mam would have a nice new mat for Christmas. And they were the size of this table. They were huge. And they were on this wood frame thing. And out would come the proggy mat at night, and this was part of our entertainment. We used to cut up all our old clothes. And this was recycling carried to its extreme, because we used to go round the neighbours and say "You haven't got an old coat, have you?" or "You haven't got a frock or a skirt or something or trousers, that we could cut up and make into bags of clippings?". And you either made a proggy one, which was long, or clippy ones which was short. But these used to come out at nights, and of course we all used to sit round, us kids. The hessian was old sacks. It was literally sacks of coal that we washed, sewed together. Me

mother used to make a lovely pattern on it – very decorative. And then on would go the clippies in the appropriate colours. And we all used to sit there. And if we made a mess of it, you had to pull it out. So you became very professional.

And we used to sit there, and during this time we put the radio on. And there was "Dick Barton, Special Agent", quarter to seven every night, we'd be sitting there proggery away. And then there would be the storyteller who used to come on and go "I am your storyteller – the man in black". He used to tell you bloody awful ghost stories and things. Scared the pants off you. Then of course there was Wilfred Pickles. And there was the ITMA Show with Tommy Handley. There was Peter Brook and Archie Andrews. Now how you ever got away with Peter Brook and Archie Andrews, because he was a puppet. He was a puppet on the radio. You can't imagine, can you? I don't suppose he even mimed with his mouth shut, because he was on the radio. But we fell for it anyway, and that was good. So these were great nights.

We had a wireless with an accumulator. They were just like a square thing with acid or whatever it was – I don't know how it worked – but you used to carry it down to the local shop, they used to have chargers, they used to charge your accumulator, and bring it back, and it would last a whole week of listening. You didn't have choices, like 27 stations or anything like that. You had one station, and you listened. And the news came on and we were all glued for news because we had no other means of getting any. There was no telephones. We used to stop and stand

for the Queen - you won't believe we did that in the house. You did it in public places like the end of the pictures. We used to think "Can we get out of here before the end of the picture?" but no you couldn't' because the minute it went "God Save.." you stood still and everybody stood like statues with nobody moving. But in our house at 10 o'clock or something the radio went off and the last thing that happened on the radio was God Save the Queen, so we all used to stand up.

And if this didn't happen, all your relatives - your 38 aunts and uncles, who were always pounding at the door - "Make us a cup of tea", and would sit there. And all these old aunties had the most fantastic stories to tell about their childhood and what they got up to - and their ghost stories, because apparently there was a house in Denton Burn where a bride jumped out of the top floor on her wedding night (perhaps didn't fancy the idea!) but she jumped out of the window and she haunted the fields round Denton Burn for years. We were all fascinated with all these stories. And then of course after they'd all drank their tea, on would go the cups. And they'd read all your tea-leaves. And they were good at this. I don't know how they did it. Aunties and uncles, they were fantastic. Tell you all sorts of things that you needed to know. And of course men were away at war, so these women who were all having their tea leaves read were dying for news, and of course you didn't get any. You had no televisions telling you every hour of every day that your guys were getting shot, the guys were getting injured. There was none of that. You just sat there and got the tea leaves, and they said "Oh, he's having a great time out there". So everybody felt happy.

We also played cards and dominos and tiddly winks and snakes and ladders. And there was a game called Hangman, which now is the equivalent to Scrabble which was great fun. And if you were really lucky and you had talented family, that was terrific. There was pianos in the area, there was accordions, people had banjos and penny whistles and mouth organs. Even if you did a comb on a paper. We used to all sing. My father thought he was Al Jolson. He used to get up and do a turn every night when he'd had a couple of pints.

Alma Wheeler

Maureen McDade enjoyed dancing when she was a teenager in the 1950s.

I went dancing at all of the dance halls in Newcastle. There was the Oxford, the Brighton, and the Heaton occasionally, but the main one was the Milvain because it was local. I also went to the cinema a lot.

The only shampoo I can remember when I was young was Vaseline shampoo. It was in a little packet, and it was dry shampoo and you mixed it in a cup with hot water. That's what I remember when I was in my teens. We used to use sugar and water to set our hair, and we used to pincurl it. You used to damp the ends with sugar and water and curl the ends and put a pin in. It looked lovely.

And if you were going anywhere very, very special, you used Amami wave setting lotion to set your hair. Once a week you washed your hair. You didn't do it any more than once a week. Friday night was "wash your hair" night.

Maureen McDade



I wouldn't go out with a turban on. I was posh! I wore my curlers overnight in bed. It killed you. You know what curlers were like? The ones I first got were dinky curlers. They made your hair curly at the roots and spiky at the ends, and it stood up all over the place. You put your hair into the two pieces and clipped it together with your fingers, then you rolled it up, and then you brought this bar across and slid a piece down, so that it wouldn't come adrift. And if it got damp, it dropped, and that wasn't the thing to do.

Sylvia Wood



During and immediately after the Second World War, cinema-going was at its most popular ever in Britain. By 1939 Newcastle had 47 cinemas. As well as the big city centre cinemas seating over 2,000 people at a time such as the Haymarket and the Odeon, there were several in the west end, including the Majestic and the Grand on Condercum Road, the Rex in Benwell Village, the Plaza on the West Road, the Embassy at Denton Burn, and the Rialto on Armstrong Road. Joan Coulson worked in several city centre cinemas during the postwar period.

When I left Elswick Road School I went to work in a sweet factory in Diana Street. That was my first job. Chocolate éclairs were my favourites. Then I worked for the railway making the tarpaulin sheets to go over the wagons. And from there I was an usherette for the pictures. Then, there was the Odeon, then there was the Olympia in Northumberland Road, the Grainger in Grainger Street, there was the Haymarket, then there was the Stoll, the Pavilion, the Westgate at the corner of Westgate Road, then there was the Palace where they used to have variety acts, and the Empire where they had all the big stars of the time. I worked at the Haymarket first, and then I went in the Stoll. And I was at the Pavilion at one time, and the Odeon. My job was showing people to their seats. It was really good at that time because the cinemas were all full. Where the Haymarket was, there was a back lane, and sometimes the queue was all the way up the back lane. You had to look for seats with the torch. Now you go in and they're empty sometimes. But it was a really good atmosphere then in the pictures. You could go out if you didn't like it and go into another picture hall – it was that cheap. You never saw the daylight.

Some of the local cinemas lacked the glamour of the big city centre cinemas.

We had a cinema on Scotswood Road, and we called it the Gaff because it was a pit. You went there and it was the lousy opera because you always caught a flea. It was absolutely terrible. In fact sometimes during the performance they used to go around with these puffer things and you were choking – but that was how they kept the fleas down.

Alma Wheeler



Joan and friend Lillian 1960s

You went in about 10 o'clock in the morning and you were there until 11 o'clock at night. We used to have trade shows and things like that and premieres where you got guests coming in – maybe a football team or a couple of actors who were playing at the Theatre Royal who would come in and watch the previews. Before the films started, I would watch them at the preview, and mostly you got to see the last picture right though at the end before you went home. My favourite was "King's Rhapsody" with Errol Flynn and Anna Neagle. We seen the preview. We used to see the preview in the morning and the manager would say "What do you think of it? Do you think we should run it for two weeks or should we run it for three weeks?". "Dam Busters" went on for about seven weeks. We had the premiere there. We had all the big brass knobs from the Air Force all the way up, and Douglas Bader. This was the Haymarket – the premiere of the film. That was the first time I tasted champagne. Richard Todd was there, and Michael Redgrave. Just as they were coming in, they shook our hands as we were at the top of the stairs waiting to show them to their seats.

Dickie Valentine had come and he was really big-headed. I seen him a few times in the band and I knew he was big-headed. And he was coming to watch one of the films. And I got all the lasses and I said "Dickie Valentine's coming. Take no notice of him, just ignore him when he comes in." And he come in and he was looking around and nobody's taking any notice of him. So he went in and sat at the front, and when the lights come on he stood up and they still took no notice of him. He went storming out, and I said "That'll teach him, the big-headed lump."

Joan Coulson

Women's LIVES

In the West End of Newcastle

This book describes, through the memories and photographs of local older women, what it was like to live in the west end through the first two-thirds of the 20th century. The stories are told in the women's own words as part of a project carried out by the Riverside Women's Group aimed at finding out how the lives of women in the west end have changed over the past century.



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