

'YOU CAN'T MAKE OWT FROM NOWT':
OFFICIAL RESPONSES TO THE IMPACT OF UNEMPLOYMENT
UPON THE COMMUNITY IN THE LANCASHIRE WEAVING AREA
IN THE EARLY 1930s

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Abbreviations

IMR	Infant Mortality Rate
JIC	Juvenile Instruction Centre
MMR	Maternal Mortality Rate
MOH	Medical Officer of Health
PAC	Public Assistance Committee
SMO	School Medical Officer

Abstract.

This thesis argues that the official responses at the national level to the impact high unemployment had upon the community in the North East Lancashire weaving area in the early 1930s were barely adequate. The Lancashire cotton industry had been in depression since the early 1920s, long before the Great Depression affected the rest of the world, and the high unemployment and the low wages paid in the cotton industry had a disastrous effect on an area almost totally dependent upon that industry. Financial conservatism during the Great Depression meant low benefits, and these low benefits resulted in widespread poverty.

I argue that in contrast to the national government's response, local authorities in North East Lancashire set a reasonably high standard of care in their area. They cared for those in need: children, the elderly and the sick and made medical care and education available for children with disabilities. They provided maternal and child welfare clinics, a school medical service and a school meals service. They were also vigorous in housing inspections according to Housing Acts and Public Health Acts.

Based on a closely detailed study of local authority records and National Government Education and Health records, this thesis demonstrates that poverty was widespread; the national government was dilatory in recognising regional variations of long-term structural unemployment which in the Lancashire weaving area was slow to diminish, and that local authorities' responses, while ample, could not address the problem of poverty in the area adequately without further funding from central government.

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

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In a study such as this, many hours are spent in libraries and I would like to thank the staff of the Barr Smith Library, particularly Margaret Hosking, who has a phenomenal memory for students' research interests.

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My greatest thanks must go to the communities in the North East Lancashire towns for the generous gifts of their time and memories when they were interviewed. This thesis is for them.

SETTING THE SCENE

North East Lancashire has been noted for textile weaving from Elizabethan times; originally woollen cloth was woven, then linen, then fustian, a thick hard-wearing twilled cloth with a short nap. Poor farming land in the North East Lancashire area meant farmers needed to supplement their income, and from as early as the thirteenth century they had woven to earn a second income. Because the North East Lancashire towns were not controlled by guilds, as many towns were, anyone could establish a trade, and towns like Blackburn, Burnley, Darwen, Accrington, Nelson and Colne began to specialise in textiles, particularly weaving.¹ Textile manufacturing expanded rapidly from the mid-eighteenth century. The domestic production of textiles was replaced by factory production and the area grew swiftly, as *The Times* noted in 1862:

For years cotton merchants flourished so exceedingly in Blackburn, and such fabulous fortunes were amassed in a short time, there was a rush to get into it....The trade in a very short time not only absorbed the whole town but spread out into the country districts around, and the banks of the Blakewater are covered with great mills right up the valley to Accrington.²

From the middle of the eighteenth century until the early part of the twentieth century the Lancashire cotton industry was influential. Alan Fowler wrote, in 2003 that:

The Lancashire cotton industry began to rise to prominence in the mid-eighteenth century and continued to be influential until the middle of the twentieth century. In terms of world history this is a brief period and yet the changes in the Lancashire economy in the second half of the eighteenth century were to change the world economy.³

The Lancashire cotton industry had been central to the industrial revolution in Britain, and the process of industrialization extended to the rest of the world. By the end of the nineteenth century Blackburn had become the greatest weaving centre in the world.

Derek Beattie wrote 'Even in a county of cotton towns, Blackburn was singularly a

¹ Derek Beattie, *Blackburn: The Development of a Cotton Town*, (Halifax, 1992), p.13.

² *The Times* September 1862, Quoted in Beattie, *Blackburn*, p.15.

³ Alan Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton Operatives* p.1

cotton town'.⁴ There were other industries, but most supported the cotton industry and when the industry struggled, so did the supporting industries. The cotton industry reached its peak in 1914 when foreign competition began to affect its exports and thereupon, wrote Beattie, 'The collapse of the cotton industry was spectacular'. In the interwar years the industry felt that competition deeply. Many mills closed never to reopen, while others stumbled on for a few more decades until the industry was no more.

NOTE:

This figure is included on page xiii of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Figure 1. Materials woven in Lancashire before cotton.

Source: *The Lancashire Cotton Industry*, ed. Mary B Rose, (Preston, 1996), map 1.

⁴ Beattie, *Cotton Town*, p.19.

A Brief Political and Economic Overview of Britain 1918-1939.

Between the end of the First World War and the beginning of the Second World War there were seven different governments in Britain, one Liberal coalition government, two minority Labour governments, one National Labour government, two Conservative governments and two Conservative National governments.

The election on 14 December 1918, following the war was won by a coalition of Liberal, Conservative and Labour politicians led by David Lloyd George, with a majority of 238 seats. It was a government which faced economic and social problems mainly caused by the war. 745,000 Britons had been killed in the war (9% of all men under 45) with an additional 150,000 dying in the influenza epidemic of 1918-1919. A further 1.6 million had been wounded, some so severely they would be unable to work again. This meant that 3.5 million Britons, including widows and orphans received a pension or an allowance.⁵ The impact of the war on British finance was significant. Britain had lost many markets during the war, and had accrued debt, particularly to the United States. Other countries owed Britain more than Britain owed the US, in particular Russia, but the change of regime in Moscow meant that the Russian Government did not pay what they saw as the Tsar's debts.⁶ The war had created an over-investment in the staple industries, in iron, steel and coal for armaments manufacture, in shipbuilding and in textiles for uniforms. When the war ended demand was reduced and after a short trade boom, there was rising inflation. Interest rates were raised and the boom turned into recession. The recession in the cotton industry in the Lancashire weaving area was to last until the Second World War. By June 1921, unemployment had risen to over two million and Ministers were ordered to cut their budgets. Although deemed to have been a failure, the coalition government of Lloyd George introduced the *Unemployment Insurance Act*, which extended the existing scheme to cover almost all workers earning

⁵ Robert Pearce, *Britain: Domestic Policies 1918-1939* (London, 2005), p.21.

⁶ Rex Pope, *The British Economy Since 1914, A Study in Decline?* (London, 1998), p.21.

less than £250 a year.⁷ Lloyd George resigned in October 1922 and an election was called for 15 November 1922.

The election of 1922 was won by the Conservative party led by Bonar Law with a majority of 74 seats. In May 1923 he resigned because of ill-health and Stanley Baldwin became Prime Minister and called an election to be held on 6 December 1923. The Conservatives won 258 seats, Labour won 191 seats and the Liberals won 159 seats. Although the Conservatives held the most seats, they did not have a majority and Baldwin declined to form a government. The King called for the leader of the second largest party to form an administration. Thus, Labour led by James Ramsay MacDonald, formed a minority government with 98 less seats than the Conservatives and Liberals combined. It was the first Labour government in Great Britain and was to last for nine months until another election was held on 29 October 1924.

The 1924 election was won by the Conservative party led again by Stanley Baldwin, who made Winston Churchill Chancellor of the Exchequer. In the 1925 budget, Churchill returned sterling to the Gold Standard after advice from the Treasury. From 1816 until the outbreak of the First World War the gold standard was the means by which leading countries had regulated international finance. The value of the pound, under the gold standard was fixed against other currencies on the basis of its value in gold.⁸ One main drawback for the return to the gold standard was overvaluing of the currency which meant that British goods would be over-priced and uncompetitive abroad, hampering economic growth, and, as a consequence, employment. The main reforms of this government were contributory old age pensions, widows' pensions, unemployment insurance reform and the Local Government Act, 1929, which was to give local authorities far more control than they had hitherto, with power over public health, housing and maternity and child welfare. However, because they received more

⁷ Pearce, *Domestic Policies*, p. 22.

⁸ Juliet Gardiner, Neil Wenborn, eds., *The History Today Companion to British History* (London, 1995), p. 346.

revenue from Westminster than ratepayers, they became, in effect, agencies of the national government.

The General Election in May 1929 was won by the Labour party led by Ramsay MacDonald, but it would be a minority government. Labour won 288 seats, the Conservatives 260 and the Liberals 59. In many ways it was not a good election to win because the Wall Street Crash, in October 1929, was to introduce the most severe phase of the Depression. Exports declined and unemployment rose making the cost of unemployment benefit rise from £12 million in 1928 to £125 million in 1931.⁹ The Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer was Philip Snowden, Blackburn's MP from 1906-1918, and MP for Colne from 1924-1931. He was a rigid, orthodox financial thinker who insisted that balancing the budget was most important, and that retrenchment was vital, which meant cuts in social services, including unemployment benefits, which was unacceptable to many in the Labour Cabinet. The Labour Government resigned on 24 August 1931, after a failure to agree on cuts. A National Government was formed in August 1931 which would be led by Ramsay MacDonald, Britain abandoned the gold standard and the government undertook an emergency package of cuts and introduced a Means Test for benefits.

In the General Election of 1931, a National Coalition government was elected by a landslide. Expenditure was cut by ten per cent, and the pound was devalued making exports cheaper. Interest rates were lowered and Britain slowly emerged from the Depression. Unemployment fell except in the areas of the staple industries, some of which were declared Special Areas, which achieved little. In November 1935, Stanley Baldwin replaced Ramsay MacDonald as Prime Minister. Baldwin led a Conservative National Government to victory in the 1935 election. This was followed by a Churchill-led coalition government (1940-5) which was in power until the end of the Second World War.

⁹ Pearce, *Domestic Politics*, p. 52.

Brief overview of social legislation examined in this thesis.

There are various pieces of legislation I will study in this thesis, bills which shaped the official responses to the unemployment crisis in the 1930s. They are: Unemployment Insurance Acts between 1911 and 1934; Housing Acts between 1919 and 1935; the Local Government Act, 1929 and The Poor Law Act, 1930.

The National Insurance Act, 1911, provided for a National Insurance scheme with provision for time-limited unemployment and medical benefits. It was funded by the worker, the employer and the government. The Act was not intended to maintain an unemployed worker and his family over a long period but to provide short-term help while finding work. Longer unemployment meant the worker was required to apply to the Poor Law for assistance. Subsequent Acts in 1920, 1921, 1926, 1929 and 1931 extended entitlement. The rise in the unemployment rate after the First World War meant that too many workers who were unemployed had to resort to the Poor Law and the time for eligibility was extended. By 1931, the Unemployment Fund became insolvent needing Treasury assistance to meet its commitments, turning the scheme into a system of public relief. The Unemployment Insurance Act in 1934 required those who were receiving 'transitional payments' to be subject to a household means test.¹⁰

Housing Acts between 1919 and 1935 were enacted to reduce the housing shortage by granting subsidies and encouraging local authorities to build more public housing and providing them with the capacity to demolish or improve unsanitary houses. Later Acts gave local authorities the power to declare clearance areas and compulsorily purchase property in order to demolish it.

The Local Government Act, 1929, and the Poor Law Act, 1930, changed the way the poor, the old and the sick were cared for in Britain. The Local Government Act changed the structure of Poor Law institutions in England and Wales by abolishing the

¹⁰ GDH and MI Cole, *The Condition of Britain* (London, 1937), pp.191-205.

Poor Law Unions and their Boards of Guardians and passing their powers to County Councils, County Borough Councils or Municipal Borough Councils, which were also given responsibility for Public Assistance. The Poor Law Act transferred Poor Law hospitals to local authorities making obtaining medical treatment easier, while Workhouses became Public Assistance Institutions.

The National Economy Act, 1931, enacted because of the economic crisis stipulated that those who had used up their entitlements from Unemployment Insurance would instead receive 'Transitional Payments' through a local Public Assistance Committee (PAC) after being subjected to a household means test. Because the cotton textile area of North East Lancashire had been in depression since the First World War, cotton workers used up their entitlements quickly making them dependent upon the local PAC and how they administered the regulations. We will see that Blackburn's PAC was considered to be more generous than Burnley's PAC. These two PACs and the Lancashire PAC No.7 were responsible for the Lancashire weaving area.

NOTE:

This figure is included on page xix of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Figure2. The North East Lancashire Weaving Area.

(© *Lancashire Cotton Operatives and Work 1900-1950*, Fowler, Alan, 2003, Ashgate Publishing)

INTRODUCTION

The media, newspapers and newsreels, and to a large extent, novels and films constructed certain images of the unemployed in the 1930s, which are retained in folk memory today. These images convey a certain reality, and the common image of Britain in the early 1930s is one of depression and dole queues, strikes and mass unemployment, poverty and despair, while the common representation of the Lancashire weaving area, indeed all of Lancashire is one of unrelieved dirt and grime. Neither image is a true illustration of the area we will examine.

This thesis argues that the official responses at national level to the impact high unemployment had upon the community in the North East Lancashire weaving area in the early 1930s were barely adequate, while in contrast, local authorities in the area set a reasonably high standard of care for those in the community. They made provision for those in need, children, the elderly and the sick and the unemployed and their families at a time when the unemployment rate was overwhelming and income from rates had diminished through mills closing down.

This is an original piece of research bringing together primary materials hitherto neglected by historians, and it contributes to our understanding of the development and expansion of welfare mechanisms in Great Britain in the interwar years, and more importantly, it writes poverty back into the Depression. It does so by focusing on the history of the textile towns of the weaving area of Lancashire, an area that is of fundamental importance to our understanding of the central experience of unemployment, poverty and poverty's attendant problems in the interwar period. It also presents a region which was not only as badly affected as any other but one which was unique in its experience of unemployment among women. By using memories and documentary evidence, this thesis gives an illustration of how the poor, the elderly, the

low-paid, the sick and the unemployed survived during the interwar years in an area which was not generally healthy, not necessarily clean and which was polluted to a large extent by at least 150 years of industrialization.

The North-East Lancashire cotton textile area was a district mainly dependent upon one industry, one which had high structural unemployment. It was the main industry particularly in Blackburn, the largest County Borough in the region. In an area like North East Lancashire, dependent upon an industry which had been in decline since the First World War, unemployment was extensive. Unlike the 'Special' or 'Distressed Areas' of South Wales, Cumberland, Durham or Tyneside, which were provided with limited financial assistance from the *Special Areas Act*, Lancashire, and especially North East Lancashire, with unemployment in some areas averaging 50 per cent for some periods, received no assistance.¹ Lancashire had been one of the areas considered by the Board of Trade in 1931 for inclusion in the 'Special Areas'. However, the County was excluded because the unemployment rate in Lancashire as a whole had fallen by one third between 1931 and 1934, from 32.3 per cent to 21 per cent; it had a wider employment base than those of special areas, and had attracted newer industries. In fact, the weaving district had higher unemployment rates, 40.1 per cent as opposed to the areas chosen as special areas, South Wales, 39 per cent; West Cumberland, 36.8 per cent; Durham, 34.4 per cent; and Tyneside, 33.6 per cent.² While it was accepted that the North East Lancashire weaving area still had high unemployment, it was argued, in the House of Commons in 1934, that to assist small areas which had not shared in the general recovery, which a large part of the country had enjoyed from 1933 onward, would fritter away the activities and resources of the Special Areas Commissioner.³

¹ Rex Pope, *Unemployment and the Lancashire Weaving Area* (Preston, 2000), pp. 21-31.

² Derek Beattie, *Blackburn. The Development of a Lancashire Cotton Town* (Halifax, 1992), p.146.

³ Pope, *Unemployment*, p.21

Any credible investigation into poverty must take into account what the unemployed, the low paid and their dependents thought about the poverty in which they lived. The poverty existed in everyday life, and it is in everyday life, in anecdotes and in interviews that we can search for answers to what impoverishment was like for those who had very little. The practice of using traditional avenues of investigation such as politicians' papers, memoirs and official documents to examine the effects of unemployment on family structures can again be useful but will not give us the complete picture. National records alone are unsound because of the particular political, economic and cultural ideology of the period, and I have, therefore, used local government records in addition to national records. This thesis draws upon the County Borough of Blackburn MOH Reports, the County Borough of Blackburn Education Committee Reports, and the County Borough of Blackburn Public Assistance Committee (PAC) records for the years 1929-1936, the same records for the County Borough of Burnley for the same years, and the MOH Reports for the Municipal Borough of Darwen for the years 1930-1936. In addition, numerous records from smaller Borough councils were accessed, including Accrington Education Committee Minutes for 1931-1935; some Maternal and Child Welfare records for Haslingden, from 1930-1934; MOH Records for Great Harwood for the years 1930-1935; records for Colne including MOH reports concerning Maternity and Child Welfare Centres for the years 1930-1935, Education Committee reports from 1932-1935 and MOH Reports for the years 1930-1935; records from Nelson which include the MOH report for 1933, the Education Committee minutes for 1931-1933, and records for free meals from 1931-1934; and records concerning the Lancashire PAC for all the areas which will be dealt with in this thesis from 1930-1935. The national records this thesis draws upon are the Ministry of Health Annual Reports for the years 1929-1936, the Ministry of Education Annual Reports for the years 1929-1936, the Ministry of Labour Gazette for the years 1930-1936 and all the relevant Acts of Parliament mentioned in the thesis. I have

compiled all the tables used in this thesis from the above sources unless otherwise noted.

I have transcripts of interviews with several elderly people (some now deceased) who were young and unemployed in the early 1930s, and were interviewed on my behalf in 2000 and 2005. I also sent a letter to a local newspaper which gave me two respondents, one quite useful, and I have used recordings of people's memories of the 1930s from the North West Sound Archives, founded in 1979 to preserve sound recordings relevant to the life, character, history and traditions of the north west of England and containing 110,000 sound recordings. The twenty-three recordings I used are primarily from people who were young in the 1930s, and are reminiscences of school, work, unemployment and life in North East Lancashire in the interwar years.

The interpretation of the social history of Britain between the wars has been an ever changing one with distinct shifts of emphasis. Accounts of the 1930s from the time, are, depending on the political viewpoint of the author, either filled with optimism, or contain savage indictments of the government. One decade later, the 1930s were described as the 'hungry thirties' or the 'devil's decade'. In the 1950s and 1960s when welfare politics were fashionable and employment was high, the unemployment of the 1930s was the most overriding theme and was seen as appalling and almost unbelievable. In the 1970s and 1980s, when consumerism and materialistic theories abounded in Britain, the 1930s were viewed as the beginning of the contemporary economy, when full employment appeared impossible to achieve. The most dominant fact of all, however, is that in Britain, the 1930s and the Depression had had, until the 1990s, immense political significance. The number of paradoxes concerning Britain's experience of the years of depression means that many interpretations can be put forward, and all of them could be creditable. Which one became accepted depended on the political and intellectual climate of the time.

The literature of the 1930s itself concerning the effects of unemployment can be divided between government reports which were optimistic because they did not want to admit to health problems caused by poverty, and writers who tried their utmost to show just how erroneous the government was in that optimism. These writers were dismissed as communists or social agitators by a government more afraid of Bolshevism and social revolution, than the poor health of the unemployed. In 1932, Fenner Brockway, a pacifist politician and a member of the Independent Labour Party, published a book, *Hungry England*, which found 'Actual hunger in the sense of nourishment less than enough to maintain bodily health, [existing] widely in Britain'.⁴ In 1933, a report commissioned by the Save the Children Fund, found many children with impaired health caused by conditions in which they lived, and took the government to task for unsafe statistics concerning children's health used by Sir George Newman, Chief Medical Officer for the Board of Education.⁵ From the Department of Economics at the University of Manchester, John Jewkes and Allan Winterbottom wrote a book in 1933 on juvenile unemployment, which has become a guide or handbook for those who write about juvenile unemployment. They noted that, 'Any nation which employs vast numbers of relatively untrained and immature children in competitive industry is heading for a low general standard of living'.⁶ In the textile industry the employment of untrained juveniles was common because young people were cheaper to employ than adults. Allen Hutt, in 1933 wrote, *The Condition of the Working Class in Britain*, patterned along the lines of Friedrich Engels *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*. Hutt demonstrated that there was an improvement in living standards since 1844, however, he also established that a large percentage of Britain's population were hungry, ill-clothed and badly housed.⁷ Brockway and Hutt's work proved to be the forerunners to many effective and widely circulated publications

⁴ Fenner Brockway, *Hungry England* (London, 1932), p.222.

⁵ Save the Children Fund, *Unemployment and the Child* (London, 1933), p.124.

⁶ John Jewkes & Allan Winterbottom, *Juvenile Unemployment* (London, 1933), p.13.

⁷ Allen Hutt, *The Condition of the Working Class in Britain* (London, 1933), p.xii.

dealing with same theme, and attempting to arouse the social conscience in the 1930s. JB Priestley in 1934 wrote of three Englands, and one, which he called nineteenth-century England, 'the industrial England [consisting of] thousands of little houses all alike',⁸ is the one we shall deal with here: Any balanced investigation of unemployment and its effects must take into account what the unemployed thought about what was happening to them, and in a series of interviews, the BBC did just that. These interviews were then edited into a volume by Felix Greene and published in 1935.⁹ The interviewees gave matter-of-fact, and at times harrowing, accounts of the effects of unemployment, which, because of the government's attitude to criticism, were checked and double checked for accuracy and found to be veracious.

A second group of works written in the 1930s can be categorised as reports. Two of them, *Poverty and Public Health*, by GCM M'Gonigle and J Kirby, and *Food, Health and Income*, by Sir John Boyd Orr, both published in 1936, bothered the government. M'Gonigle's because he was a Medical Officer of Health, and Boyd Orr's because he was a nutrition expert.¹⁰ M'Gonigle was threatened with removal from the medical register unless he toned down his findings and Boyd Orr was pressured to suppress his report. It is ironic that Boyd Orr's *Food, Health and Income* became the basis for the later British policy on food during World War Two, which Boyd Orr helped to formulate. GDH Cole and MI Cole, with their investigation into the condition of the population of Britain, were also to annoy the government.¹¹ One report which the government found difficult to ignore, or dismiss, was the report to the Pilgrim Trust, *Men Without Work*, which, despite its title, dealt also with unemployed women and the effect of unemployment on families.¹² *Working Class Wives*, (1939) by Margery Spring

⁸ JB Priestley, *English Journey* (London, 1933) p.4.

⁹ Felix Greene, ed., *Time to Spare* (London, 1935).

¹⁰ GCM M'Gonigle & J Kirby, *Poverty and Public Health* (London, 1936). Sir John Boyd Orr, *Food, Health and Income* (London, 1935).

¹¹ GDH & MI Cole, *The Condition of Britain* (London, 1937).

¹² Report to the Pilgrim Trust, *Men Without Work* (Cambridge, 1938). The Pilgrim Trust was and still is a charity founded in 1930 by New York philanthropist Edward Stephen Harkness.

Rice, was another report, this time to the Women's Health Enquiry Committee.¹³ Rice presented many statistics and lists of prices and expenses, which gave some idea of the difficulty of feeding a family on an income clearly not sufficient for good or even indifferent health. Last, but definitely not least of the 1930s literature, we come to Walter Hannington's three books, *Unemployed Struggles*, (1936), *The Problem of the Distressed Areas* (1937) and *Ten Lean Years* (1940).¹⁴ Hannington was a founder member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, a political activist, and a thorn in the side of the government. His organisation of the hunger marches in 1932, 1934, and 1936, gave widespread publicity to the plight of the unemployed, as did the three aforementioned books. Hannington's books argued for improved treatment for the unemployed, against the household Means Test, and against the inequities of the Unemployment Assistance Board.

In 1955, Charles Mowat, in the influential *Britain Between the Wars*, noted that any advantage Britain had in being the first country to industrialize had ended when other countries began to compete. He also believed that Britain had been in depression since the First World War and the old staple industries, which had supplied most of the country's exports, began their decline. Mowat's view was that the decline should have been 'offset by the rise of new industry.... [However] The old staple industries had been highly concentrated, and where they were, there depression and chronic unemployment settled over towns and people. The new industries went elsewhere.'¹⁵ In 1965, AJP Taylor's view of interwar Britain, *English History, 1914-1945*, was dismissive of the unemployed. He felt that the unemployed workers, particularly those who had been 'aristocrats of labour', the miner or cotton worker, had a 'decent though old fashioned, house in a reasonably well-kept town', and received the dole which kept

¹³ Margery Spring Rice, *Working Class Wives* (Harmondsworth, 1939).

¹⁴ Walter Hannington, *Unemployed Struggles* (London, 1937), *The Problem of the Distressed Areas* (London, 1937), *Ten Lean Years* (London, 1940).

¹⁵ Charles Loch Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars* (London, 1955), p. 260.

him and his family alive.¹⁶ We will see in Chapter Four descriptions of accommodation which contradicts Taylor's 'decent, though old-fashioned houses, and reasonably well-kept towns'. Arthur Marwick, on the other hand, in *Britain in the Century of Total Warfare*, (1968) saw the interwar years as a period of social change tempered by a catastrophic drift in politics where the government was forced to understand and make some effort to alleviate the conditions of the poor. He did, nonetheless, note the emergence of new political ideas in the 1930s, caused by that catastrophic drift.

Not until the 1970s did historians begin to write more broadly of the social impact of the 1930s. Derek Aldcroft, in 1970, using national figures, theorised that conditions could not have been so bad because of the extension of social services in the interwar years,¹⁷ however, improved social services could not provide adequate diets. John Stevenson and Chris Cook, in 1977, labelled the 'hungry thirties' as a myth.¹⁸ Stevenson and Cook also cited the expansion of social services as proof that malnutrition was not as prevalent as supposed, and that many writers politicised such issues as poverty, ill health or bad housing. This could have been so nationally, but close scrutiny of local authority figures for the Lancashire weaving area, or the 'distressed areas', shows that malnutrition was as prevalent as demonstrated by Brockway, Hutt and Hannington. American economic historians Daniel Benjamin and Lionel Kochin believed, in 1979, that the primary cause of high unemployment was overgenerous benefits which created a disincentive to find work.¹⁹ These authors claimed that lower benefits would result in less unemployment, an unacceptable view considering the lack of employment in the staple industries. Jay Winter concluded in his paper 'Infant Mortality, Maternal Mortality and Public Health in Britain in the 1930s', that the deprivation did not affect maternal or infant mortality adversely in the 1930s.

¹⁶ AJP Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945* (Harmondsworth, 1965), p.428

¹⁷ DH Aldcroft, *The Interwar Economy* (London, 1970).

¹⁸ John Stevenson, Chris Cook, *The Slump* (London, 1977).

¹⁹ D Benjamin; L Kochin, 'Searching for an explanation of unemployment in interwar Britain', *Journal of Political Economy*, v.87, (1979), pp.441-478.

However, he used demographic evidence for the country as a whole, while I concentrate on a small area of the country in a specific time frame.²⁰ All the above writers used national figures and government estimates, which usually gave optimistic results. I have used local figures and estimates in addition to national figures to demonstrate that drawing conclusions from national averages only gives part of a picture.

In the Lancashire Weaving area in the interwar years, housing was a problem. Many houses were sub-standard and unhealthy, and I will examine closely the local housing authorities' records and the sections of Ministry of Health Reports dealing with housing, to establish what the situation was. However, I have studied the following works to gain a broader, national knowledge to allow me to compare local with national figures. An increase in house building for the public sector has been widely cited by many commentators, however, John Burnett believed, in 1977, that the beneficiaries were the expanding middle classes. The theory was that the working class would then move into their houses and out of the slums. The unemployed could not afford higher rents, and therefore stayed in the slums.²¹ Stephen Constantine, in 1983, wrote of houses remaining unoccupied between the wars, yet there was a housing shortage and overcrowding in the slums. His explanation was the same as Burnett's: the houses were beyond the financial reach of many of the unemployed.²² In 1989, John Benson wrote that neither slum clearance, nor house building had much effect on conditions generally.²³

The standard of living of the low paid and the unemployed was insufficient to maintain good health. The following works discuss the standard of living, its connection to good health, and national government responses to the problem. Charles Webster,

²⁰ JM Winter, 'Infant Mortality, Maternal Mortality and Public Health in Britain in the 1930s', *Journal of European Economic History*, 8, (1979) pp439-462.

²¹ JA Burnett, *A Social History of Housing 1815-1970* (London, 1977).

²² Stephen Constantine, *Social Conditions in Britain 1918-1939* (London, 1983).

²³ John Benson, *The Working Class in Britain* (London, 1989).

Margaret Mitchell, Jane Lewis and Madeleine Mayhew are all of the opinion that the 1930s were a time of ill health, poor housing and hunger for a large section of the population, and that calling the 'hungry thirties' a myth was wrong.²⁴ Mitchell and Webster subscribed to the view that the use solely of contemporary official figures, was dangerous because the figures were most likely influenced by the political, economic and cultural ideology of the time and there was evidence, mentioned below, which showed that government figures could have been 'optimistic'. Stevenson and Cook argued that central government was entirely dependent upon reports of local officials, while Helen Jones argued differently, when in 1994, she quoted Charles Webster who noted:

Much of the data within local health reports gave grounds for alarm and a handful of Medical Officers of Health were censured by the Chief Medical Officer [Sir George Newman] for attempting to define the relation between economic changes and local mortality rates.²⁵

Jones wrote of regional Medical Officers of Health jeopardising their careers by telling the Ministry of Health the real situation, she also noted optimistic interpretation of local reports by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Sir George Newman, in order to avoid embarrassment to his department, and thus demonstrating that depending on government reports could have been unreliable.²⁶

Elizabeth Roberts, in 1982, showed that because wages in cotton textiles were less than the national average, women had to work of necessity. For this they received official condemnation and blame for their children's poor health.²⁷ In 1986, Roberts wrote about 'women's strategies' and how they struggled to find the means to feed

²⁴ Charles Webster, 'Healthy or Hungry Thirties?' *History Workshop Journal* 13, 1982, pp.110-130. And 'Health, Welfare and Unemployment During the Depression' *Past and Present*, 109, 1985 pp.204-300. Margaret Mitchell, 'The Effects of Unemployment on the Social Condition of Women and Children in the 1930s' *History Workshop Journal*, 19, 1985, pp.104-127, Jane Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood* (London, 1980) and *What Price Community Medicine?* (Brighton, 1986). Madeleine Mayhew, 'The 1930s Nutrition Controversy' *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.23, No.3, July,1988 pp.445-464.

²⁵ Webster, 'Healthy or Hungry Thirties', p.112

²⁶ Helen Jones, *Health and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London, 1994), p. 74.

²⁷ Elizabeth Roberts, 'Working wives and their families', in Barker, ed. *Population and Society, 1850-1980*, (London, 1982).

clothe and house their families, and what those strategies were. All of which are themes in this thesis.²⁸ The standard of health of the population has also been debated. Noel Whiteside, in 1987, wrote an article in which she argued that poverty took a worse toll on the health of wives and children than on workers themselves, and low earnings, not just unemployment was the cause of poverty in their own right.²⁹ John Welshman, in 1996, wrote of Sir George Newman, the Chief Medical Officer to the Board of Education, advocating physical education as a component of preventative medicine. Newman believed that the emphasis on posture and gymnastics could safeguard the nation against the effects of poverty and malnutrition.³⁰ Anne Hardy, in 2001, believed Newman proved to be a better politician than a reformer, more concerned with providing political support to government than with developing new approaches to health and social conditions. Hardy claimed Newman continued to play down evidence of distress in areas badly affected by long-term unemployment.³¹ This is indicative of the lack of adequate responses from a government ministry to poor health and deprived social conditions, and demonstrates the ignorance of a Government Minister to the level of poverty in the distressed areas.

Several works based on oral evidence and autobiographies give some indication of the distress Newman disregarded. Andrew Davies, in 1992, used oral evidence to write his study concerning poverty. He showed that the 1930s was not a time of overwhelming depression and unemployment, but a time of contrasting prosperity and recession in different regions. He also demonstrated that the poverty cycle impinged on the lives of all working people, and how many, through alcohol or other diversions, plunged their families into destitution.³² Jean Shansky interviewed

²⁸ Elizabeth Roberts, 'Women's Strategies, 1890-1940', in Lewis, J., ed. *Labour and Love. Women's Experience of Home and Family, 1850-1940* (London, 1986).

²⁹ Noel Whiteside, 'Counting the cost: sickness and disability among working people in an era of industrial recession', *Economic History Review*, 2nd Ser. XL, 2, (1987) pp.228-246.

³⁰ John Welshman, 'Physical Education and the School Medical Service in England and Wales 1907-1939', *Social History of Medicine*, Vol.9, No.1, April 1996, pp.31-48.

³¹ Anne Hardy, *Health and Medicine in Britain Since 1860* (London, 2001), p. 78.

³² Andrew Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty* (Buckingham, 1992).

several people from North East Lancashire; people who lived through the Depression, and how they coped with the poverty, and how they lived their everyday lives. She demonstrated how the lack of food was widespread, and how high carbohydrate foods were the ones most eaten because they were cheap and filling.³³ William Woodruff's *Road to Nab End* (2000), first published under the title *Billy Boy* in 1993 gives a first-hand account of poverty and unemployment in Blackburn in the late 1920s to the early 1930s.

Keith Laybourn, in 1990, and Matt Perry, in 2000, wrote histories of the interwar years, Perry from a British and international viewpoint, and Laybourn from a British point of view.³⁴ Both had thought that 'balancing the budget' interested governments far more than the health of the public. Laybourn argues that while there was substantial improvement in social conditions, living standards among a large proportion of the working class deteriorated. Perry was critical of the government health officials who denied there was malnutrition while at the same time blaming it on working class women who were ignorant of proper nutrition. He also subscribes to the view that official optimism exaggerated the common occurrence of health improvements, and minimised disparities between classes and regions. Laybourn is slightly more strident than Perry, and asks the question if poverty existed in prosperous areas, how much more debilitating must poverty have been in the really depressed industrial areas of the north? This thesis will demonstrate, by using local authority figures, and anecdotal recordings, just how debilitating the poverty in the north was, and what the official responses to that condition were.

Until 2003, the only large-scale study of the Lancashire weaving area had been the three studies written by Rex Pope, ' "Dole Schools": the North East Lancashire Experience' (1977), *Unemployment and the Lancashire Weaving Area* (2000), and

³³ Jean M Shansky, *Poverty in the 1930s* (Preston 1995).

³⁴ Keith Laybourn, *Britain on the Breadline* (Gloucester, 1990). Matt Perry, *Bread and Work* (London, 2000).

'Unemployed women in interwar Britain: the case of the Lancashire weaving district' 2000.³⁵ These constitute a study of the causes and consequences of unemployment in an important area of industrial Britain, and the responses of state and local authorities. Pope demonstrated how the community came to terms with unemployment, the levels of benefit, how women were affected and what training and public assistance was available. In 2001, a reader which dealt with poverty, inequality and health in Britain, was published. This contained excerpts from many books mentioned in this literature review, and presents empirical evidence of the relationship between poverty and health.³⁶ Alan Fowler, in 2003, wrote a social history of cotton workers, and holds the view, as do many of the above authors, that the industry was in depression for more than twenty years and the cause was loss of markets. The interwar years witnessed a dramatic transformation in the fortunes of the Lancashire cotton industry, and as a consequence, the fortunes of the workers. He suggests that the 'cotton masters', instead of reorganising, engaged in a period of price cutting, and the lowest common denominator was cutting wages.³⁷ According to Marguerite Dupree, in 1996, this caused cotton unions to look for political rather than industrial solutions to the industry's decline.³⁸ Considering that the decline was, for the most part, due to foreign competition, there were no solutions, political or industrial. The above works document the rise, but more importantly the spectacular fall of the textile industry in the Lancashire weaving area, and record the resulting misery caused by high unemployment, and government responses, both nationally and locally to that high unemployment. My work contributes to this by providing evidence of the distress,

³⁵ Rex Pope, 'Dole Schools: the North East Lancashire experience, 1930-1939', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 9, (2), 1977, pp.26-33. *Unemployment and the Lancashire Weaving Area* (Preston, 2000). 'Unemployed women in interwar Britain: the case of the Lancashire weaving district', *Women's History Review*, December 2000.

³⁶ George Davy Smith, Daniel Dorling, Mary Shaw, eds., *Poverty, inequality and health in Britain 1800-2000: A reader* (Bristol, 2001)

³⁷ Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton Operatives*.

³⁸ Marguerite Dupree, 'Foreign competition and the interwar period', in *The Lancashire Cotton Industry*, pp.265-295

hardship and anxiety in the lives of many in the interwar years in the Lancashire weaving area.

Later research connected conditions in the 1930s with adult disease. In 1934, WO Kermack, AG McKendrick and PL McKinley published a paper which made certain connections between childhood health and adult disease.³⁹ In 1974, Sir Dugald Baird, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at Aberdeen University, published a paper which associated high perinatal mortality rates with the quality of the mother's diet during pregnancy,⁴⁰ and in the North East Lancashire textile area, during the 1920s and 1930s many pregnant women had diets which were of very low quality. In 1980, Baird again published a paper in which he argued that due to economic circumstances, many women in Britain suffered 'reproductive inefficiency' (or difficulty conceiving or achieving a full-term pregnancy) due to environmental conditions in early childhood, or even *in utero*, and the problem was intergenerational.⁴¹ Jay Winter, in 1983, noted Baird's studies and wrote, 'Here is evidence of the human costs of the depression.'⁴² In 1984, David Barker and Clive Osmond published a paper which demonstrated that 'ischaemic heart disease, chronic bronchitis, and stroke are all more common in areas which used to have the highest infant mortality,' a paper which was to be the start of a highly influential research programme.⁴³ In 1992, Barker and Osmond published a paper which examined conditions in three North East Lancashire towns, Burnley, Colne and Nelson. All three towns had greatly differing adult mortality rates in the late 1980s, yet the three towns have very similar socioeconomic conditions. In these towns adult mortality mirrors the infant mortality rates of late 1920s, suggesting that past

³⁹ WO Kermack, AG McKendrick & PL McKinley, 'Death rates in Great Britain and Sweden: some general regularities and their significance', *Lancet*, 1934, i: pp.698-703.

⁴⁰ Sir Dugald Baird, 'The Epidemiology of Low Birth Weight: Changes in Incidence in Aberdeen, 1948-72', *Journal of Biosocial Science*, Vol. 6, No. 4, July, 1974, pp.323-341

⁴¹ Sir Dugald Baird, 'Environment and Reproduction', *British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* Vol.87, No.12, December 1980, pp.1057-1967.

⁴² Jay Winter, 'Unemployment, Nutrition and Infant Mortality in Britain, 1920-50'. In Jay Winter, ed., *The Working Class in Modern British History* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 232-256.

⁴³ David Barker, Clive Osmond, 'Infant mortality, childhood nutrition, and ischaemic heart disease in England and Wales', *Lancet*, 1986, i: 1077-81, p. 1077.

differences in maternal health and the environment in early childhood, particularly in diet and housing may be determinants in later differences in adult mortality.⁴⁴ These studies demonstrate that childhood conditions can affect the community decades later. The effects of unemployment and the lack of basic necessities were to be felt in North East Lancashire in the decades following the 1930s

The literature here reviewed deals with responses to unemployment and poverty and its effects upon the community, common threads which affected the community not only in the 1930s, but in later years when the consequences of the 1930s were still felt in North East Lancashire. Some works use national demographics and records, and the figures are too general for my purpose, but useful for comparison. However, because I will examine a limited area in a narrow time frame I have been able to use detailed local records to address the political and social questions concerning the effects of unemployment upon the North East Lancashire community and the responses to those effects.

In Chapters One and Two I will examine official responses to adult and juvenile unemployment. Unemployment was high in North East Lancashire, and with the exception of Nelson, which wove cloth for the home market; the Lancashire weaving area mostly wove cloth for India. During the First World War, India was cut off from Lancashire's cotton cloth and as a consequence, India's textile industry began to expand. Mill owners were slow to recognise the permanent change in their markets and failure to modernise had a further effect on the industry's decline. I will investigate the high numbers of women employed in the cotton industry and determine how the loss of their jobs and the financial independence work had given them caused social and psychological problems; women lost their social network and their place in their own society. When considering unemployment, contemporaneous social commentators

⁴⁴ David Barker, Clive Osmond, 'Inequalities in health in Britain: specific explanations in three Lancashire towns', in *Fetal and Infant Origins of Adult Disease*, DJP Barker, ed., (London, 1992).

took little account of juvenile unemployment: there were no reliable statistics available for researchers to use, and the government made use of estimates. Because the work which was available in North East Lancashire was mostly in textiles, that was where young people went to work, at cheap rates, or in 'blind-alley' jobs with long hours and low pay, and consequently, when employers had to pay adult wages or unemployment insurance these juveniles became unemployed.

Unemployment and low wages were the main causes of poverty, the official reaction to which will be examined in Chapter Three. However, sickness, old age and the loss of a breadwinner were also causes of hardship and want. Low unemployment benefits and pensions made it difficult for women to feed and clothe their families. At a time of mass unemployment, low wage labour and fiscal retrenchment, government ministers and senior civil servants desperately tried to disprove links between poverty, malnutrition and ill health. Normally infant and maternal mortality rates act as indicators of health and nutritional standards. North East Lancashire was known to have a higher mortality rate, both infant and maternal, than the rest of England and Wales and even with a reduction in local and national rates, it stayed higher than in the rest of the country. There was also an increase in the incidence of rickets which is well documented as a disease of bad housing, poverty and malnutrition, and the cause of problems in childbirth which in turn affected the maternal mortality rates.

Poverty had an immense impact on all areas. Housing was substandard in many parts of North East Lancashire, and in Chapter Four, I will examine what if anything was done to alleviate the housing problem both locally and nationally. Much of the housing in the region dated back to the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, and there was general decay because of the trade slump which hit the cotton industry much earlier than other industries. Many historians of the period point to the expansion of housing as one of the great achievements of the period, but much of the housing built was for private sale. New public housing was becoming increasingly available, but

the cost of rents was out of the reach of the unemployed and low paid. An unemployed man could be paying more than a third of his income in rent.⁴⁵ Three bedroom houses, with hot water systems and bathrooms, which cost between seventeen and eighteen shillings a week, were empty while two bedroom terraced houses with no bathrooms and with outside, rather primitive lavatory facilities which were available for rents of between six and ten shilling a week, had plenty of applicants. A new council house would have been ideal, but higher rents meant less to spend on food, and there is evidence that when a family moved into public housing, their health deteriorated because a greater proportion of their income went on rent rather than on a healthy diet.

The welfare of the community is the topic under discussion in Chapter Five which deals with the care of disabled children, the care of the infirm elderly, and the care of abandoned children or children in need of care because of home conditions or because they had been remanded into the care of the local council by a magistrate. The main resources I use in Chapter Five are local government records for the Lancashire weaving area. The cost of relieving the poor, including the unemployed was removed from the Poor Law, which was replaced by the *Local Government Act 1929*, and the *Poor Law Act 1930*. These Acts gave the local authorities more power but made them dependent upon the national government for adequate funding. Chapter Five will examine these Acts in detail and discuss the consequences upon the poor and disadvantaged in our towns, the uncertainties of boarded-out children; the purpose of the Public Assistance Institution [the workhouse], children in cottage homes, special schools for children with disabilities and local hospitals and their function in the community.

Chapter Six will examine the social function of schools and education departments in a crisis and argues that these departments worked to tirelessly to alleviate the effects of the poverty on children's' health and well-being both through the

⁴⁵ John Benson, *The Working Class in Britain* (London, 1989), p.82.

School Medical Service and the School Meals Service. The national government and local authorities were aware of the condition of schools, and until the Great Depression had been attempting to redress the problems. In our towns, the condition of many schools was of a low standard and not conducive to good health in a child population already in indifferent health. Many schools, especially in the poorer areas, were old, with poor lighting and ventilation, with antiquated equipment and limited space for children to play, and besides being a threat to health; these conditions did not contribute to the learning process. The School Medical Service and the School Meals Service and their effect on the health of the schoolchild will be studied, as will local authority clinics and the benefits they brought to the children of the unemployed and low paid. Details of new schools to be built, special schools for children with disabilities, and grants and student loans for secondary and tertiary education will also be studied closely, with local authority records the main resource. These records show that the local authorities were attempting to improve the state of schools in the area.

Chapter Seven will concentrate on health, and the social and economic legacy of the financial conservatism of the 1930s will be discussed. I will examine infant and maternal mortality rates, comparing the rates of North East Lancashire with the rest of the country. By close examination of local authority Departments of Health records, I will examine infant and maternal mortality rates in the area being studied and demonstrate that rates were far higher in the area than nationally. Using the same records I will consider the diseases of malnutrition and the consequences of an inadequate diet and study epidemiological research, including one study for three towns in the area being considered, a study which demonstrates the possible impact on future generations of the poor diet and conditions of the 1930s.

CHAPTER ONE

RESPONSES TO ADULT UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE EFFECTS ON THE COMMUNITY

In this chapter I will examine unemployment in North-East Lancashire in the early 1930s, the types of unemployment and the numbers of unemployed, not just in an economic sense, but also from the perspective of the psychological implications in order to evaluate the effects of high unemployment upon the community. I will also consider official responses to unemployment and their outcomes on the community in North-East Lancashire in the early 1930s. To do this it will be useful to first examine and analyse unemployment in that area, and to discover what would be the consequences of high unemployment when income was insufficient to provide an adequate diet and reasonable accommodation. It is essential to discover what, in addition to the economic crisis, were the causes of high unemployment in the cotton textile industry? How did cotton workers feel when alienated from an industry which had been a fundamental part of the community for over a hundred and fifty years; in what ways were the workers affected; and how did unemployment define their place in society? Unemployment was a major contributor to poverty which in turn would affect health, welfare, housing and education, and unemployment, both adult and juvenile, and was to have a significantly negative effect on the lives of the population of North-East Lancashire. The problems facing unemployed adults and unemployed juveniles were different and therefore I will concentrate upon adult unemployment in this chapter and examine juvenile unemployment in Chapter Two. In addressing unemployment, I will examine primary sources including national and local government records, newspapers from the early 1930s, contemporaneous social commentaries, interviews

with people young and unemployed in the early 1930s, and sound recordings made by the BBC in the 1930s. Lastly, I will use oral recordings from the North West Sound Archives in Lancashire. This chapter will show that what the responses to unemployment were and what was the impact on the community in the Lancashire weaving area.

It is a common conclusion among historians that overall, Britain in the 1930s had been relatively prosperous compared to earlier decades. Only in the depressed areas with the staple industries, such as shipbuilding, mining and textiles, was poverty to remain a problem. Historians also accepted that unemployment was high, especially in the depressed areas. What was not commonly established was the effect of high unemployment, including high unemployment among women, on the cotton towns of North-East Lancashire. In the Lancashire cotton towns, the 1929 'crash' was just another determinant in the towns' shrinking industrial base, which was mostly the cotton textile trade. The drastic decline in the cotton textile industry was the main cause of the high unemployment in the area. The industry in North-East Lancashire was heavily dependent on exports, and cotton weaving dominated the area's economy. The main market for cloth woven in the area was India and, as seen above, when cut off from receiving Lancashire's cloth during the First World War, the Indian cotton industry was, of necessity, forced to expand rapidly. In 1913 India 'imported annually 3,000 million yards of cotton cloth...and the amount had fallen below 500 million yards by 1936 and never recovered'.¹ During the interwar years, most of the export trade of the Lancashire cotton towns was lost, and in an industry that depended on exports, the loss had a devastating outcome. In Blackburn, in January 1930, 21,000 were unemployed out of a workforce of 80,000, with fifty mills closed. Six months later, 100 mills were closed.² Employment in the cotton textile industry in Lancashire, Yorkshire

¹ Beattie, *Cotton Town*, p.144.

² *Blackburn Times*, 17 December 1932.

and Cheshire dropped from more than 1.3 million in 1929, to one million in 1931.³ Towns in North-East Lancashire, because of their high dependency on the cotton textile industry, had higher unemployment than towns that had more than one industry. In other parts of Britain, unemployment climbed to over 21 per cent in 1931, to a peak of 23.4 per cent in 1933.⁴ The figures in the cotton textile districts were different. In 1930, unemployment in the cotton industry averaged 32.41 per cent and in 1931, 43.24 per cent.⁵ Before the 'crash' of 1929, nearly 150,000 people, out of a total workforce of 220,000 in North-East Lancashire, worked in the cotton textile industry. Many of those not employed in cotton were also dependent upon the textile industry, either employed in companies which serviced the cotton mills such as shuttle and reed makers, transport companies, or as local traders from whom the unemployed bought their necessities.⁶ The Pilgrim Trust Report, *Men Without Work (1939)* showed that towns with industries that were most affected by depression, such as cotton textiles, 'tend to produce secondary unemployment in such groups as building, gas, water and electricity.'⁷ The numbers of people dependent upon benefits in North East Lancashire could have been at least 195,000 if each unemployed man had a wife and one child, more if we count the female unemployed.

³ CH Feinstein, *Statistical tables of National Income, Expenditure and Output of the United Kingdom 1855-1965*, (Cambridge, 1972), T130.

⁴ WR, Garside, *British Unemployment 1919-1939* (Cambridge, 1990), table 5, p.13.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Pope, *Unemployment and the Lancashire Weaving Area*, p.119.

⁷ *Men Without Work*, A Report Made to the Pilgrim Trust (Cambridge, 1939) p.19.

The Pilgrim Trust was founded in 1930 by New York millionaire philanthropist Edward Stephen Harkness. It is still in existence as a charity.

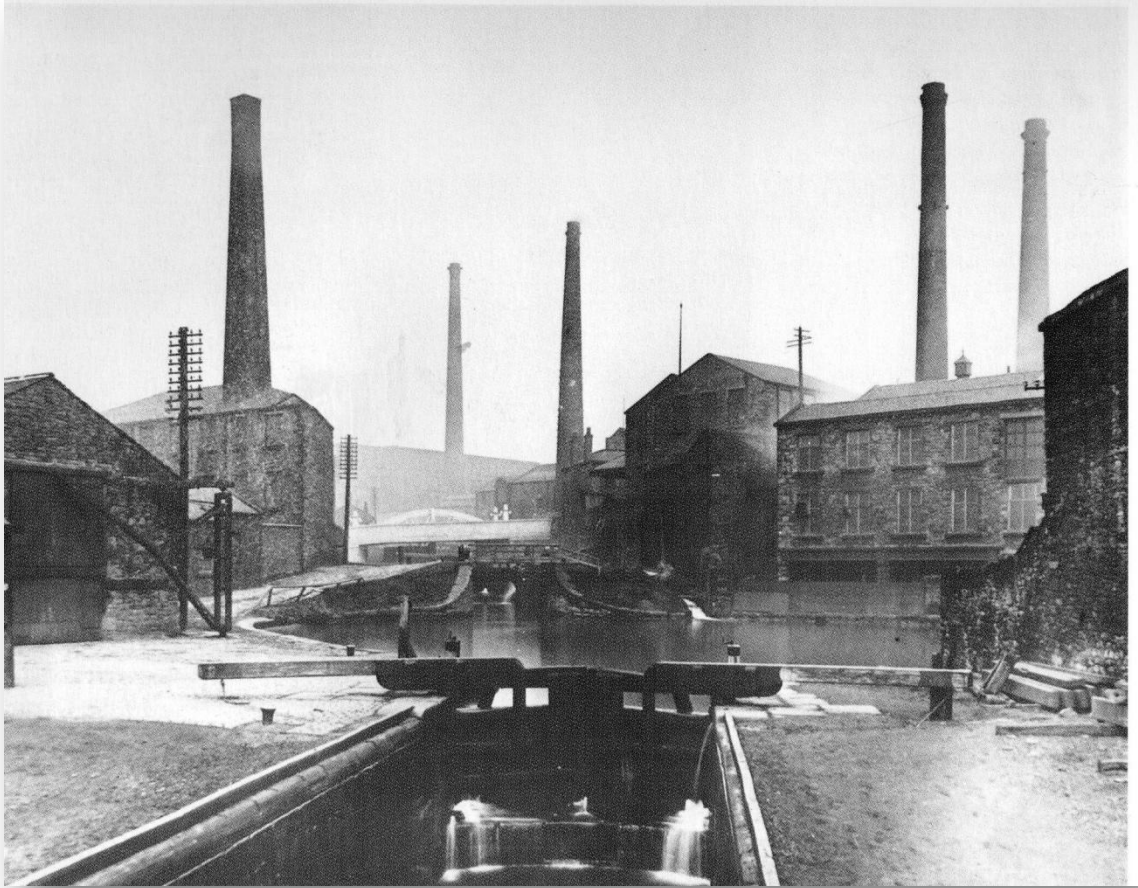


Figure 3 Mill Chimneys and Nova Scotia canal locks in Blackburn, 1930s. The chimneys were not smoking because the mills were closed.

Source: Image provided by Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council for use in the Cotton Town Digitization project.

The Report to the Pilgrim Trust, explains that the high number of long-term unemployed men and women in Blackburn, in 1932, was because ‘the depth of depression reached much earlier in the cotton industry than elsewhere.’⁸ Alan Fowler agrees. He believes that apart from a small boom after World War One, the cotton industry had been in depression since that war.⁹ In a survey of unemployment undertaken in 1951, it was shown that older people were usually unemployed for longer periods than younger people. Female unemployment in cotton textiles in 1931, in the 18-34 age groups was 38.3 per cent, while in the 35-64 age groups, it was 50.4 per

⁸ Pilgrim Trust Report, p.13.

⁹ Fowler, *Lancashire Cotton Operatives*, p.74.

cent. Among men, in the 18-44 age groups, it was 22.4 per cent, and in the 45-65 age groups it was 24.4 per cent.¹⁰ An industry that imported its raw materials and exported most of its production, as the cotton industry did, was dependant on outside forces. When, as happened in the interwar years, the collapse of outside forces caused the mills to close, it meant one of two things: long-term unemployment, or migration to other parts of Britain or the world. This study will focus on the unemployed who did not leave North East Lancashire.

In the North East Lancashire cotton towns, structural unemployment was the main point at issue.¹¹ The inherited structure of the cotton industry was geared to high exports, a structure that proved unable to cope with changes in world trade. With the collapse of the export markets, the hardest hit sections of the industry were the ones which produced simpler, coarser cotton cloth, mainly for export to India. The area around Blackburn and Burnley, with the exception of Nelson, manufactured this type of cloth. A Committee, appointed in August 1929 'to consider and report upon the present condition and prospects of the cotton industry, and to make recommendations as to any action which may be practicable to improve the position of that industry in the markets of the world', presented their report in July 1930. The Committee noted:

Until far-reaching improvements are introduced into the British Industry, there is no likelihood that Lancashire will be able to arrest the decline in her export trade, still less that she will recover the trade which she has lost....The cost of production of cotton goods in Lancashire is substantially higher than that in principal competing countries...and it is essential that the employers and operatives in all sections of the industry should reduce costs and increase efficiency, by technical improvement in the spinning and manufacturing sections involving considerable re-equipment....There is no alternative method of recovery. The system which brought prosperity to the cotton industry is today manifestly inadequate to meet the strain of modern conditions....the great losses that Lancashire has suffered (since World War One), are in large part due to an attempt to conduct the industry along

¹⁰ Beck, G., *A Survey of British Unemployment 1927-1945* (Oxford, 1951) Table 39.

¹¹ Structural unemployment is unemployment resulting from industrial reorganization due to technological change, rather than fluctuations in supply and demand.

pre-war lines and to a refusal to recognise that the old conditions so favourable to Lancashire, have passed away forever.¹²

Most of the cotton mills were technologically stagnant, with machinery that was old and inefficient. In fact, during his visit to North East Lancashire while in Britain for political talks in 1931, Gandhi spent three days visiting mills. The antiquated condition of the machinery and the industry itself did not escape him, and he was heard to remark, 'The machinery in the Bombay and Ahmadabad mills is 100 per cent more efficient.'¹³ Rather than modernise, the mill owners attempted to increase productivity through the 'more looms' per weaver system. Traditionally, weavers in Lancashire tended four looms, indeed, four looms was considered the maximum for good work, but weavers were asked to tend six, seven or eight for the same pay.¹⁴ Textile unions wanted an agreement for a minimum wage however, as the unions were negotiating from a poor position, they had little power when rationalization began in the 1930s. Michael Kirby, in his 1974 paper, 'The Lancashire cotton industry in the interwar years', believed that the 'cotton barons', the entrepreneurs, 'acted in an entirely rational manner'. Change would be costly, and, he thought, while 'the cotton entrepreneurs were not opposed to the principle of technical innovations', the operatives' negative 'Luddite' attitude to modernization precluded this.¹⁵ One could argue, however, that those same entrepreneurs were late in recognising that a permanent change in market conditions had occurred, and consequently, lost the financial will and ability to modernise. Instead of modernising, they, according to LG Sandberg, in *Lancashire in Decline*, rationalised by closing the mills.¹⁶ The Lancashire Cotton Corporation, instituted in 1929, attempted to reduce the size of the industry, and legislation in 1936 obliged the cotton industry to

¹² Ministry of Labour *Gazette*, Vol.38, No7, p.243.

¹³ Woodruff, *Nab End* p.346.

¹⁴ Bowden, S, & Higgins DM, 'Productivity on the cheap? The 'more looms' experiment and the Lancashire weaving industry during the interwar years', *Business History*, v4 (1999), pp.2-21, p.7.

¹⁵ Kirby, MW, 'The Lancashire cotton industry in the interwar years: A Study in Organizational Change', *Business History*, v.16 (1974) pp. 154-159 p.152-3.

¹⁶ Sandberg, LS., *Lancashire in Decline*, (Columbus,1974), pp. p.121.

destroy surplus textile machinery. Such rationalization was to cause still higher unemployment.¹⁷ It was noted in the 1932 Ministry of Labour Gazette that:

The rate of unemployment varied considerably from one part of the area to another. No less than one-fifth of the total unemployment was centred in the cotton weaving belt which lies to the north and north-east of industrial Lancashire, and contains the great centres of Burnley, Blackburn and Preston, and numerous towns and villages surrounding them....The extent of the surplus in the cotton industry in 1929 was about 63,000 persons (21,000 males and 42,000 females). This, however, makes no allowances employers reducing the number of looms which each weaver operates, while still running full time: this is a form of underemployment which does not appear in the unemployment statistics. It is suggested in the report that an addition of from 10,000 to 15,000 should be made to the surplus quoted above to represent, in terms of totally unemployed persons, the amount of under-employment owing to this practice. The surplus in the cotton industry consists predominantly of females and contains an exceptionally large proportion of married women.¹⁸



Figure 4 Gandhi's visit to Darwen in 1931.

Source: Image provided by Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council for use in the Cotton Town digitisation project.

¹⁷ Constantine, *Unemployment*, p.9.

¹⁸ Ministry of Labour Gazette, Vol.40, No.9, 1932, p.324

Below are the numbers of people on the unemployment registers in some North East Lancashire towns.

Year	Town	Men	Women	Juveniles	Total
Jan. 1930					
	Accrington	5,931	2,580	267	8,778
	Blackburn	5,983	5,300	430	11,713
	Burnley	3,913	2,648	154	6,715
	Nelson	1,717	1,293	105	3,115
Jan. 1931					
	Accrington	8,029	6,930	787	15,746
	Blackburn	12,800	16,872	1,354	31,026
	Burnley	9,133	10,678	475	20,268
	Nelson	4,066	4,298	452	8,816
Jan. 1932					
	Accrington	6,305	4,159	390	10,854
	Blackburn	10,364	12,850	594	23,808
	Burnley	5,876	6,271	358	12,505
	Nelson	2,714	2,373	131	5,218
Jan. 1933					
	Accrington	6,161	2,819	337	9,317
	Blackburn	9,486	8,548	447	18,481
	Burnley	5,571	4,174	250	9,995
	Nelson	2,369	1,953	110	4,432
Jan. 1934					
	Accrington	4,358	2,556	142	7,056
	Blackburn	9,179	9,319	393	18,891
	Burnley	5,311	4,684	185	10,180
	Nelson	2,053	1,632	67	3,752
Jan. 1935					
	Accrington	3,303	2,129	216	5,648
	Blackburn	8,265	7,801	617	16,683
	Burnley	5,776	4,536	339	10,651
	Nelson	2,682	2,159	178	5,019

Table 1. Persons on the Unemployment Register at Principal Towns.

Source: Table produced by me using figures from Ministry of Labour Gazettes, Volumes 38-43, 1930-35.

From these tables we see that 1931 seemed to be the worst year for the numbers of unemployed, however, because the Unemployment Insurance (Anomalies) Regulations, 1931 removed many married women from the unemployment register, then the totals for 1932 do not show a true figure. In 1931, the economic crisis and the run on the unemployment insurance scheme resulted in a set of regulations which restricted the rights of certain categories of workers to claim unemployment benefit. The group most affected by these regulations was married women. There are no

records for these women and so they are uncounted in the unemployment numbers, and were deprived of their right for benefits.

Unemployment in the cotton industry 1930-1932.

Between 1930 and 1932, the unemployment in the cotton industry was severe, with unemployment peaking in 1931 with 38.5 per cent of the workforce unemployed. The Ministry of Labour, in its monthly Gazette, gave detailed reports on the state of employment or unemployment in some of the principal industries, which included the cotton industry. These will illustrate how severe unemployment in the cotton industry was, and how the effects of that unemployment impacted on the unemployed, particularly between the years 1930 and 1932. The report for January 1930, noted:

At Blackburn employment was bad and further suspensions of winders and weavers occurred; employment was much worse than in December 1929. At Accrington, employment was very slack, except with certain firms engaged on light or fancy fabrics (for the home market); the number of winders and weavers totally unemployed was gradually increasing week by week. At Darwen, employment was bad and under-employment prevalent; six mills were closed and a large number of looms were idle. At Burnley employment continued badly; but for most of the month, all the mills were working except those that are regarded as permanently closed; and employment here was not quite as bad as at some other weaving centres. At Nelson, employment was worse than a month earlier; about 20,000 looms, affecting 6,600 people were stopped for the full week at Christmas, and there was a large amount of under-employment during the rest of the month.¹⁹

This was when the industrial depression was just beginning. The following month, February 1930, it was noted that 'Blackburn, Accrington, Darwen and Burnley were all seriously affected by the prevailing depression and the position at all these centres was worse than in December 1929.' There was also a decline in employment at Nelson and Colne.²⁰ While the January 1930 report for the cotton industry in the Ministry of Labour Gazette seemed severe, the report for March that year was far worse. Twenty-two mills

¹⁹ Ministry of Labour *Gazette*, Vol. 38, 1930, No.1, p.19.

²⁰ *Ibid.* Vol. 38, 1930, No.2, p.57.

were closed in Blackburn, with under-employment in the remaining mills. Fourteen mills were closed in Accrington, and thirty mills were closed in Burnley. In Darwen, 2,500 operatives were under-employed and 10,000 looms were idle, while in Nelson 50 per cent of the workforce in the cotton industry was under-employed. As we go through the Gazette month by month, the position worsens and unemployment was increasing 'week by week'.²¹ In June 1930, the Gazette noted that in Blackburn and Great Harwood, 'the abnormal depression continued,' with an increase of 3,000 unemployed in Blackburn and over 13,000 women on the Employment Exchange Register. In Accrington, twenty-one out of fifty-three mills had closed down and nineteen were working short-time, while in Darwen over half the looms were stopped. In Burnley, 9,000 women were unemployed and the number of unemployed in Burnley and Padiham increased by 2,800. At Nelson, all the cotton workers were either 'unemployed or seriously under-employed,'²² as the decline in the industry continued. In July 1930, a further 3,500 textile workers became unemployed in Great Harwood, which meant 'sixty-five percent of textile workers were unemployed, while twenty-five per cent of the remainder were under-employed.' In addition, half of Darwen's textile workers were unemployed.²³ In August 1930 65 per cent of Blackburn's textile workers were unemployed, while 75 per cent of Great Harwood's textile workers were unemployed and the rest were under-employed. In Darwen, fifty mills, out of a total of sixty-five, were closed down indefinitely, while in October 1930 there were 20,000 looms idle. In Blackburn, 75 per cent of the textile workers were unemployed, and on average, seventy mills were closed each week of September. By November 1930, the Ministry of Labour Gazette noted a slight improvement in our area. However,

At Blackburn there was a slight improvement, less short-time was worked, and looms which had been idle for many months were restarted. Nevertheless an average of 71 mills (out of a total of approximately 120) were closed each week. At Accrington the hard waste weaving was the

²¹ *Ibid.* No.5, p.171.

²² *Ibid.* No.6, p.211.

²³ *Ibid.* No.7, p.254.

only section that was fully employed, and an unprecedented number of women were on the 'wholly unemployed' register. Only fourteen mills in the whole Accrington area were running at the end of the month and most of these contained empty looms. At Great Harwood the depression was still acute. At Darwen employment remained very poor, with over 50 per cent of the persons normally engaged in the trade unemployed; most of these have been idle for many months, some for over a year. At Burnley no material change took place during the month. At Padiham employment was bad and showed a further decline. At Colne, a slight improvement was shown during the month, principally in the Gray section of the trade, but employment remained very bad. At Nelson, there was a marked improvement, two firms having restarted after a stoppage of 15 weeks.²⁴

In December 1930, while the slight improvement was maintained, 'employment was still very bad in all the principal centres' in weaving and spinning and the situation was much worse than in 1929. There was a reduction in the numbers of textile workers temporarily out of work, but there was an increase in the number registered as wholly unemployed.²⁵ In the January 1931 edition of the Gazette, which reported December's figures, we note little improvement. Blackburn showed a slight improvement in the first three weeks of the month, but it was seen as temporary by the Ministry of Labour. Accrington showed a slight improvement, but none of the closed mills were reopened. There was increased employment at Great Harwood but more than half the textile workers were unemployed. There was no improvement at all in Darwen where 60 per cent of the textile workforce was unemployed and the rest on short-time. 12,000 Burnley textile workers were unemployed at the end of December, and at Nelson and Colne, the Christmas holiday stoppage was extended.²⁶ In January 1931, the Cotton Dispute, which had been simmering since April 1929, began, causing still more lay-offs, short time working and joblessness, which increased the effects of unemployment on the North East Lancashire population and making conditions for families even more difficult.

²⁴ *Ibid.* No.11, p.410.

²⁵ *Ibid.* No.12, p.450.

²⁶ Ministry of Labour Gazette, Vol.39, 1931, No.2, p.57.

The normal practice in the cotton textile industry was for individual weavers to work on four looms at an agreed rate of pay. Following negotiations between the relevant associations, the Burnley Master Cotton Spinners' Association, the Cotton Manufacturers' Association and the Burnley Weavers' Association, an agreement was reached whereby certain Burnley firms would run four per cent of their looms with eight looms to a weaver on a three month experiment. At the end of three months a dispute had arisen between employers and employees concerning a general reduction in wages. By 5 January 1931, weavers went on strike at nine mills in Burnley which led to lock-out at all Burnley weaving mills. By 17 January 1931, a general lock-out became operative and the dispute was extended to other centres in Lancashire, Cheshire, Yorkshire and Derbyshire. On 13 February 1931, the lock-out was called off. The Central Committee of the Cotton Spinners' and Manufacturers decided unanimously that the lock-out would be withdrawn, that the more-loom-to-a-weaver experiment at Burnley would be discontinued and that 'the mills shall be opened for work on Monday morning'.²⁷ This dispute created further financial problems in the textile community. At the end of January, the majority of weaving sheds were closed down completely, while many spinning mills were closed because of lack of demand for yarn. In Blackburn, all the mills were affected by the dispute. Darwen had all but seven mills closed, also owing to the dispute. Great Harwood had only three mills open, while Burnley, at the centre of the dispute, was almost at a standstill, with ninety per cent of the mills affected by the dispute.²⁸ The end of the cotton dispute brought a small measure of improvement to the weaving part of the cotton textile industry with some sheds re-opening, although the unemployment situation was still grim.

March and April 1931 showed a little improvement in employment, possibly because of the end of the cotton dispute, however, the numbers of jobless was high. In May 1931 Blackburn showed a small improvement although approximately half the

²⁷ *Ibid.* No.3, pp.89-90.

²⁸ *Ibid.* No.2, p.57.

mills were closed part of the time. Darwen showed no improvement, yet Great Harwood showed a slight improvement as did Accrington; however Burnley's position was worse than in March. Several mills were 'weaving out' (finishing orders) with the intention of closing down, and most other mills had a high number of idle looms. There was a slight improvement noted in Nelson and Colne.²⁹ In June 1931, the section which manufactured goods for the Indian market, North East Lancashire, remained in an uncertain position, particularly Clayton Le Moors and Great Harwood, which depended on the India trade, and there was no improvement in unemployment at that time.³⁰ July 1931 showed a further decline in the weaving section of the industry. Unemployment was rising in all centres. Blackburn records show a decline in employment however Darwen was even worse, with 75 per cent of textile workers unemployed, while Great Harwood, again, was in deep depression with 60 per cent of looms stopped. Burnley had more mills closed temporarily and unemployment at Nelson and Colne showed no improvement.³¹ August 1931 was worse than June although the Ministry of Labour noted that it was not as bad, in most districts, as it had been in July 1930, and in several districts the improvement was substantial. However, in East Lancashire, in Blackburn, Burnley, Darwen, Great Harwood, Accrington, Colne and Padiham, unemployment rose and when some weavers were working, they were minding two looms instead of four, which as a consequence halved their wages.³² This under-employment was rife in the cotton industry, and there were times when the operatives' take home pay was less than Means Tested benefit.³³ In September 1931, there was little to celebrate. Blackburn saw seventy-seven mills closed and over sixty per cent of textile workers were unemployed. It was worse in Darwen. Only twenty-two mills out of sixty-five were working and seventy-five per cent of textile workers were unemployed.³⁴

²⁹ *Ibid.* No5, p.181.

³⁰ *Ibid.* No.6, p.223.

³¹ *Ibid.* No.7, p.264.

³² *Ibid.* No.8, p.304.

³³ Brockway, *Hungry England*, p.29.

³⁴ Ministry of Labour *Gazette*, Vol.39, No.9, p.345.

October 1931 saw no improvement in Blackburn with seventy eight mills closed and sixty four per cent of the workforce unemployed. At Accrington and Darwen there was a further decline in unemployment among weavers, as there was in Great Harwood where 2,800 women were totally unemployed and conditions in Burnley, Padiham, Nelson and Colne were unchanged.³⁵ In November 1931, the Ministry of Labour Gazette noted:

There was an improvement in all the principal departments and nearly all districts...The improvement in the weaving department, though substantial, was not quite so marked as the spinning department and was very unevenly distributed; some firms, or even whole districts, showed little or no improvement, particularly those manufacturing for the Indian market.³⁶

As a consequence, in the East Lancashire area the general depression continued owing to the small demand for cloth from India, although slight improvements were noted, particularly in Burnley, Great Harwood, Nelson, and Padiham. In Barnoldswick, in the Colne area, there was an improvement owing to the increased demand from China, but no improvement in Colne.³⁷ The Gazette noted, in December 1931, that a further improvement in all departments was apparent at the end of November. Mills that had been closed were beginning to reopen, with a reduction in under-employment. More looms were running and employment had improved. In Blackburn, five weaving mills had partially reopened, mostly on account of orders from the Indian market. Accrington showed some improvement, but Darwen was still struggling, yet 600 more looms were running, which meant 150 more weavers employed. In Great Harwood, 300 more weavers were working, while Burnley, Nelson, Colne and Padiham showed slight improvement.³⁸

When we see long lists of figures, we sometimes forget that they were not just numbers, they were people, families who were struggling to survive, and the figures

³⁵ *Ibid.* No.10, p.386.

³⁶ *Ibid.* No.11, p.425.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.* No.12, p.469.

demonstrate the depth of unemployment in the area. Furthermore, while there was a small improvement in exports, and a slight increase in people employed, there were still many people who had no job, little money, and no prospects until the mills reopened fully because there were no other industries in which to seek employment. This is the unemployment which would and still does affect the area with its damaging consequences.

January 1932 saw a further improvement in the employment situation. Six mills had reopened in Blackburn, 300 more looms were running in Darwen, Accrington's weavers were almost all reabsorbed, although not all looms were running. Great Harwood showed a slight improvement, as did Burnley, Padiham and Nelson. Colne was still classed as 'very bad'.³⁹ February 1932 showed a slight decline, although it remained 'much better than a year ago.' Blackburn had not maintained the improvement of the previous three months. Accrington weavers worked more or less full time, while unemployment at Darwen was again 'bad', as was Great Harwood and Colne. Nelson and Padiham were described as 'steady'.⁴⁰ In Blackburn, in March 1932, there had been a considerable improvement, with six more mills opened. Accrington showed a slight decline and Darwen, Colne and Great Harwood were still described as 'very bad', while the position at Padiham and Nelson was described as 'fair'. Burnley had a lack of new orders, but mills were busy filling orders from the end of the previous year.⁴¹ April 1932 showed a further improvement 'partly owing to continued better demand from India.' Blackburn saw further improvement and even Darwen, for so long 'very bad', showed a slight improvement. Burnley, Colne, Padiham and Nelson all showed some improvement. In fact Nelson had several firms running nearer to full capacity than they had done for many years.⁴² May 1932 showed no change apart from a slight improvement in the weaving section in Great Harwood, and

³⁹ Ministry of Labour *Gazette*, Vol.40, No.1, 1932, p.17.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* No.2, p.55.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* No.3, p.94.

⁴² *Ibid.* No.4, p.137.

a slight decline in Nelson.⁴³ June 1932 saw many firms extending the Whitsuntide holidays from Whit Monday to a full week for workers, but there was little change in circumstances. There was a small improvement in Great Harwood, while Darwen, again, saw little change. At Padiham, where most mills were engaged in weaving for the home market, the situation was described as 'fairly good'.⁴⁴ July 1932 the area showed an improvement compared to the previous month, but continued to be depressed in all departments and nearly all districts. Employment at Blackburn was affected by disputes, but on the whole there was a slight improvement. Great Harwood showed a slight improvement, while Darwen, as before showed no improvement. In Burnley, looms were stopped and weavers were again unemployed, while Colne's position was 'slightly worse'.⁴⁵ In August 1932 the depression in the textile industry continued. At Blackburn, where the workers who were involved in disputes in July 1932 returned to work, employment 'remained very bad'. Burnley, this month, was hit by a dispute which caused almost 'a general stoppage'. At Great Harwood, Darwen, Padiham Colne and Nelson were all worse than in July.⁴⁶ In September, the Gazette reported

The dispute in the manufacturing section at Burnley which began in July continued throughout August, and disputes in other weaving centres began about the middle of the month. There were also holiday stoppages at many towns. As from 29 August, a stoppage began affecting the great majority of weaving sheds in North-East Lancashire, and many of those in other districts. The spinning section was greatly affected by the consequent reduction in demand for yarn, and many additional spinning mills were closed, or extended their holiday stoppages, and much short-time was worked in this section.⁴⁷

There was a slight decline in the weaving section at Blackburn and a marked decline in the spinning section owing to the dispute. Several spinning mills normally sent their yarn to Burnley, but with the dispute, were closed themselves. Accrington had fairly

⁴³ *Ibid.* No.5, p.177.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* No.6, p.214.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* No.7, p.252.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* No.8, p.293.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* No.9, p.334.

steady employment, while in Great Harwood there was, again, a decline in employment. Darwen showed little change and the situation was still 'very bad'. Nelson, because of the dispute, had to suspend many employees and close mills for varying periods.⁴⁸ The dispute, which had begun in August 1932, continued until 27 September 1932. The dispute had involved nearly all the weaving sheds in the principal cotton manufacturing districts of North-East Lancashire, many of those in the other parts of the county (except the South-East), and some in Yorkshire. The dispute was a continuation of the 1931 Cotton Dispute which began when employers wished to reduce wages. The agreement, which came into force on 27 September 1932, reduced wages by almost 8.5 per cent.⁴⁹ All the principal weaving centres were closed down owing to the dispute for the whole of the month of September,⁵⁰ with all the operatives out of work and finding it difficult to claim benefits because it was an industrial dispute. Regulations for the receipt of relief were complicated. If a man was involved in the dispute, he was not entitled for relief for himself, but could claim relief for his wife and any children he had. If a woman was involved, she received no relief, but her husband and children did. The maximum amount should not exceed 36 shillings weekly.⁵¹ It should be mentioned that any payments were for dependents, not for the person involved in the dispute who received no income for the month the mills were closed, although the Temporary Assistance clause gave the PAC some leeway in an emergency. The Lancashire Record Office holds the Outdoor Relief List for Burnley, and the total amounts paid to dependents of strikers were enumerated, as were the numbers of children each claimant had. The lists run to several hundred claimants but I shall show details for just a few. WF, who had six children, received three pounds thirteen shillings in cash and four pounds seventeen shillings in kind for the entire time of the cotton dispute. WGM, who had five children, received one pound six shillings

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* No.10, p.373.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Blackburn Central Relief Sub-Committee, 29 August 1932.

and sixpence in cash and four pounds seven shillings in kind for the entire time of the cotton dispute. ER, a widow with one child received two pounds seven shillings in kind for the whole of the cotton dispute.⁵² The food in kind was usually vouchers (known locally as 'Town Relief') which could be exchanged for food at certain local shops.

The end of the dispute brought a substantial improvement in the manufacturing section of the cotton industry. The mills in Blackburn which had been running prior to the dispute were reopened. At Accrington full time was worked at nearly all mills, while in Darwen, all the mills which had been running prior to the dispute were running again, although half the mills in the area remained closed. Great Harwood reported a considerable improvement, while in Burnley employment was reported to be better than before the dispute, and some mills were reported to have orders to provide full work until the end of the year.⁵³ The Gazette for December 1932 reported that there was a slight improvement in the cotton industry, but 'remained very slack.' In Blackburn there was a gradual improvement in employment throughout the month, as there was in Accrington, Darwen, Great Harwood, Burnley Padiham and Nelson.⁵⁴ The Gazette for January 1933, gave the figures for December 1932, however, it is not necessary to continue giving figures because all centres in our area noted a slight improvement, and the most severe part of the industrial depression was over for North-East Lancashire although unemployment remained very high as will be seen in Table 2.⁵⁵ This table demonstrates that besides unemployment, which between 1930 and 1933 was very high, so too were the numbers on short time work. These people, although theoretically working, could be working perhaps one or two days weekly and unable to draw unemployment benefit.

⁵² County Borough of Burnley *Outdoor Relief Lists, 1930-1931*, District No. 1, Lancashire Record Office.

⁵³ *Gazette*. No.11, 1932, p.418.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*. No. 12, p.461.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*. Vol.41, No.1, p.18.

NOTE:

This table is included on page 37 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Table 2 Unemployment and short time working 1929-1935.

Source: © *Cotton Operatives and Work, 1900-1950*, Alan Fowler 2003, Ashgate Publishing, p.77.

Employment and Unemployment among Women in the Cotton Textile Industry.

The Lancashire cotton textile industry had always had a tradition of employing married women. This tradition of high numbers of married women working produced an occurrence unique to Lancashire, the widespread experience of high unemployment among women. Economic historians Benjamin and Kochin believed that unemployment among women had not risen, but rather the Anomalies Regulations simply changed the way unemployment amongst women was counted.⁵⁶ GM Beck in 1951, showed in statistics that between July 1931 and July 1932, which was the period when the Anomalies Regulations were brought into force, 28,000 insured cotton weavers lost their right to benefit, even though their insurance payments were up to date.⁵⁷ Below is the relevant part of the Anomalies Regulations.

A married woman (other than a married woman whose husband is incapacitated from work or is unemployed and not in receipt of benefit)shall be entitled to benefit only if, in addition to satisfying the other requirements of the Acts for the receipt of benefits, she also proves:-
 (i) That she is normally employed in insurable employment and will normally seek to obtain her livelihood by means of insurable employment, and
 (ii) that having regard to all the circumstances of her case, and particularly to her industrial experience and the industrial circumstances of the district

⁵⁶ Benjamin & Kochin, 'Searching for an explanation', p.464.

⁵⁷ Beck, *British Employment*, p. 53.

in which she resides, she can reasonably expect to obtain insurable employment in that district.⁵⁸

Men, on the other hand only had to satisfy the requirement of the Act in order to receive benefits

The cotton textile industry provided the most available employment opportunities for both men and women in the North-East Lancashire region. Male earnings in the industry were well below the national average for adult male manual workers, with a four loom weaver earning around 60 per cent of the average wage.⁵⁹ Low wages were traditional in the Lancashire cotton industry because women could do most of the work, and were paid less than men. Because of the low wages, families who worked in the mills usually pooled their resources; it was almost a tradition on Thursday nights after being paid, that everyone 'tipped up' their wages, usually on the kitchen table, although not all families did. The money was then allocated for rent, food and spending money. Because many families worked in the cotton industry, it was inevitable that there would be a greater incidence of familial unemployment than in any other comparable areas, such as mines shipyards or docks, as households in cotton textiles depended on more than one income. This type of unemployment would also explain why Annie Jones, a weaver, committed suicide when her benefits were discontinued in November 1931. Her husband was a labourer in a cotton mill who earned far less than a weaver.⁶⁰ Rex Pope, in his 2000 article, 'Unemployed Women in Interwar Britain', suggests that recent studies on unemployment that propose women were better placed than men when it came to keeping their jobs in interwar Britain were mistaken regarding the Lancashire cotton industry. He also advances the argument that because some historians, usually economic historians like Benjamin and Kochin, have questioned the reliability of unemployment figures, they have ignored the true

⁵⁸ Ministry of Labour *Gazette*, Vol. 39, No 10, p.407.

⁵⁹ EM Gray, *The Weaver's Wage*, (Manchester, 1937), p.10.

⁶⁰ *Blackburn Times*, 2 January 1932, p.12.

unemployment figures for women in Lancashire.⁶¹ In fact, the scale of female unemployment in cotton towns in the early 1930s was devastating. In Darwen, for nineteen consecutive months from June 1930, female unemployment stood at more than 60 per cent. For five of those months it was more than 70 per cent. In Great Harwood, it was more than 70 per cent for the last six months of 1930 and was to reach 79.9 per cent in August 1931. In Blackburn, levels were more than 60 per cent for nine consecutive months from June 1930, and remained more than 50 per cent for a further nine months.⁶² The Anomalies Regulations meant that most of these unemployed women were unable to claim benefit, even when their insurance contributions were up to date, because the regulations required that 'she [could] reasonably expect to obtain insurable employment' in her district. With the mills closed, she could not gain employment in the area. Ascertaining the actual numbers of women unemployed is almost impossible, because the *Local Unemployment Index* only allows comparison of percentage unemployment of insured workers.⁶³ However, an Industrial Survey of Lancashire undertaken by the University of Manchester, at the request of the Ministry of Labour in 1930, noted that 'sixty-nine per cent of the unemployment among insured females occurred in cotton and textile finishing.'⁶⁴ Women's unemployment on this scale is unreported in any mainstream work on interwar unemployment because community-wide high female unemployment was unique to the Lancashire cotton towns. A regional study undertaken in the 1930s would have been useful, both to me and other researchers, but there has been no major study and therefore the actual numbers of women who were unemployed is unknown, and any figures produced at this late date would be purely speculative.

⁶¹ Pope, Rex, 'Unemployed Women in Interwar Britain:' p. 744.

⁶² Pope, *Unemployment and the Lancashire Weaving Area*, p.32.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Ministry of Labour Gazette, *The Industrial Surveys of Lancashire and of the North East Coast*, February 1931.

The social effect of unemployment upon women could have been, for some, overwhelming. The mill, for many had been a second home. Work in cotton mills had given women not only independence, but social contacts, and with the closure of these mills, both the independence and the social companionship was lost. Yet, for others, unemployment, although it caused much stress, gave many women the opportunity to have a home life of a kind they had never known. Most women had gone into the mill at the age of twelve or thirteen expecting to spend their lives there. Their whole life was work, either at home or in the mill, with their children put into the care of a childminder who was paid a certain amount of money each week, and quite often looked after several children. An unforeseen consequence of long-term unemployment was that these women could stay at home and care for their children and their houses with work far less tiring than they were used to.⁶⁵ Fenner Brockway wrote of a miner's wife, who told him in 1932,

The weaver works harder than any woman on earth. She starts work at the mill at seven and works until quarter-past eight. She has three quarters of an hour to get breakfast and get the children off to school...then back to the mill from nine until half past twelve. An hour's break for dinner for her husband, herself, and the children; the mill again until five-thirty. Then tea and the housework and the cooking and baking and the washing and the mending and the clothes-making, and the bathing the children and putting them to bed.⁶⁶

Staying at home may have been a far more desirable prospect both for mothers and children were it not for the lack of money.

A further important consequence of female unemployment in North-East Lancashire was the loss of financial independence. Although earnings, of necessity, had to be pooled, to earn one's own money was vitally important. In fact, according to the Pilgrim Trust Report, 'many women in Blackburn set a value on their financial

⁶⁵ Pope, *Unemployment etc.* p.241.

⁶⁶ Brockway, *Hungry England*, p.40.

independence. Unless they are “keeping themselves” they feel something is wrong’.⁶⁷ Among Lancashire women, the traditional financial independence was reflected in the taunt to a wayward husband, ‘Ah con allus get four looms.’⁶⁸ To have a job with an income gave one status; an employed woman was not dependent on her husband. Most women in North-East Lancashire were reluctant to do certain jobs. Pope writes of the Preston Unemployment Assistance Board reporting, ‘the vast majority of Lancashire women evinced a thorough dislike of domestic service which they feared would impinge on their traditional independence.’⁶⁹ A contemporary newspaper article reports of a Rishton Weaver’s, Winder’s and Warper’s Association meeting which passed a resolution condemning, ‘officials at employment exchanges in requiring young women who have lost their work as cotton operatives...to go into domestic service.’⁷⁰ To most Lancastrian women, being ‘in service’ was humiliating. Women in Lancashire had a long history of working in the textile industry; their working culture began long before the munitions industry attracted women workers in the First World War. According to Pope, attempts to train women for domestic service met with a distinct lack of interest. Only eleven women out of 1,248 women interviewed were prepared to attend a residential training course in domestic science.⁷¹ Training schemes for women and girls under the age of thirty-five were conducted by the Central Committee on Women’s Training and Employment which advised the Ministry of Labour on such matters. The main feature of the Committee’s work was the training of women and girls at non- residential training centres with a view to their employment as resident domestic servants. By May 1930, forty-one training centres had been organised chiefly in North-Eastern, North-Western and Wales Divisions where unemployment among women was most severe. They were attended by women and

⁶⁷ Pilgrim’s Trust Report, p. 83.

⁶⁸ ‘I can always get four looms’. Meaning she could always work as a weaver. Quoted in Priestley, JB, *English Journey*, (London, 1934), p.259.

⁶⁹ Pope, *Unemployed Women*, p.755.

⁷⁰ *Blackburn Times*, 20 December 1930, p.10.

⁷¹ Pope, *Unemployment and the Lancashire Weaving Area*, p.64.

girls who lived in the neighbourhood or within daily travelling distance. The full course lasted for a period of twelve or thirteen weeks, and consisted of instruction in cookery, housewifery, laundry work and needlework. Training allowances were paid in lieu of benefit and free mid-day meals were provided.⁷² But, as mentioned above, domestic service was not popular with Lancastrian women. The shrinking labour demands of the Lancashire cotton textile industry, and the lack of alternative employment for its female workers, is rarely dealt with in mainstream histories of interwar unemployment. Nevertheless, for these women, unemployment, with its loss of financial independence and social networks, was, at the very least, distressing. They had gone from being productive and financially independent members of their community to dependents of their husbands, or the state. They could not even draw unemployment benefit in their own right.

Psychological Effects of Unemployment

The mill, for thousands of Lancashire workers, was the one constant thing in their lives. It had been there for generations and had regulated their lives; indeed, their lives had revolved around the mill. In the Lancashire cotton industry, men and women worked side by side, doing the same jobs, an occurrence rare in any other industry. There was a daily routine, and unemployment was to break that routine and cycle. This break was, in social psychologist Maria Jahoda's opinion, one of the worst psychological consequences of unemployment.

Virtually all employment involves a fixed time schedule, often rigidly fixed by the requirement to clock in at the beginning and clock out at the end of the working day. Not only manual workers but everybody living in an industrial society is used to firm time structures – and to complaining about them. But when this structure is removed as it is in unemployment its absence presents a major psychological burden. Days stretch long when there is nothing that has to be done; boredom and waste of time become

⁷² Ministry of Labour Gazette, Vol. 38, No.5, p.164.

the rule, particularly when the first shock has been overcome and the search for employment has been given up as futile.⁷³

Wight-Bakke, in *The Unemployed Man* (1933), noted that the men he observed for his book, particularly men who had a family, 'showed evidence of the blow to [their] self-confidence had suffered from the fact that the traditional head of the family was not able to perform his normal function'.⁷⁴ The closure of the mills, and the loss of security of employment, was to be a lasting burden for the people of the Lancashire cotton textile area. An industry, which was the centre of many lives, had been unable to provide either security of unemployment or a reasonable living wage. Work provided an income which determined their standard of living, and work provided workers with their status in society, their self esteem and their social contacts. With the closure of the mills and subsequent loss of their jobs, their status and self esteem suffered, although social contacts remained the same. Restructuring destroyed jobs, made skills redundant and caused psychological suffering at least as serious as the decline in living standards caused by unemployment. For many North-East Lancashire villages, the mills were the only source of income. The villages had grown around mills and had single-mindedly invested their labour in cotton, believing the cotton industry would always be there. Re-employment would go a long way to heal the psychological effects of unemployment.

Nevertheless, re-employment would not be so easy. Mowat wrote of new industries rising alongside the old, and believed that 'the decline in the market for products of the old staple industries could be redeemed by the growth of markets'.⁷⁵ John Stevenson and Christopher Cook, in 1977, wrote that 'unemployment was falling, [and] industrial production was rising, especially in the new industries'.⁷⁶ Yet GDH Cole, in 1937, wrote, 'the employer in search of a site for his new factory shuns the

⁷³ Jahoda, Maria, *Employment and Unemployment* (Cambridge, 1982) p. 22.

⁷⁴ E. Wight-Bakke, *The Unemployed Man* (London, 1933), p.70.

⁷⁵ Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, p. 271-2.

⁷⁶ Stevenson, J., & Cook, C., *The Slump. Society and Politics During the Depression* (London, 1977), p.30.

depressed areas....It's regarded as a bad advertisement to have one's business address in a depressed area.' There were many new factories, but not in the depressed areas. They were instead, in areas such as the Midlands, or Greater London, and workers from depressed areas had to migrate or stay unemployed.⁷⁷ The Industrial Surveys of Lancashire noted

The report draws very special attention to the low rate of migration of population from Lancashire. Between 1921 and 1931, the natural increase in the population of the county (i.e. The excess of births over deaths) was 238,000 or 4.9 per cent of the 1921 total; the net loss by migration amounted to 132,000, or 2.7 per cent; so that the actual increase in population was 106,000 or 2.2 per cent. The failure of migration to make a substantial contribution to the draining away of the surplus of labour in Lancashire is in striking contrast with the relatively high rates of migration in the depressed areas of North-East England and South Wales.⁷⁸

Rex Pope, however, explains why geographical mobility was hindered. There was the effect of multi-income families, and the high incidence of home ownership in the area and the practice of owning shares in the mills.⁷⁹ In fact, about one third of Burnley houses and just under one third of Blackburn houses were owner occupied, and as a consequence, many older workers were tied to the area because it was difficult to sell houses.⁸⁰ Stephen Constantine noted, in 1983, that during the nineteenth century industrialization, employment opportunities had been in the North and it was to the North that labour had migrated, ignoring the South and East. This pattern was reversed in the interwar years and in his view, 'the North and West became, and for the most part have remained, the areas with the least attractive opportunity for employment.'⁸¹ Stevenson and Cook informed us that 'new industries forged ahead at an unprecedented rate [and] the British economy enjoyed the almost boom conditions of expansion.'⁸² This was fine if one could, or was prepared to migrate to the new

⁷⁷ GDH, Cole, *The People's Front* (London, 1937), p.209.

⁷⁸ Ministry of Labour Gazette, *Industrial Surveys*, March 1931.

⁷⁹ Pope, *Unemployment and the Lancashire Weaving Area*, p.64.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* p.72.

⁸¹ Constantine, *Social Conditions*, p.13.

⁸² Stevenson and Cook, *The Slump*, p.30.

expanding areas, but if one was tied financially to an area, it was infinitely more difficult.

Responses to Unemployment.

Unemployed clubs, established by voluntary agencies under the general co-ordination of the National Council of Social Services (NCSS), founded in 1919 to promote voluntary community activity through the co-operation of public authorities and voluntary agencies. The movement to establish clubs in North-East Lancashire was only set in motion in 1932, with the establishment of an NCSS Unemployment Committee and its receipt of a grant from the Ministry of Labour to bolster financial support from various voluntary organisations.⁸³ The investigators for the Pilgrim Trust, found that membership to these clubs were seen by some as 'something not quite respectable,' and that the perception was that only those who 'wanted something for nothing' went to them. One club, the 'Gamecock' which was held in the YMCA premises, was looked down on by YMCA members because of 'the deplorable appearance' of the unemployed. Nevertheless, local political and religious leaders in the North-East Lancashire community strenuously supported the clubs in an attempt to provide the social companionship lost through unemployment. In Blackburn, the Unemployed Discussion Group was sponsored by Quakers, The Society of Friends, Community House, was founded by a committee of town worthies chaired by the Bishop of Blackburn. The Mayor, the Town Clerk and the Chief Constable were prominent among the founders of the 'Gamecock'.⁸⁴ In Burnley, an appeal by the Bishop for premises for an unemployed club was adopted by free churchmen in the

⁸³ Pope, *Unemployment and the Lancashire Weaving Area*, p. 93.

⁸⁴ Pilgrim Trust Report, p.322-3, and *Blackburn Times*, 9 July 1932 & 31 December 1932. The *Gamecock*, was named after Sir Henry Hornby, a 19th Century mill owner and politician whose nickname was *The Gamecock*, and whose statue stood in front of the YMCA.

town.⁸⁵ The Burnley Unemployed Service Council, in 1932, circulated an appeal for funds, an appeal printed in the local paper.

Prolonged unemployment involves public problems and personal problems. Compulsory leisure may easily become debilitating idleness ending in complete inertia and listless apathy. Large numbers of unemployed people have come to feel that they have no place in the community. They are not wanted in industry and their lack of means makes it impossible for them to take part in any pursuits by which others enhance the pleasure of life or counteract its monotony. In the interests of communal wellbeing, as well as in the immediate interests of those affected, it is necessary that such service as will enable our unemployed fellows to retain their self-respect, and feel they are not forgotten and unwanted, should be undertaken.⁸⁶

Gradually, clubs were opened in the smaller Boroughs of North-East Lancashire, both for men and for women. By March 1935, there were approximately thirty-three clubs, nineteen for men and thirteen for women with 4,470 members in the area of mid Lancashire.⁸⁷ All these clubs were based on self-help and filled a void in the spare time that many now had. Workers in Lancashire had gone from working side by side in the mill, to being segregated into male and female groups, with men playing sports, and women learning housewifely arts, and this The Reverend Cecil Northcott, MA, gratuitously noted 'is doing a unique piece of work for its members', women would be able to spend the meagre income 'more wisely'.⁸⁸ According to William Woodruff, 'Blackburn was a town that had clothed the world; yet in the worst years of the depression we didn't have enough clothing to cover our backs. We Blackburnians bought Japanese shirts and cottons at half British prices because we didn't have enough money to buy our own products.'⁸⁹ The alienation of the workers from the cotton industry was almost complete.

There are many reasons besides the Great Depression for the severity of unemployment in North-East Lancashire in the 1930s. We need to realize that the

⁸⁵ *Burnley Express*, 24 September 1932.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 22 October 1932.

⁸⁷ Pope, *Unemployment and the Weaving Area*, p.95.

⁸⁸ Greene, *Time to Spare*, p.117.

⁸⁹ Woodruff, *Nab End*, p.356.

cotton textile industry was in depression for most of the 1920s. The Lancashire cotton industry was old fashioned and technologically stagnant. It was also an industry which needed to export the majority of its production in order to survive, and many North-East Lancashire mills were dependent on the Indian cotton trade. The 1930 Indian boycott on foreign imported goods had a disastrous effect on the towns dependent on the Indian trade, Blackburn, Burnley, Great Harwood, Darwen and Colne. Many mills closed permanently which caused more distress, as did the disputes between employers who wanted to reduce wages and employees who did not want their wages reduced. The dependence of the towns in the area, particularly Blackburn, on one industry created secondary unemployment in other industries, such as building and allied trades, retail outlets and in the utilities. Clubs for the unemployed created by Government and voluntary agencies did little to improve the employability of the unemployed. As we have seen, migration to other areas was not popular because of the high incidence of home ownership and the difficulty of selling those houses in the economic conditions of the times, and also the high level of community support in North-East Lancashire which gave help, encouragement and comfort to neighbours. There was also the fear that the unemployed would be as impoverished elsewhere without the benefit of the close community support available in North East Lancashire.

High unemployment among women was unique to the Lancashire cotton textile industry; women had to work for the family to survive. It was not the mill owners who were to blame for inefficient machinery and technologically stagnant mills; it was, according to Michael Kirby, the fault of the operatives' 'Luddite' opposition to change which was to blame. Cotton had made North-East Lancashire, and those who did not work in the mills were either related to, or dependent upon those who did. The closure of the mills not only affected them financially, but at a deeper emotional level. Lancashire cotton workers, both men and women, had worked side by side in a way alien to the rest of the British workforce. Unemployment weakened the fellowship that

had existed, and the social fabric, if not torn asunder, was full of holes. By 1939, Blackburn, which had been the greatest of all cotton weaving towns, had seen half its mills closed permanently, and the downward slide would continue for the next few decades, until only one mill was left at the end of the twentieth-century.

There has been little in the way of a major study of unemployment in North-East Lancashire during the interwar years. It could be because there was so much happening on the international stage, or because the cotton textile area of North-East Lancashire was not as interesting as other areas. Unemployment and official responses to its effects caused a catastrophic change in the lives of those who lived through the 1930s in North-East Lancashire, and this chapter shows the beginning of that overwhelming experience in the textile area. Later chapters will show just how that change occurred, and what the consequences were.

CHAPTER TWO

OFFICIAL RESPONSES TO JUVENILE UNEMPLOYMENT

In the interwar years, social commentators wrote extensively about adult unemployment, but disregarded juvenile unemployment as a major problem. A 1932 enquiry into the employment of juveniles in Lancashire, conducted by the University of Manchester, bemoaned 'the almost entire absence of statistical information.'¹ In a country which kept statistical information on things as diverse as how many dustbins there were in a given area and the precise cause of every death that had taken place, the shortage of statistics detailing the scale and character of juvenile unemployment leaves several questions unanswered. Was juvenile unemployment considered unimportant? Did the national government grasp the extent of the problem, or did they accept the assurances given to them by groups with an agenda, such as employers' representatives on government enquiries and committees concerning juvenile unemployment? What was, and what should have been done for the young unemployed? Why was the impact of juvenile unemployment in North-East Lancashire particularly harsh, and most important, what were the effects on juveniles unemployed for years? This chapter will examine these questions in addressing the broader issue of juvenile unemployment in North-East Lancashire and establish what responses national and local government made to solve the problem of unemployment in young people under the age of eighteen.

In the years between the wars, particularly in the 1930s, the foremost focus of any study of unemployment was the plight of the adult male. For some, Wal Hannington, Allen Hutt, and GDH Cole included, adult male unemployment was of

¹ Alan Winterbottom, 'An Enquiry into the Employment of Juveniles in Lancashire,' *The Manchester School of Economic and Social Studies*, Volume III, (Manchester, 1932), p.29.

prime importance,² nonetheless, even for those commentators, juvenile unemployment, when alluded to, was a tale of stunted hopes, frustration, dead-end jobs, of being too old at sixteen when employers could pay lower wages to fourteen year olds. The former was a common theme throughout most social commentary in the 1930s which had anything to say concerning juvenile unemployment. The Report *Unemployment and the Child*,³ commissioned by the Save the Children Fund in 1933, emphasised 'blind-alley' occupations available for fourteen to sixteen year olds, and sixteen to eighteen year olds becoming unemployed consequently. The Report too commented on the requirement to pay unemployment insurance being the main reason employers dismissed sixteen year olds.⁴ The 1938 Report to the Pilgrim's Trust, referred to in Chapter One also gave examples of using juveniles as cheap labour until the age of sixteen and then dismissing them.⁵ This report, however, concerned itself with adult unemployment and classed eighteen to twenty-four year olds as very young. The only contemporary accounts which dealt solely with juvenile unemployment were the 'Enquiry into the employment of juveniles in Lancashire', by Alan Winterbottom in 1932, *Juvenile Unemployment*, 1933, by John Jewkes and Alan Winterbottom, which was based on the enquiry by Manchester University noted above, *Youth in British History*, by John Gollan, in 1937, and *The Juvenile Labour Market*, by John Jewkes and Sylvia Jewkes, in 1938.⁶ These works gave suggestions as to the extent and character of juvenile unemployment, and the efforts needed to control it. Jewkes and Winterbottom dealt primarily with Lancashire, and the reasons why juvenile unemployment was particularly harsh. Jewkes and Jewkes recorded a study which lasted two years and

²Allen Hutt, *The Condition of the Working Class in Britain* (London, 1933). GDH Cole, & MI Cole, *The Condition of Britain* (London, 1937). Walter Hannington, *The Problem of the Distressed Areas* (London, 1937).

³ Save the Children Fund, *Unemployment and the Child* (London, 1933).

⁴ Until 1934, when school leavers became eligible for the Unemployment Insurance Benefit Scheme, juveniles who left school at fourteen had to wait until they were sixteen before entering the scheme.

⁵ Pilgrim Trust, *Men Without Work* p.228.

⁶ Alan Winterbottom, 'An Enquiry into the Employment of Juveniles in Lancashire,' *The Manchester School of Economic and Social Studies*, Vol.III, 1932. John Jewkes, Alan Winterbottom, *Juvenile Unemployment* (London, 1933). Gollan, John, *Youth in British Industry* (London, 1937). Jewkes, John, Jewkes, Sylvia, *The Juvenile Labour Market* (London, 1938).

dealt with two thousand school leavers in Lancashire. Gollan dealt with British industry as a whole, with a section dealing with the textile areas, and other sections which dealt with unemployment, and what could or should have been done. JB Priestley, in his *English Journey* (1934), wrote of juvenile unemployment in Lancashire. He thought that the 'lads' would have been better off spending a few years in the ranks of a 'sort of labour army'. They were 'workless lads in a workless world'. No mention was made of 'lasses', a common omission when dealing with juvenile unemployment in the 1930s, yet a serious omission when dealing with the cotton textile areas of Lancashire where, as we have seen, there was a tradition of females working in the mills. It could be said that the works mentioned are dated, but they are the only works written in the 1930s, and as we will see, anyone writing about juvenile unemployment since World War Two quotes Jewkes and Winterbottom extensively.

Post-war commentators had differing views of juvenile unemployment in the 1930s. In the immediate post-war years, they did not see it as a problem. Mowat, in 1955, wrote that youth in the depressed areas had never known steady work and were therefore unconcerned by the lack of it.⁷ A decade later, AJP Taylor, completely ignored youth unemployment.⁸ John Stevenson and Chris Cook, in *The Slump*, written in 1977, wrote only one page dealing with unemployed juveniles. The one page consisted of substantial quotes from Winterbottom, Jewkes, Gollan and the Coles.⁹ Rex Pope, in "'Dole Schools": The North-East Lancashire Experience, 1930-39,' an article published in 1977, dealt with one of the government's attempts to maintain morale and employability, the Junior Instruction Centres (JICs).¹⁰ In the end, JICs were unsuccessful because what they taught was not useful in finding work. WR Garside, in

⁷ CL Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, p.485.

⁸ AJP Taylor, *English History 1914-1945*.

⁹ J Stevenson, C Cook, *The Slump*.

¹⁰ Rex Pope, "'Dole Schools" The North-East Lancashire Experience', *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 1977, 9, (2) pp. 26-33.

his 1977 article, 'Juvenile Unemployment and Public Policy Between the Wars',¹¹ quoted G Meara's, *Juvenile Unemployment in South Wales* (1936), in which he noted, 'No exhaustive treatment of the social problem of juvenile unemployment exists.'¹² Garside concluded that 'this remains the same today'.¹³ In 1979, Benjamin and Kochin thought that the juvenile unemployment rate was low because unemployment was unattractive to juveniles.¹⁴ Stephen Constantine, in *Unemployment in Britain Between the Wars* (1980), subscribed to the common view that unemployment was at its lowest among juveniles.¹⁵ However, most employed juveniles were in dead-end jobs, also a common theme. Economic historian Barry Eichengreen, in 1987, disagreed with those who believed that youth unemployment was low in the 1930s. His argument was that the low levels of youth unemployment in interwar Britain basically reflected the under-recording of juvenile unemployment. He also compared and contrasted juvenile unemployment in the 1930s and the 1980s and was hampered by the 'woefully inadequate nature of the statistics.'¹⁶ Keith Laybourn, in 1990, was more concerned with adult unemployment than with unemployed juveniles, which seems curious given his sympathetic view of the poor and the unemployed, but in keeping with the fact that the history of children and juveniles is not extensively studied.¹⁷ Matt Perry, in 2000, was also more concerned with adult unemployment. Again, in this context, this is unexpected given his treatment of the unemployed in the 1930s.¹⁸ Juvenile unemployment, however, was a common gap both today and in contemporary works of the 1930s. Not until the 1980s, when juvenile unemployment again began to rise, did commentators write about the young unemployed, and the problems they faced. Any work which deals with juvenile unemployment, even marginally, refers to Jewkes and

¹¹ WR Garside, 'Juvenile Unemployment and Public Policy Between the Wars', *Economic History Review* (Great Britain) vol. 30 (2) 1977 pp322-339, p.323.

¹² G Meara, *Juvenile Unemployment in South Wales* (Cardiff, 1936).

¹³ Garside, *Juvenile Unemployment*, p.323.

¹⁴ Benjamin & Kochin, 'Searching for an Explanation',

¹⁵ Stephen Constantine, *Unemployment in Britain Between the Wars* (London, 1980).

¹⁶ Barry Eichengreen, 'Juvenile Unemployment in Twentieth-Century Britain: The Emergence of a Problem', *Social Research*, Vol.54, No.2 (Summer 1987) pp.273-301, p.275.

¹⁷ Keith Laybourn, *Britain on the Breadline* (Gloucester, 1990).

¹⁸ Matt Perry, *Bread and Work* (London, 2000).

Winterbottom, which is no surprise since theirs is the only substantial work on the subject published since 1930.

Jewkes and Winterbottom, in 1933, wrote, 'At the present time it is impossible for any individual or any authority to state how many children between the ages of fourteen and eighteen are unemployed.'¹⁹ The Ministry of Labour stated in 1932 'It has been estimated that in Great Britain the number of unemployed juveniles who do not register [as unemployed] is equivalent to about one third of the total number of juveniles who do register.'²⁰ Below are their estimates for unemployed juveniles.

1930		170,000
1931		134,000
1932		166,000
1933		147,000
1934	November	110,000
1935		118,000
1936	November	90,050

Table 3 Estimates for Unemployed Juveniles 14-17 Years.

Source: Table produced by me from the figures in the Ministry of Labour Gazette 1930-36.

The above figures from 1930-1933 are estimates for the whole country and are likely to be underestimated. Only 'live register' (those over fourteen registered as unemployed) numbers were accurate. In North-East Lancashire many juveniles under sixteen were not required (or able) to register because they worked short time (a term from the period), often as little as one day a week when work was available. We need to ask where the numbers estimated by the Ministry of Labour came from considering the deficiency of trustworthy figures? In addition, estimates from the country overall do not give a true picture of the situation in the depressed areas. As the Juvenile Advisory Committee stated in 1933, 'The chief characteristic of juvenile unemployment is its concentration in the depressed areas, the staple industries of which can no longer offer

¹⁹ Jewkes and Winterbottom, *Juvenile Unemployment*, p.18. In 1930s Britain, juveniles up to the age of eighteen were children, up to the age of twenty-one, they were young people.

²⁰ Ministry of Labour *Report* 1932, p.43.

progressive employment, which, when recruiting young labour, do so to decrease labour costs rather than to increase production.²¹ The employers gave jobs to those who were cheaper to employ, that is fourteen year olds. The survey conducted in 1931 by the University of Manchester and mentioned above found that of the Juvenile Unemployment Bureaux and the Juvenile Employment Advisory Committees in operation in industrial Lancashire, only eight could furnish any statistics.²² Winterbottom's figures show that in cotton districts, in 1932, thirty per cent of male school leavers and more than forty per cent of female school leavers who found employment entered the cotton industry, while in Nelson and Colne, in the east of our district, the total was more than sixty per cent.²³ In 1934, ninety-four cotton mills closed and textile unions estimated the closures would make one-fifth of the workers in the industry redundant.²⁴ Prospects for juvenile employment in North-East Lancashire looked grim when the means of employment were destroyed without other employment opportunities being created.

Jewkes and Winterbottom believed that even the government's inadequate figures showed the gravity of the situation.²⁵ Below are Juvenile Unemployment Tables for January 1930 and December 1935. These are national figures and it is possible that the early ones are estimate, but it will give some idea of juvenile unemployment in the country for the period being studied. North East Lancashire is in the North/West Division.

²¹ Juvenile Advisory Committee Report, 1933, p.10.

²² Winterbottom, *Enquiry*, p.30.

²³ *Ibid.* p. 31.

²⁴ Gollan, *Youth in British Industry*, p.24.

²⁵ Jewkes and Winterbottom, *Juvenile Unemployment*, p.19.

NOTE:

This table is included on page 55 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Table 4a Juveniles aged 14 and under 18 on the register at 27 January 1930.

NOTE:

This table is included on page 55 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Table 4b. Juveniles placed in employment in the four weeks ending 27 January 1930.

Sources for Tables 4a & 4b. Ministry of Labour Gazette, Vol. 38 No.2, p.67

NOTE:

This table is included on page 55 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Table 5a. Numbers of juveniles aged 14 and under 18 on the registers of unemployment exchanges at 16 December 1935.

NOTE:

This table is included on page 56 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Table 5b. Juveniles under 18 placed in employment in the four weeks ending 23 December 1935.

Source for tables 5a & 5b, Ministry of Labour Gazette, Vol.44, No.1, p.19.

As early as 1930, according to the Ministry of Labour estimates, the North/West Division had more insured and uninsured unemployed juveniles, (21,599) than the North/East Division, (20,273) the Scotland Division, (11,511) or the Wales Division (10,402). In the tables for juveniles placed in employment, the numbers differ. The best area for being placed in employment was London with a total of 9,996 vacancies filled, while the North/West Division, the North/East Division, the Scotland Division and the Wales Division had only 9,702 vacancies filled between them. In 1935, the North/West Division (18,109) fared better than the North/East (25,480) or Scotland Division. (22,196). Employment placements for 1935 were better. The North/West Division had (4,705) the North/East Division had (4,705) the Scotland Division had (3,747) and the Wales Division (825), while the London figures were again the better ones. Below are the figures for juveniles on the unemployment register, and the percentages nationally, for the North West, and for the South East. Between 1930 and 1935, the North/West Division had a higher juvenile unemployment rate than the South/East Division and nationally. These figures demonstrate the North West of England had a higher number of unemployed juveniles than other areas, as we shall again see below, but were not included in the Special Areas Scheme.

Date.	N/West	%	S/East	%	National	%
Jan 1930	11,204	7.6	3,158	4.6	45,490	5.2
July 1930	14,485	12.0	1,051	3.4	43,616	6.0
Jan 1931	15,698	14.1	4,162	7.3	49,485	8.7
July 1931	14,648	11.4	2,100	4.0	56,205	7.4
Jan 1932	12,138	8.5	4,069	7.1	58,966	7.4
Jul 1932	12,016	9.0	2,316	3.8	52,840	6.5
Jan 1933	12,378	9.0	4,890	8.0	61,922	7.8
July 1933	9,367	6.7	1,913	3.1	38,991	4.4
Jan 1934	11,090	7.5	3,867	5.4	52,115	5.7
July 1934	10,474	6.2	1,556	2.2	40,648	4.1
Jan 1935	14,555	7.9	4,909	5.9	70,692	6.2
July 1935	10,676	6.1	1,764	2.4	48,641	4.2

Table 6 Numbers of juveniles aged 14 and under 18 on the unemployment registers and the percentage of unemployed.

Source: Table produced by me from Ministry of Labour Gazettes, 1930-1935. Vols. 38-43.

The inadequacy of official statistics, and the government's reliance on estimates, opened the way for groups with their own agenda to manipulate figures for their own ends. In North-East Lancashire, there was a fear among cotton employers that any action to reduce juvenile unemployment by raising the school leaving age would deprive them of cheap labour. When the National Advisory Council for Juvenile Unemployment (England, Wales and Scotland) prepared a report (1929) for the Minister of Labour concerning the age of entry into the Unemployment Insurance scheme, when and if the school-leaving age was raised from fourteen to fifteen,²⁶ the Majority Report recommended that the age of entry to the employment insurance scheme be lowered from sixteen to fifteen if the school leaving age was to be raised to

²⁶ The National Advisory Councils for Juvenile Employment 2nd Report, Majority, November 1929.

fifteen. The Minority Report, by the employers' representatives disagreed. They supplied a table that they had compiled from figures in a memorandum furnished by the Ministry of Labour in 1928, which had examined the effect in the decline of the birth rate during World War One and concluded that it would reduce 'very materially' the numbers of juveniles available for employment between 1928 and 1936. Indeed, in the Ministry of Labour Gazette, June 1930, it was noted

The Gradual reduction, resulting from the falling birth-rate during the war, in the number of boys and girls between the ages of 14 and 18 available for employment continued to make itself felt during the year. The decrease during 1929, however, mainly affected the 14 year age-group....The distribution of unemployment amongst boys and girls varied widely according to locality...in areas such as Merseyside, Tyneside and the Lancashire cotton towns.²⁷

It was thought that the raising of the school-leaving age would have accentuated the shortage of cheap labour. The memorandum illustrated the extent to which the Ministry of Labour expected there to be a 'misdistribution' of juvenile labour which was not very mobile.²⁸ This table demonstrated that by 1931 there would be a shortage of 63,000 juveniles for jobs available.²⁹ In December 1931, by Minister of Labour estimates, there were 40,988 unemployed juveniles.³⁰ By 1934, the Minority Report argued, if the school leaving age was raised to fifteen there would be a shortage of 762,000 juveniles for available jobs.³¹ In December 1934, there were 43,839 unemployed juveniles.³² The employers' representatives were looking after the interests of employers by endeavouring to keep a large pool of cheap juvenile labour, and attempting to keep the school leaving age at fourteen which would keep costs down. If the school leaving age rose to fifteen and entry into the Unemployment Insurance went from sixteen to fifteen,

²⁷ Ministry of Labour Gazette, Vol.38, No 6, p.200.

²⁸ *Memorandum on the Shortage, Surplus and Redistribution During the Years 1928-1933, Based on the Views of Local Juvenile Unemployment Committees*, Ministry of Labour, May 1929.

²⁹ The National Advisory Councils for Juvenile Employment 2nd Report, Minority, November 1929, p.12

³⁰ Ministry of Labour, *Gazette*, December 1931.

³¹ Minority Report, p.12.

³² Ministry of Labour, *Gazette*, December 1934.

costs for employers would rise. This was particularly true in North-East Lancashire. When labour was scarce and wages high, employers searched for increased production by being more efficient. When labour was cheap and plentiful, there was no need to economise by increasing productivity. Many school leavers continued to enter the cotton industry even when the industry was overcrowded. Fourteen year olds were cheaper to employ than sixteen year olds, and employers, struggling with export market losses, continued to employ juveniles when work was available.

The above mentioned Memorandum on Shortage, Surplus and Distribution, which supplied estimates which employers used to demonstrate a shortage of juvenile workers, was revised by the government in October 1934 after the 1931 census figures were examined. These figures are shown below.

A. Reaching employable age

NOTE:

This table is included on page 59 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Table 7 Estimated numbers (thousands) of juveniles reaching the ages of 14, 15, 16 & 17 during the years specified.

Source: Ministry of Labour Gazette, October 1934, p.348.

A. Availability for employment

NOTE:

This table is included on page 60 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Table 8 Estimated numbers (Thousands) of juveniles likely to be available for employment in Britain at the end of years specified.

Source: Ministry of Labour Gazette, October 1934, p.348.

The above tables, although based on estimates, were more likely to be closer to the actual figures being based on census numbers, than those based on the above mentioned Memorandum on Shortage, Surplus and Distribution from 1929. These estimates were based on the assumption that of the total numbers in any age group, the proportions available for employment remained the same. Any alteration due to change in trade or general prosperity, or in the numbers of juveniles remaining at school after the age of fourteen would materially affect the figures. These figures were markedly different from the figures in the memorandum on the shortage, surplus and distribution, because of the government's use of estimates. They also demonstrate how easy it was for groups with an agenda, such as employers' groups; to make the figures say what they wanted by manipulating the figures.

As we have seen, one reform considered necessary was raising the school-leaving age and lowering the age juveniles could enter into the Unemployment Insurance scheme. The Report of the Consultative Committee of the Board of

Education on 'The Education of the Adolescent' (the Hadow Report) dated October 1926, had recommended increasing the school-leaving age to fifteen.³³ In July 1929, the Government announced its intention to promote legislation for raising the school-leaving age to fifteen as from April 1931.³⁴ The financial crisis in the autumn of 1931 led the Government to secure a reduction in expenditure on social services and education. The Bill failed and the President of the Board of Education, Sir Charles Philip Trevelyan, resigned. Raising the school-leaving age was, for many, mainly a question of improving education. Yet, others viewed the raising of the school leaving age in terms of its potential impact on unemployment. Jewkes and Winterbottom believed that in the Lancashire Industrial Survey Area alone, the raising of the school-leaving age would withdraw 60,000 juveniles from the labour market.³⁵ Garside, saw the economic crisis between the wars as the beginning of 'the manipulation of the school-leaving age for industrial rather than educational purposes...as a means not only of protecting the future employability of children, but also of providing some immediate relief to the growing number of jobless juveniles and adults'.³⁶ Support for a higher school leaving age as a weapon against unemployment increased as the unemployment rate rose. As seen above, the National Advisory Council's Majority Report recommended that the school leaving age be raised and that entry into the Unemployment Insurance scheme be lowered correspondingly. We have also seen that the Minority Report by employers' representatives disagreed. They made it clear that in their view, expenditure on social services, including education was 'more than double that in any country in the world', and industry could not afford extra taxes. Employers would also have to pay their share of unemployment insurance for fifteen year olds.³⁷ The Government accepted the Majority Report's recommendations, but as

³³ Board of Education Consultative Committee, 'The Education of the Adolescent', 1927.

³⁴ Jewkes and Winterbottom, *Juvenile Unemployment*, p.83.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p.133.

³⁶ WR Garside, 'Unemployment and the School Leaving Age in Interwar Britain', *International Review of Social History (Netherlands)* Vol. 26, (2) 1981, pp. 159-170 p.159.

³⁷ Brian Simon, *The Politics of Educational Reform* (London, 1974), p.165.

we have seen, the bill never became law. In 1932, the Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance recommended that the age of entry into insurance should be lowered to correspond with the school leaving age, which was to occur in September 1934.³⁸ The Ministry of Labour noted:

As from 3rd September 1934, the minimum age of entry into unemployment insurance, which had hitherto been 16 years, has been lowered, under the provisions of the Unemployment Insurance Act, 1934, to the age (not being less than fourteen years) at which the juvenile is no longer required by law to attend school. Every person who is required by the Unemployment Insurance Act to become an insured contributor is under an obligation to obtain an unemployment book.³⁹

Table 7 below gives a truer picture of unemployment among juveniles, relying on unemployment books issued rather than estimates. It also demonstrates that the North Western Division and the North Eastern Division, the complete north of the country had the worst juvenile unemployment with almost 33 per cent of the total unemployed juveniles for the country. The reason was because there were less job opportunities in these areas owing to loss of markets in staple industries.

NOTE:

This table is included on page 62 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Table 9 Unemployment Books Issued up to 29 September 1934, to boys and girls under 16 years of age.

Source: Minister of Labour Gazette, Vol. 42, No.10, p.350.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Ministry of Labour Gazette, Vol. 42, No.10, p.350.

The Government attempted to alleviate the problems juvenile unemployment brought until the hoped for recovery occurred. Juvenile Unemployment Centres, later Juvenile Instruction Centres (JICs) had been established by the Ministry of Labour in November 1918 to deal with juveniles who lost their jobs when war industries ran down at the end of the First World War. By 1929 and facing rising juvenile unemployment, the Ministry, on the advice of the National Advisory Council on Juvenile Unemployment for England and Wales, introduced a revised scheme for JICs.⁴⁰ In March 1930, the Advisory Council was asked by the Ministry of Labour to give special consideration to the position of the cotton area in and around Lancashire.⁴¹ The Juvenile Unemployment Committee reported in 1931, that in 1930 the number of centres rose from 78 to 116 and the total average attendance rose from 7,000 to 16,000.⁴² In 1931, the number of centres rose to 163, in 109 towns, with the average attendance rose to approximately 23,000 in September 1931, but declined to 17,800 by the end of the year because of 'the improved industrial situation.'⁴³ The JICs were meant to maintain morale and employability, but, as we will see did neither. The curriculum was a varied one in most areas; it was largely practical and designed to increase manual dexterity in keeping with process work. Juveniles were not trained for any specific occupation, though a certain amount of bias towards local industries was permitted. However, JICs could do nothing to provide or create jobs and did nothing to maintain employability. Social psychologist, Marie Jahoda (1907-2001) in 1980 believed such schemes were helpful, but offered neither economic independence, nor the means to achieve it. She further argued that, 'two psychological burdens that unemployment imposes, the undermining of status and identity' were perhaps intensified by attending these centres.⁴⁴ Garside argues that the juvenile unemployed were the only group for whom

⁴⁰ Pope, 'Dole Schools', p.26.

⁴¹ Ministry of Labour Gazette, Vol.39, No.12, p.458.

⁴² *Ibid.* p.459.

⁴³ *Ibid.* Vol.40. No.11, p.411.

⁴⁴ Marie, Jahoda, *Employment and Unemployment* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 30-31.

the Government attempted to provide more than just a cash payment.⁴⁵ The JICs only reached a small proportion of the intended recipients. For the young unemployed in North-East Lancashire the difficulty was with the criteria which had to be met before JICs would be supported. Cost was one criterion. Grants of seventy-five per cent of the costs to establish and maintain JICs were available yet the condition of the North-East Lancashire local authorities' finances made it difficult for them to support centres financially. The closure of the mills had reduced rate income and the changes in the Poor Law through the Local Government Act, 1929, had created added expense and made local authorities reluctant to establish centres without full grants. Another condition was that attendees were required to have been unemployed for twelve consecutive days. This created a dilemma, because much of the juvenile unemployment in the area was short-time work or being temporarily laid-off. The Ministry of Labour would not accept the cotton towns' demands for 100 per cent grants, but gave ground on the twelve consecutive days wholly unemployed clause in the regulations.⁴⁶

The two County Boroughs⁴⁷ in the area Blackburn and Burnley, both of which had high juvenile unemployment, were the first to open centres. Blackburn set up two centres, which catered for 200 juveniles in each, 150 of who came from nearby Darwen. The Lancashire Education Department arranged, where possible, for unemployed youth from their areas to attend centres in the County Boroughs of Blackburn or Burnley. These Centres were not fondly remembered in the Lancashire weaving area. Seabrook was told by an interviewee, Mrs. L, who was born in Blackburn in 1919, 'The dole school was just a gimmick really, to keep us off the streets'.⁴⁸ The perceived uselessness, concerning finding work, of the curriculum at the JICs was

⁴⁵ WR., Garside, 'Juvenile Unemployment and Public Policy Between the Wars', *Economic History Review (Great Britain)* Vol. 30, (2) 1977, pp 322-339, p.332.

⁴⁶ Pope, 'Dole Schools', pp. 26-27.

⁴⁷ County Boroughs were self governing towns independent of the county surrounding it. Blackburn and Burnley were the only two County Boroughs in North-East Lancashire.

⁴⁸ Seabrook, *City Close-up*, p.202.

another complaint from Mrs L. 'We trooped there, six miles, and we sat there all afternoon while the teacher, a woman, was talking about hygiene and things like that. How could that find us a job'?⁴⁹ For girls, there was instruction in needlework and mending, cooking and laundering among other things, while boys were given instruction in woodwork and joinery, arithmetic and games.⁵⁰

Only those in receipt of unemployment benefit were compelled to attend JICs. Table 10 below shows the Junior Instruction Centres in North East Lancashire, when they opened, and when they closed. It also shows how the Lancashire Education Authority made use of the facilities in the County Boroughs when they had none in their area. The table also shows how long the JICs were in operation: almost until the Second World War when that conflict would solve the unemployment problem.

Local Education Authority	Centre Location	Boys Opened	Boys Closed	Girls Opened	Girls Closed
Blackburn	Blackburn	September 1930	December 1937	September 1930	September 1937
Burnley	Burnley	October 1930	September 1937	October 1930	September 1937
Lancashire	Darwen Girls Only	Boys Attended Blackburn		1931-32	1937-38
Lancashire	Accrington	1930-31	1936-37	1931-32	1937-38
Lancashire	Nelson	1936-37	1937-38	1935-36	1937-38

Table 10 Junior Instruction Centres in North-East Lancashire.

Sources:

County Borough Blackburn Education Committee, *Annual Reports* 1930-1939.

County Borough Burnley Education Committee, *Annual Reports* 1930-1939.

Lancashire Education Committee, *Annual Reports* 1930-1939

Table Produced by me from the above sources.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Pope, 'Dole Schools', p.29.

Juvenile unemployment in Blackburn, 1929-1935: An Analysis.

This section will examine the Education Department records for juvenile unemployment in Blackburn for the years 1929 -1936. Blackburn reported their records in a different way from Burnley, and there seemed to be more minutiae which gave additional depth to the records. The reports provided information on the numbers of unemployed, the numbers of registrations as unemployed, re-registrations as unemployed, the numbers of unemployed youth on the register at the end of the month, and vacancies notified and vacancies filled. Following the above was an analysis of jobs entered, divided into boys and girls, followed by a table showing the employment of school children. Finally, claims for unemployment benefit were tabled showing new claims, repeat claims and 'live' claims at the end of the month. However, we must remember that only those registered were counted as unemployed. Many young people found work for themselves, usually in the mill, and more often than not through friends or relatives. In addition, the Committee held meetings with parents and children and advised on suitable occupations and continuing education. The Education Department also employed welfare officers who visited employers 'in respect of future vacancies.' What follow are the figures for the month of December for the years 1929 to 1936 from the County Borough Blackburn, Education Department, Juvenile Unemployment Sub-Committee Minutes.

Year	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935
Live register	111	645	408	353	304	773	541
Vacancies notified	62	21	105	40	61	92	112
Vacancies filled	59	18	105	35	59	90	108

Figure 11 Unemployment figures for December in the years 1929-1935.

Year	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935
Fresh Claims	170	127	57	56	35	69	38
Repeat Claims	217	387	117	192	162	110	75
Live Claims	294	962	139	193	89	84	107

Figure 12 Unemployment Insurance figures for December in the years 1929-1935.

Year	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935
Newspaper Delivery	137	170	121	144	142	157	176
Milk Delivery	31	25	16	21	24	23	27
Running Errands	69	51	42	58	59	38	47
Street Trading	1	1	2	--	--	--	--
Market Trading	4		1	1	--	--	--
Total	242	247	182	224	225	218	250

Figure 13 Employment of Schoolchildren for December in the years 1929-1935

Source. All the above tables were produced by me from the County Borough of Blackburn, Education Department, Juvenile Unemployment Sub-Committee, 1929-1936

In the figures for 1929, we see the beginning of a rise those seeking jobs and a fall in jobs available, with only 62 vacancies for 111 unemployed youngsters. When we look at the jobs obtained by boys, there was only one apprenticeship. It is interesting to note that five girls and five boys obtained work in textiles despite the mills closing and four girls in domestic service, despite the antipathy towards 'being in service'. The

employment of schoolchildren was regulated, with children needing permits from the education department to work, however, Woodruff noted in his autobiography when he obtained a newspaper delivery job. 'I was a year below the minimum age, but...no one enforced the law. They paid me the princely sum of two shillings and six pence a week, of which I kept sixpence. Mother took the rest. That was my contribution to help pay for the house'. When Woodruff reached the age of fourteen, he obtained a job as a shop assistant and delivery boy. He wrote the shopkeeper 'took me on at ten shillings a week. Of the sum I received tenpence from my parents. The rest was needed at home'. He further noted that the ten shillings he earned 'were the only earnings coming into our house. The rest of the family had been...waiting for work for ages'.⁵¹ Newspaper delivery was the most popular job, and is still in the 2008, a way to earn pocket money. It is interesting to note that while the figure for unemployed juveniles was 111, the number of unemployed juveniles claiming unemployment insurance was 294.

The figures for 1930 show a dramatic increase in the number of unemployed juveniles. The numbers on the live register increased from 111 to 645, with only 21 vacancies. The number of schoolchildren working rose from 231 to 242. Again, there was only 1 apprenticeship, as a butcher. Cable messengers, Christmas card workers, messengers and household helps, were all jobs with few prospects, while the numbers of unemployed juveniles rose from 294 to 962. The numbers of visits by welfare officers to prospective employers rose from 41 to 109 but did not translate into more jobs.

Figures for 1931, while showing a decrease in numbers on the live register from 645 to 408, show an increase in the number of vacancies from 21 to 105. There were four apprenticeships for boys, a mechanic, a signwriter, an electrician and an engineer, and four apprenticeships for girls as confectioners. Again we see juveniles going into the mill and girls going into domestic service. The numbers of employed schoolchildren fell from 242 to 182. Claimants for unemployment benefit were 139 compared to 962 in

⁵¹ Woodruff, *Nab End*, pp. 287, 298, 317

1930. The likely cause was the twenty-six weeks limit for unemployment benefit when the unemployed person received transitional payments instead.

Figures for 1932 again show a reduction in the numbers of juveniles on the live register from 408 to 353 while the numbers of vacancies fell from 105 to 40 while the numbers of claimants for unemployment insurance rose from 139 to 193. The job placements had the same combination of jobs as before, some apprenticeships, some textile jobs, some domestic service jobs and some 'blind-alley' jobs. Nevertheless, 1932 was the worst year for unemployment in the area and even 'blind-alley' jobs were better than no job at all.

In 1933, the numbers of unemployed juveniles show a reduction from 353 to 304, and the vacancies rose from 51 to 69. Some of the money earned by these children went towards family expenses, as we heard from Woodruff. The number receiving unemployment insurance decreased from 193 to 89. We again see young people entering the textile workforce and into domestic service, with 'blind-alley' jobs like bill distributors, cafe helpers and farm boys. There were three apprenticeships taken, but shop assistants followed by domestic service were the jobs most offered and taken.

The figures for 1934 show an increase in unemployed juveniles from the previous year, from 304 to 773 with an increase in vacancies from 61 to 92. Employment of schoolchildren was similar, 225 to 218. The numbers claiming unemployment insurance fell from 89 to 84. There was a greater variety of jobs obtained in 1934, including 8 apprenticeships, quite possibly because the trade depression was lifting, on the other hand shop assistants, textile workers and domestic servants were the jobs most taken. There were also several 'assistants', labourers and general helps. Many of these young people would have 'gone into cotton', but with the

mills closing, they could not do this and took any work available, even though there were no prospects for long-term employment.

The figures for 1935 were no more promising than in previous years. The numbers on the live register fell from 773 to 541, and vacancies rose from 92 to 112. The numbers of schoolchildren working rose from 218 to 250, and claims for unemployment insurance rose from 84 to 107. The positions obtained were also a mixture of jobs from those with prospects to those which would only last a short time. The number of textile positions taken increased, as did jobs in domestic service and shop assistants. There were several apprenticeships, but it should be noted that apprenticeships were not offered, not because the employers did not realise the importance of apprenticeships, but because there were none available. There were some clerical jobs, none of which was well paid, but at least offered prospects. Warehouse boys or machine boys did not seem to offer the prospect of lifetime careers; neither did dismantlers, cinema attendants or boxmakers. In addition, three of the jobs were temporary, but in a time of economic crisis they were better than no job at all.

As mentioned above, only those registered were counted as unemployed. What the figures below show are the numbers of registered unemployed young people and the numbers of job vacancies. The prospects were not hopeful.

Date	Number of unemployed	Vacancies notified.
December 1929	111	62
December 1930	674	49
December 1931	408	105
December 1932	453	40
December 1933	304	61
December 1934	773	92
December 1935	541	112

Table 14 Numbers of Registered Unemployed and the Number of Vacancies in Blackburn 1929-1935

Source: Table generated by me from the County Borough Blackburn, Education Committee, Juvenile Unemployment Sub-Committee Minutes, 1929-1935.

As the above figures show, employment prospects for juveniles in the cotton towns of North-East Lancashire were grim. In the words of Woodruff, 'On juvenile employment in Blackburn in the early 1930s the answer is simple; there was none.'⁵² Young people were expected to work when they left school at fourteen, more than likely in the mill, to help with family finances. This tradition was the main reason the impact of juvenile unemployment in North-East Lancashire was particularly harsh. Escape through education was difficult. Secondary schools, even with a scholarship, were expensive. Jean Shansky wrote of Lisa, whose headmaster wanted her to sit for a scholarship to secondary school. Lisa was excited and could not wait to tell her mother who promptly squashed her enthusiasm. 'Don't be daft Lisa' said her mother, 'Forget those big ideas, my lass. I want you in the mill earning some brass.'⁵³ There was no hope, wrote Woodruff, 'of becoming apprentice to a plumber, or a carpenter, or a machinist, or a glazier, or a boilermaker, or a painter. They were all looking for work themselves. People were fighting over pick and shovel jobs.' He mentioned his sister, Brenda, who 'topped the state examinations for eleven year olds in the country.' She won a scholarship to a Grammar School in Preston, which provided everything Brenda would need, 'uniforms, stockings, books and pencils, train fares even,' except for shoes. She only had clogs and the family could not afford shoes. She could not go. 'What use is there in this learning when she could be doing some real work', said Woodruff's father. William Woodruff ended his academic career as a Professor of Economic History.⁵⁴ Woodruff was born in 1916, attended St Peter's and St. Philip's schools in Mill Hill and Griffin, Blackburn, left at 13, worked locally as a grocer's boy, then as a labourer in a Darwen brick-works. He went to London and worked two years as a 'sand rat' in an

⁵² Personal correspondence with author, 10 June 2004.

⁵³ Shansky, Jean, M., *Poverty in the 1930s* (Preston, 1995), p.97.

⁵⁴ Woodruff, *Nab End* p.346.

iron foundry. At night school he discovered a love of learning. He gained a scholarship to Oxford and embarked on a distinguished career as a historian and writer.⁵⁵

What employment was available?

We have seen that there were some jobs available, but were mostly 'blind alley' jobs with no prospects. When juveniles obtained employment in the retail trade, many worked very long hours for a small wage. John and Sylvia Jewkes gave several examples. 'PA dismissed as "too old" at the age of fifteen and a half years'. Or DR (Girl): 'working in bakery fifty hours a week at two shillings and six pence a week. Asked for an increase in the middle of 1935 and this was refused'. Or, 'AM (girl): working eight am to eight pm in a shirt factory at age of fourteen years', or 'AS (Girl) works twelve hours a day, sixty-six hours a week as a packer in a bakery'.⁵⁶ These young people were desperate for work and were exploited when they did find it. However, in January 1935, the Blackburn Juvenile Unemployment Sub-Committee made a resolution:

That this Committee considers that the maximum number of hours of employment for juveniles between 14 and 18 years of age, as permitted by the Factory and Workshop Act, is excessive and urges the Government to take such action as would bring them into conformity with those permitted by the Shops Act, 1934.⁵⁷

This resolution is evidence that the local authorities were concerned about the young people in their community, and demonstrates the local government's responses to juvenile unemployment.

Not all juvenile's stories were negative. Some people interviewed for the North West Sound Archives, or interviewed on my behalf, gave positive stories. Arthur Worrall, born in Burnley in 1912, was never unemployed in all his working life. His father, who returned from World War One an alcoholic, got him an apprenticeship as

⁵⁵ Cotton Town Digitization Project.

⁵⁶ Jewkes, J., & Jewkes S., *The Juvenile Labour Market* (London, 1938) pp.36-41.

⁵⁷ Blackburn *Juvenile Unemployment Sub-Committee Minutes*, 22 January 1935.

an electrician in September 1926. He said 'I earned ten shillings a week, paid three shilling a week for tram fares and gave my mother six shillings a week'. He saved and bought a bicycle for ten shillings and has never been without transport since.⁵⁸ Or LJ, born Blackburn in 1915, who began her working life as a kitchen maid for five shillings a week with meals, but was taught how to cook and worked as a cook all her working life.⁵⁹ However, the negative stories outweigh the positive ones, and most of the other people interviewed, either for me or those interviewed by the North West Sound Archives, eventually worked in the mill when they re-opened, while a great majority of juveniles were unemployed or exploited.

Not only did lack of work create financial strain, it also threatened the social fabric. Labour transference, whereby unemployed workers were transferred to other areas where jobs might have been available, was attractive to the Government. However, Garside, in 1977, saw special difficulties with labour transference of juveniles. He argues that many transferees under eighteen 'found themselves in areas with appreciable levels of unemployment, or regarded merely as cheap labour.'⁶⁰ These young people would have to leave their homes to go into a new area, go into a job which would be low paid and live alone. Most of their parents would have been unemployed also and thus unable to support them financially, leaving them vulnerable to homelessness or exploitation. The scheme of juvenile transference was established in 1928, and the project received assistance from the Lord Mayors Fund. By July 1934, the fund was almost empty. Between 1928 and the time the fund was almost empty, the fund had provided assistance to 3,538 boys and 422 girls, for periods varying from a few weeks to the maximum of two years.⁶¹ The 1930 Report on the work of Local Committees for Juvenile Unemployment noted that there was little overseas migration of juveniles, 'partly owing to the apathy of juveniles and their parents'. Efforts to

⁵⁸ Arthur Worrall, 1998.0001, North West Sound Archives, Clitheroe Castle, Lancashire.

⁵⁹ LJ, interviewed August 2005. Transcript in author's possession.

⁶⁰ Garside, 'Juvenile Unemployment', p.334.

⁶¹ Ministry of Labour *Gazette* Vol.43, No.10, p.370.

overcome 'this inertia', even in the depressed areas, met with 'very little response'.⁶²

The Report for 1931 noted that from the beginning of the Transference from the Distressed Areas Scheme in 1928 up to 26 December 1931, 6,643 boys and 5,688 girls had been transferred from the distressed areas to more prosperous districts. The boys went into a 'great variety of occupations', the girls 'nearly all into domestic service'. However, it was noted that 'many Committees still found difficulty in filling such situations.' The numbers transferred in 1931 were 868 boys and 1,986 girls. This showed a decrease in boys transferring, but the number of girls transferring increased. Approximately 46 per cent of the boys and girls transferred up to the end of 1931 were from Wales, and 39 per cent from the North-East.⁶³ Woodruff, while not officially a transferee, left his Blackburn home to look for work in London. He found a job in a foundry and a shared room and a shared bed in a 'filthy tenement' for fifteen shillings a week.⁶⁴ He never returned to live in Blackburn.

The young unemployed in the North-East Lancashire cotton textile region had grown up in an area dependent upon one main industry. If one's parents did not work in cotton, then it was likely that one's relatives did, or were dependent on cotton one way or another. Juveniles entered the cotton industry not because it offered a career; they entered, when they could, because there were no alternatives. Apart from work in the mill, a young woman could do little. In the Blackburn district, 26.9 per cent of women under the age of twenty-one were estimated to have been unemployed, while the estimate for youths under the age of twenty-one who were unemployed, was 21.8 per cent.⁶⁵ Brockway, as early as 1932, wrote of a union official telling him, 'Look at these villages. For generations the life of the population has centred on the mill....the mill has been the very existence of the place....now it's closed....and the source of life has

⁶² Ministry of Labour *Gazette* Vol. 39, No. 12, p.459.

⁶³ Ministry of Labour *Gazette* Vol.40, No. 11, p.411. Under the age of 18, juveniles were boys and girls. Between 18 and 21, they were young people.

⁶⁴ Woodruff, *Road to Nab End*, pp. 8-10.

⁶⁵ Pope, *Unemployment and the Lancashire Weaving Area*, p.35.

suddenly dropped from the whole community'.⁶⁶ The same thing was obvious in Marienthal, a village in Austria which was subjected to a systematic psychological study in 1930. This village was dependent on one industry, a flax mill, and when the mill closed in the late 1929, most of the villagers became unemployed. The study showed that, 'prolonged unemployment led to a state of apathy in which the victims do not utilise any longer even the few opportunities left to them'.⁶⁷ Marienthal had a population of 1,486, while in North-East Lancashire, 64,860 were unemployed. The contraction of the cotton industry was a massive trauma for the whole community, but especially for the young. Work was a rite of passage to adulthood and unemployment, especially of this magnitude, denied them their initiation into that world. A job gave one an occupational identity, self esteem and one's place in society. Blackburn Education Department's Juvenile Unemployment Sub-Committee was aware of psychological problems as early as 1932, when the Sub-Committee became a member of the National Institute of Industrial Psychology.⁶⁸ As juvenile unemployment was almost ignored by contemporary social commentators, it was also ignored by psychologists. Adrian Furnham, in 1983, wrote, 'Since Psychological research in the 1930s, particularly Jahoda, Lazarfeld and Zeisel in 1933, and Eisenberg and Lazarfeld in 1938,⁶⁹ very little systematic research has been done in this area by social psychologists despite its social relevance'.⁷⁰ Jahoda, who first addressed the psychological problem of unemployment in 1933, stressed, in 1979, that studies of the impact of unemployment on juveniles, 'showed that even for those age groups normally the most resistant to depression....resignation and restriction of ambition and desires

⁶⁶ Brockway, Fenner, *Hungry England* (London, 1932), pp.10-11.

⁶⁷ Jahoda, M., Lazarfeld, P.F., Zeisel, H., *Marienthal the Sociography of an Unemployed Community* 1933, [English Translation 1972] (Tavistock, 1972), pvii.

⁶⁸ Blackburn Education Department, Juvenile Unemployment Sub-Committee Minutes. December 1932.

⁶⁹ Jahoda et al, *Marienthal*, 1933. Eisenberg, P., & Lazarfeld, P., 'The psychological Effects of Unemployment' *Psychological Bulletin*, 1938, 35, pp.358-390.

⁷⁰ Furnham, Adrian, 'Attitudes towards the Unemployed Receiving Social Security Benefits,' *Human Relations*, Vol.36, 2 November 1983, pp.135-150, p.135-36.

were the rule'.⁷¹ She also stressed, that many in the 1930s worried that unemployment would become a way of life. Or that, 'mass unemployment would lead to organised revolution....Studies clearly showed resignation as the major response'.⁷² Andrew Donovan and Michael Oddy, in an investigation into the psychological aspects of unemployment, in 1982, found unemployed juveniles more depressed and anxious, less socially adjusted, and had lower self esteem than employed juveniles.⁷³ Although these are general studies and were not specific to North-East Lancashire in the 1930s, the comparisons are useful in determining the effects of unemployment on juveniles.

How much more damaging was unemployment to juveniles when the known order of things had disappeared? Instead of leaving school and going to work, for the rest of one's working life, they either worked until they were sixteen and too expensive to employ, or they were unemployed. The present day safety net of social security payments did not exist. The National Advisory Council's Minority Report, again looking out for employers' interests, argued that juveniles would, 'lose self respect and become demoralised' if they received any benefit.⁷⁴ FW, who left school in 1933 aged fourteen, was unemployed until he joined the army in 1938. He said, 'I tried to get work everywhere, but there was nothing. I went to the 'dole school', but it was a waste of time. When I joined up, I felt like I was worth nothing, but in the army I got fed well and they taught me to drive. I was that proud. It was the first time I'd had anything to be proud of'.⁷⁵ LS, was out of work for two years until she was lucky to find a cleaning job.⁷⁶ This enforced idleness suffered by thousands of juveniles in the North-East Lancashire cotton textile district could, according to Cole, 'cause serious disquiet...for if a worker fails to learn a trade properly when he/she is young, the loss is his/hers, and

⁷¹ Jahoda, Marie, 'The Impact of Unemployment in the 1930s and 1970s,' *Bulletin of the British Psychological Society*, (1979) 32, pp.309-314, p.309.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Donovan, A., & Oddy, M., 'Psychological aspects of unemployment: an investigation into the emotional and social adjustment of school leavers,' *Journal of Adolescence*, 1982, 5, pp15-30, p.24.

⁷⁴ Juvenile Unemployment, Minority Report, p.14.

⁷⁵ FW., 1988.126, North West Sound Archives, Clitheroe Castle, Lancashire.

⁷⁶ LS., Interviewed May 2002. Transcript in author's possession.

the nation's for the rest of his/her life'.⁷⁷ At a time when juveniles should have been gaining employment experience or furthering their education, they were obliged to stay at home. However, Woodruff noted:

Some of my best days in Blackburn, before I got the job at Darwen Brick Works, were those when I was unemployed. Provided I got something to eat, I could wander about all day. I didn't have to get back for anybody.⁷⁸

The countryside in North East Lancashire is officially designated 'an area of outstanding natural beauty' and the places Woodruff visited are still popular with the population, not only of North East Lancashire, but also of Britain. As we have seen, Woodruff went to London to look for work, and found a job in an iron foundry.

The unemployed in the early 1930s had little political influence and the juvenile unemployed had none. We know the Government was aware of the extent of juvenile unemployment even though there were no hard statistics, only estimates because no records were kept and that it was also aware of the contraction of the cotton textile industry in North-East Lancashire and the high numbers of young people attempting to enter an already overcrowded industry. The reintroduction of Juvenile Instruction Centres, first established in 1918, was the Government's attempt to maintain employability in young people. These Centres were established with an eye on the cost, with little relevance to training for employment and were consequently unsuccessful. They did, however, keep the young unemployed 'off the streets'. However, only those registered as unemployed could attend. Many, including Jewkes and Winterbottom,⁷⁹ considered that raising the school leaving age from fourteen to fifteen would help in removing thousands of young people from the job market. That and lowering the age of entry into the Unemployment Insurance scheme to fifteen

⁷⁷ Cole *Condition of Britain*, p.228.

⁷⁸ Woodruff, *Nab End*, p.359.

⁷⁹ Jewkes and Winterbottom, *Juvenile Unemployment*, p. 57.

would, in the eyes of many, have been useful for combating juvenile unemployment. The financial crises and the Government's push for expenditure reduction led to the issue being shelved. The pressure from employers' groups was significant in many financial decisions, education finance reductions such as restricting the building of new schools, among them. Employers needed a large pool of cheap labour, and keeping young people in school an extra year would make the pool smaller. The cotton industry was the main industry where school leavers traditionally went to work, unless they could get apprenticeships or got on to further education. The area had depended on cotton textiles for well over a hundred and fifty years and the industry was diminishing rapidly. Certainties were disappearing to be replaced by an unpredictability that would affect the area for decades to come.

CHAPTER THREE

POVERTY AND DEPRIVATION

No matter what reasons Mr Peek gave for his coming down in the world, most of which I failed to understand, his talk of being poor baffled me. By our standards, he was well-off.¹

Mr Peek had been a mill owner who had gone bankrupt. To Mr Peek, Livingstone Road was a slum (in fact it was, and still is, a well-off part of Blackburn) when he was used to a large house in its own grounds, while to the Woodruffs it was several rungs up the class ladder. Poverty is defined relative to the standards of living in a society at a specific time. People live in poverty when they are denied an income sufficient for their material needs and when these circumstances exclude them from taking part in activities which are an accepted part of daily life in that society. The poor, employed and unemployed did not have enough to eat, they did not have enough money to clothe themselves and their families, and did not have enough of anything to keep them healthy. That was the extent of poverty in the cotton textile areas of North-East Lancashire, and in this chapter I will set forth the effects of that poverty. For the long-term unemployed in North-East Lancashire poverty was a cumulative process. With short-term unemployment, savings and credit would be available, and replacement of clothes and household items deferred. Long-term or recurring unemployment depleted savings and made obtaining credit more difficult. Unemployment benefit or Public Assistance did not cover the cost of replacing clothing, household items, or buying fuel for heating and cooking, making the unemployed sensitive to the slightest variation in the cost of living. The loss of a shilling from unemployment benefit would almost be catastrophic to a dependent family. The main causes of poverty were unemployment, low wages, sickness or death of the main breadwinner, old age, low levels of relief

¹ Woodruff, *Nab End*, p.272.

available from the national health inadequate state pensions and large families. Since unemployment was a major cause of poverty, it follows that poverty was greater in depressed regions, in the North and West regions of England and Wales. This reversed the pattern of the nineteenth century and the Industrial Revolution, when these areas were the runaway growth areas of the country.

One can talk and write about poverty and never quite understand the kind of poverty suffered in the areas affected by high unemployment in the 1930s. In this chapter, I will use audio tapes from the North West Sound Archives, a collection of oral history recordings made by people who lived in North East Lancashire in the 1930s and knew first-hand what life was like then: people who lived with the poverty and unemployment, people who went to school in the North West and people who worked in the mills when they reopened. In addition, I have transcripts of interviews conducted on my behalf in Blackburn, Lancashire in 2002 and 2005, and I will use these in this chapter. The people who were interviewed lived in the area I will examine and all suffered to some degree from unemployment and poverty during the early 1930s. I will demonstrate why poverty persisted and that the Government had no meaningful measures to alleviate it. I will enumerate allowances given to the unemployed when their Unemployment Insurance Benefit ran out. These allowances were 'generous' according to some economic historians, and 'paltry' according to socialist commentators.

The appraisals and impressions of the 1930s were either highly optimistic government reports which denied poverty was a problem, or observers who tried their utmost to prove that it was. The 1933, Save the Children Fund report, *Unemployment and the Child*,² took the Government to task for the use of 'unsafe statistics' which were used by its Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health in his *Annual Reports*. For example, the report noted,

² Save the Children Fund, *Unemployment and the Child* (London, 1933).

Anyone who takes pains to read between the lines will find more than sufficient indication that in a country of which the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health [Sir George Newman] could say, only a few months ago, that 'there appears to be no measurable sign of impairment of the physique of children and nothing to show as yet that their health has been lowered'. The nation must not be lulled into a false sense of security and virtue because, taken as a whole the standard of public health and of the nutrition of its children has shown only a small decline during these years of stress. According to Sir George Newman's latest annual report on the health of the school child (1931) the incidence of malnutrition per 1000 inspections was 11.2 in 1931; in 1930, it was 10.6; five years earlier, in 1925, it was only 9.5. These ratios, it must be remembered are based on aggregate returns for the whole of England and Wales, so that allowing for the many cases in which a good nutritional standard is maintained, the incidence of malnutrition in the worst areas must obviously be much more severe than the average.³

The US stock market crash of 1929 had catastrophic effects worldwide. In Britain, the value of exports declined to nearly one half, and unemployment rose steeply reaching two and a half million unemployed by 1930,⁴ and the Unemployment Insurance Fund was in deficit, depending on Treasury loans to keep it afloat and avoid placing millions of unemployed persons and their dependants on Poor Relief. The Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, appointed an Economic Advisory Council, which included John Maynard Keynes, who advised the Prime Minister that large-scale public works were called for. However, orthodox financial advice was in favour of cuts in public spending, and this was the path Philip Snowden, Chancellor of the Exchequer, preferred. These cuts however, would mean reductions in social services, including unemployment benefits. Snowden put pressure on his cabinet colleagues to accept these cuts but this was unacceptable to many Labour MPs. Meanwhile, MacDonald had set up Commissions and Committees to investigate Britain's economic woes, and in May 1931 a Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance reported and recommended reductions of up to thirty per cent in benefits.⁵ In July, the all-party May Commission recommended a twenty per cent benefit cut. Keynes called the May

³ Save the Children Fund, *Unemployment and the Child*, pp. 124-126.

⁴ Pierce, Robert, *Britain: Domestic Policies 1918-39*, p.73.

⁵ *Ibid.* p.77.

Report 'the most foolish document I ever had the misfortune to read'.⁶ The Report coincided with a severe balance of payments crisis which forced the Government to take action. Snowden, the Chancellor and an orthodox financial thinker, insisted that retrenchment was vital. Unless there was a ten per cent cut in benefits, the budget could not be balanced. The final vote in cabinet was 11 to 9 in favour of the package of cuts to expenditure; however, this divided the Government in such a way that MacDonald felt he had to resign. On 24 August 1931, he offered his resignation to the King and was persuaded to lead a coalition National Government. This National Government endorsed the May Committee's findings, and among other measures, cut ten per cent off the rate of benefits. From 1 October 1931, when the *National Economy Act, 1931*, came into being, those who had used up their entitlements from the Unemployment Insurance Fund would receive further 'transitional' payments through the local Public Assistance Committee (PAC) after a household means test. This will be examined later in the chapter. Below are the amounts of unemployment benefits, before and after the ten per cent cut in benefits.

NOTE:

This table is included on page 82 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Table 15. Unemployment Insurance. Ten per cent reductions.

Source: Ministry of Labour Gazette, Vol.39, 1931, p. 73.

The Government response to the economic disadvantage caused by unemployment was to marginalise and demonize the poor. In 1929, the Labour Government set up a Committee to investigate the 'genuinely seeking work' clause in

⁶ *Ibid.*

the Determination of Claims Paper in 1929, which was increasingly being criticised.⁷ The Committee, which reported in October 1929, could not agree. Employers' representatives on the Committee demanded proof that the applicants had searched for work, even when there was none, but the rest of the Committee thought that allowances should only be stopped by refusal to accept any suitable employment.⁸ These recommendations were incorporated into the 1930 Unemployment Act. According to Snowden, in his autobiography, this Act was labelled by Sir Anthony Steele-Maitland, an 'endowment of the workshy' and by Snowden as 'insurance against revolution'.⁹ In fact, what Steele-Maitland called it was:

A Bill for the enrichment of people whom the Attorney-General calls "work shy." It is a Bill for the enrichment of people who are not deserving, at the expense of others.

While Snowden, said:

As I have said, the Bill is necessary. It gives moderately increased benefit....and it will redress a grievance which has been most keenly felt by hundreds and thousands, indeed millions of men among the most honest and hard working of our population.¹⁰

Many subscribed to the myth of 'dole abuse.' Conservative Members of Parliament, including Vicountess Astor, who used the words 'benefit abuse', Viscount Lynton who called the Bill for Unemployment Insurance 'a Bill for the stabilisation of idleness, and Sir Anthony Steele-Maitland, who said, 'the workshy ought not to get benefit.'¹¹ Between 1921 and 1931, three million people lost their benefit through 'genuinely seeking work' disallowances. Several changes were made to social policy when the National Government took office in 1931. This government was formed as a temporary measure in an extreme financial emergency. Snowden, who continued as Chancellor of the Exchequer made economies in government expenditure. Benefits were reduced by

⁷ Parliamentary Papers, *Proceedings and Evidence for the Determination of Claims for Unemployment Insurance Benefit, 1929*, Cmd. 3415.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Snowden, Philip, *An Autobiography* 2 Vols. Vol. 2, 1919-1934, p.847.

¹⁰ Hansard, *House of Commons Debates* Unemployment Insurance (No.2) Bill. December 1929.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 789

ten per cent and income tax was raised and the budget balanced. MacDonald was pressured by the Conservatives to hold a General Election and an election was held on 27 October 1931. MacDonald was still Prime Minister, but the Labour Party was soundly beaten. Snowden was moved to the House of Lords and Neville Chamberlain succeeded him as Chancellor of the Exchequer

The Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance, in its final report, suggested decentralisation of unemployment relief. While under the nominal control of the Ministry of Labour, real control for unemployment relief rested with local authorities. Fredric Miller, in 1974, considered that the relief for the long-term unemployed 'was based on shifting administrative, financial, and political considerations and theories that change from each season.'¹² Neville Chamberlain, Chancellor of the Exchequer between 1931 and 1937, proposed the establishment of a national authority, independent of Parliament, to relieve the unemployed, and all the able-bodied on out-relief. It was almost, according to Miller, as if he were trying to nationalise the Poor Law and 'create a twentieth-century pauper class.'¹³ Chamberlain wished to control Public Assistance Committees and to distinguish between the long-term and short-term unemployed. The 1934 Unemployment Act reflected on the need for that, and the reorganisation of unemployment relief. Part I of the Act intended to put the Unemployment Insurance Scheme on a sounder footing, and established a supervisory body which dealt with short-term unemployment, restored the benefit cuts of 1931 and increased dependents' allowances. Part II of the Act, however, created the Unemployment Assistance Board, the brainchild of Chamberlain. The Board would take responsibility for the long-term unemployed who had run out of benefit. The Board would replace local PACs, which were familiar with local conditions, and act as a body

¹² Miller Fredric, 'Nation Assistance or Unemployment Assistance? The British Cabinet and Relief Policy, 1932-33, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 9:2 (1974: April) 163-184, p.174.

¹³ *Ibid.*

to operate a means tested system of benefits.¹⁴ The Unemployment Act of 1934 caused massive protest demonstrations in Wales, Scotland and Northern England and created what Michael Foot described as 'the biggest explosion of popular anger in the whole interwar period, second only to the General Strike itself.'¹⁵ Matt Perry, in 2000 concurred: 'Resistance to the Unemployment Assistance Board was the high point of unemployed protest for the whole interwar period.'¹⁶ Miller noted that the protests began in the South Wales coalfields with fifty thousand people demonstrating against the cuts in benefits. These protests triggered demonstrations in West Cumberland, Northern England, including Blackburn, and in Scotland. Miller argues that the main cause of the crisis was 'sudden and unexpected reductions in tens of thousands of weekly payments,' and he wrote: 'To an extent now difficult to imagine, the Government had simply not known what working class rents were like.'¹⁷ What the Government had tried to do, by using the Unemployment Assistance Board, was to establish a national scale to replace the disparities between the local scales of the PACs. Although the Government claimed the new scales would increase payments to most, it caused hundreds of thousands of reductions, most of them in areas of high long-term unemployment. The Government was bewildered by the protests particularly the all party protests in the House of Commons, and ordered the 'supposedly independent Unemployment Assistance Board to pay either its new scale or the old PAC benefit, whichever was higher.'¹⁸ The Act had come into effect in January 1935, and was to all intents and purposes changed in February 1935.

The prevailing ideology of the 1930s was one of financial orthodoxy. The recurring themes in the media were excessive expenditure on welfare and dole

¹⁴ Laybourn, *Britain on the Breadline*, p.26-27.

¹⁵ Foot, Michael, *Aneurin Bevin: A Biography, 1914-1945* (London, 1962), p.201.

¹⁶ Perry, *Bread and Work*, p.44.

¹⁷ Miller, Fredric, 'The British Employment Assistance Crisis of 1935,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.14, No.2, (1979), pp.329-352, pp.337-338

¹⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 329-30

abuse and were prime reasons why poverty was allowed to create a devastating impact on a large section of the population. According to Perry:

Much of the information available to journalists came from government sources through regular statistics or official reports. The British ruling class, by virtue of its immense patronage and its ownership of the newspapers and film industry, was able to exert its considerable power on the recurrent themes of national solidarity, selective sympathy, paternalistic charity, dole abuse and excessive unemployment expenditure.¹⁹

The Government was unsure of the cause of, or the cure for long-term unemployment or the Depression, and their solution was to cut public spending drastically, which only made a bad situation even worse. The Government believed they needed to protect the taxpayers and ratepayers from the left-wing socialist proclivities of people like the Labour Councillors of Poplar in the East End of London,²⁰ and writers like Hannington, Brockway and Hutt, to name a few who supported them. Charles Webster, in 1985, wrote that most of the forward-looking welfare services seized upon by some historians:

Were not available until the economic upturn preceding the Second World War. For the major part of the inter-war period the emphasis was on retrenchment and rigid control of unavoidable commitments to development. Thus such important initiatives as extensive local authority investment in schools, clinics and health centres, local midwifery services, the school milk scheme, or even government investment in physical recreation, or officially sponsored investigation into malnutrition, belong to the late thirties, while universally available school meals and many other advances awaited the Second World War.²¹

The *Local Government Act, 1929*,²² altered the administration of the Poor Law and changed it from being a deterrent to seeking assistance, into a much more constructive

¹⁹ Perry, *Bread and Work*, pp. 62-3

²⁰ These Councillors were sent to jail for overspending up to £100,000 per year on council wages and for paying 'excess poor relief' to striking dock workers. From 1920, Poplar Council paid a minimum wage of £4 a week to its employees, whose previous wage had been £1.10.0d a week. It introduced equal pay for women, who saw a wage rise of 70 per cent. Writs were served on 30 councillors, twenty four male and six female, who were jailed. They were released after six weeks.

²¹ Webster, Charles, 'Health, Welfare and Unemployment,' *Past and Present*, 109, (1985), pp.204-230, p213.

²² The Local Government Act, 1929, [19 Geo. 5 c 17].

approach to the needy. It was under the nominal control of the Public Assistance Committee of local authorities, who were answerable to the Ministry of Health. There were rules concerning the amount paid to those on benefits; however some local authorities, like Blackburn and Nelson, were considered generous in their allowances as we shall see below. It did, however, give the Government more control over allowances than it had previously. This Act will be examined extensively in Chapter Five.

Meanwhile, let us see what unemployment benefits meant in the light of the depression. Unemployment Insurance had not been designed for long-term unemployment, but to enable workers to survive a short period of unemployment, in the traditional 'boom and bust' cyclical unemployment of industrialisation. It had been assumed that benefit recipients would be able to supplement their benefits with their savings, or with the assistance of their families. Gradually, with the onset of high unemployment, the government was forced by circumstances to accept that 'benefits had to suffice...for bare maintenance without supplements from other sources.'²³ Below are the average wages in Britain and the unemployment rates. These figures demonstrate how the depression was worse in 1931-33. The ten per cent reduction in benefits meant that while in 1930, a man with a dependent wife and two children would receive one pound ten shillings, after the cuts, the same man would receive one pound seven shillings and three pence

²³ Cole & Cole, *The Condition of Britain*, p.191-2

NOTE:

This table is included on page 88 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Table 16 Wages Benefits and Unemployment Rates Great Britain, 1930-1936.

Wages (adult males) Benefits (for family of four).

Source: Barry Eichengreen, 'Unemployment in Interwar Britain', 'Refresh', 8, Spring 1989, p.4.

Sir Ben Turner (1868-1942), a trade unionist and politician put these cuts into context when he listed the following in a Parliamentary debate.

Twenty seven shillings and three pence means ten shillings for rent and rates, the average for provincial towns, eighty-four meals per week for a family of four. Allowing three meals a day at two pence a meal per person, that comes to fourteen shillings...with rent...then coal, gas and other accessories of life out of the remaining three shillings....It puts them below the breadline straight away.²⁴

A limit of 156 days was set for the receipt of unemployment benefit before being removed from the Unemployment Insurance Scheme. The unemployed person would then receive Transitional Payments, financed by the Treasury but administered by the Public Assistance Committees (PAC) of the County and County Borough Councils. With the enactment of the 1929 Local Government Act, administration of the Poor Law was passed to those Councils. PACs were established to deal with out-relief (relief paid without the recipient entering the workhouse), and the Poor Law Institution, formerly the Workhouse. Three PACs were responsible for out-relief and the administration of the Transitional Payments in North-East Lancashire, Blackburn County Borough, Burnley County Borough and Lancashire County. The Transitional Payment was initially introduced in November 1931, and along with Poor Relief and Unemployment Assistance was subject to a 'determination of needs', a household means test, which

²⁴ Turner, Sir Ben, Hansard *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons, 5th Series, vol.259, cols. 238-40, September 1931.

aroused immense hostility. The harshness of the means test, and the Poor Law connotations associated with it, and the means tested Transitional Payments met with great hostility in North-East Lancashire.²⁵

The early onset of the trade depression in the weaving area meant that when Transitional Payment regulations were introduced, large numbers of unemployed were immediately affected and were required to claim Transitional Payments. In Blackburn County Borough, there were 14,000 claimants; in Burnley County Borough 10,000 claimants; in Division Five PAC District of Lancashire County, Church, Accrington, Darwen, Great Harwood and Clitheroe, 17,000; and in Division Six PAC of Lancashire County, Nelson, Colne, and Padiham, more than 8,500.²⁶ Below is a table of numbers of those ineligible for Transitional Payments for any reason between April 1930 and March 1933 the worst years of the industrial depression, and who were dependent upon public assistance.

	Blackburn PAC	Burnley PAC	Div. 5 County PAC
Apr-Sept 30	2,245	1,792	466
Oct-Mar. 31	2,370	1,787	486
Apr-Sept 31	2,408	1,598	474
Oct-Mar.32	2,833	1,909	478
Apr.-Sept 32	3,683	2,675	693
Oct-Mar33	4,656	2,546	766

Table 17 Mean numbers on out-relief April 1930-March 1933

Sources: Lancashire PAC Division 5 Guardians Committee Minutes, 1931-33.

Ministry of Labour Gazette, Vol.38, No.5-Vol.41, No 2.

Table generated by me from the above sources

Counties and County Boroughs differed in the levels of benefit they provided.

Blackburn, the largest County Borough in the weaving district, was considered by the Ministry of Labour to be 'thoroughly bad' because it had 'high Poor Law relief scales

²⁵ Pope, *Unemployment and the Lancashire Weaving Area*, p.55.

²⁶ Cotton Factory Times, 13 November 1931, Lancashire Public Assistance Committee Central Relief Sub-Committee minutes, 15 February 1932, Division 5 Guardians Committee Minutes, 2 March 1932.

and general allowances',²⁷ with the effect that the Ministry threatened to replace its PAC with a government Commissioner.²⁸ The Burnley PAC, while critical of Poor Law scales of payment and the means test, would, 'carry out the duties imposed rather than have those duties exercised by an appointee of the Ministry of Labour.'²⁹ Lancashire had to be made to acquiesce to the Transitional Payments regulations. As WG Eady, Principal Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Labour observed: 'Lancashire is the flashpoint in this country....A lot are looking at Lancashire, and if we show the white feather in Lancashire they will all go ahead'.³⁰ If the Government could not make Lancashire toe the line, then all other authorities could carry on with a liberal interpretation of the regulations. However, the Ministry of Labour eventually bullied the PACs into line and to follow the scale of allowances set by the government.

The initial hostility to the means test was replaced with deep resentment, not only toward some inspectors' vindictive or insensitive attitudes, but also toward the discrepancies in the way the means tests were administered. Fenner Brockway wrote, in 1932, of a member of a PAC in North-East Lancashire, who told him,

At first I felt I couldn't stand the experience. It was too terrible. In case after case, I knew that the allowance the Committee voted meant want and hunger....The Means Test is so cruel that I don't want to have anything to do with it, yet I know I've been able to get a few extra shillings for this family or that, and I feel for their sakes I ought to go on.³¹

The inspectors quite often did not feel the same way. Mean-spiritedness was apparent in the inspector who interviewed Ellen Thompson's employer and demanded to know if she received a midday meal. If she did, he would, he said, 'knock it off her husband's dole'. She apparently earned nine shillings a week, one shilling more than she was allowed, yet eleven shillings were deducted from her husband's Unemployment

²⁷ Pope, *Unemployment and the Lancashire Weaving Area*, p. 57.

²⁸ County Borough Blackburn, *PAC Minutes*, 9 November 1931.

²⁹ County Borough Burnley, *PAC Minutes*, 26 October 1931.

³⁰ *Blackburn Times*, 21 November 1931.

³¹ Brockway, *Hungry England*, p.26.

Assistance by the local PAC. Her employer told her, 'Never mind, I'll make it up to you' and proceeded to give her food to take home for the weekend.³² Jean Shansky wrote a young woman called Lisa who, with her husband was unemployed. In order to get unemployment benefit they had to prove to a man from 'The Means Testing Board' that they had no money in the bank: 'He asked to see our bank book. I don't think we knew what a bank book looked like, but he explained in his well cultured voice that if we did have any savings we would not be allowed to draw the dole.'³³ A B, born in 1914 in Blackburn, recalled his parents being forced to sell his mother's 'fancy china' and a harmonium which was 'dropping to bits' before receiving any benefit.³⁴ Bill Hitchen, born in 1918 at Preston, recalled his first job, in a factory labouring for 12 hours a day, for eight shillings a week. He had several jobs before deciding to go into business with his father selling vegetables and by the time he was fifteen he was earning a pound a day.³⁵ Many testimonies from the 1930s, all from the area being studied, relate how individuals, or their friends and relatives, tried to manage on the small amount of benefit they received, and how they had to cut back on nourishing food in order to provide enough filling food. Mrs Keen of Darwen, in 1935, spoke of making sacrifices: 'We can do without, but we can't see the children go wanting.'³⁶ L S, who was born in Blackburn in 1918, remembered that 'We didn't get a lot to eat, but Mam [sic] was a good provider. Dad went and pinched coal and my brother went down Pleasington [a beauty spot] at night and stole wood so we could keep warm'.³⁷ S Y, born in Blackburn in 1924, vividly remembered 'being hungry and my Mam [sic] crying because I couldn't get free dinners at school. She said it was if those women [the PAC] were paying for them [the dinners] themselves rather than the government'.³⁸ James Seaman, born in Preston in 1918 told Shansky about his family's diet. There were ten in the family, and

³² Jean Shansky, *Poverty in the 1930s* (Preston, 1995), p.104.

³³ *Ibid* p. 113.

³⁴ A B, Interviewed May 2002. Transcript in Authors possession.

³⁵ Shansky, p.113.

³⁶ Greene, *Time to Spare* p. 84.

³⁷ L S, Interviewed May 2002. Transcript in Authors possession.

³⁸ S Y, interviewed May 2002. Transcript in author's possession.

even though his father was working, his mother 'had to fill up the empty hole in our tummies. Our daily diet from Monday to Friday consisted of bread and jam. We had jam butties for breakfast, jam butties for dinner and jam butties for tea.' His mother bought a two pound tin of jam at the weekend and that had to last all week. He recalled that some days he would come home from school and there would not be a crust of bread or a spoonful of jam anywhere in the house, and all eight children had to wait until their father returned from work with his pay so they could eat. 'For some reason' James said, 'dad didn't want anyone to know we ate jam butties', he did not know why because everyone he knew did. His father would become agitated if anyone came to the house and the jam pot was on the table.³⁹ Brockway visited Great Harwood and noted, 'They can neither buy clothes nor boots, nor enough food for their children....the cheapest of everything has to be bought; anything as long as it can be eaten. The low quality of the food which is being eaten is undermining the health of entire families.' One couple, out of work for two years, spoke of being 'put on the Means Test...we watched every halfpenny, cut out everything we didn't need...You can't feed six on thirty-one shillings when you have to pay eight shillings in rent.' Within six months, they had become twelve pounds in debt. Brockway also wrote of multiple shops invading the town [Great Harwood] with cheap shoddy goods.⁴⁰ The people of North- East Lancashire, while angry at the interrogation of the means test, knew that most of their neighbours were in the same position. Arthur Reedy, a father of three, was prosecuted in December 1932, for using metal blanks in his gas meter because he and his family had no money. His wife had been allowed thirteen shillings a week in kind from the Board of Guardians, but no cash.⁴¹ Ellen Redmond, a widow with one child from Burnley, was allowed eight shillings a week in kind for five weeks between 24 January and 21 February 1931 from the Outdoor Relief during the eight looms cotton dispute. On 17 January 1931, Oswald Evans, a married man with six children, received sixteen

³⁹ Shansky, *Poverty in the 1930s*, p8.

⁴⁰ Brockway, *Hungry England*, pp.16-20.

⁴¹ Hutt, *Condition of the Working Class*, p.69.

shillings in cash and fifteen shillings in kind from the Board of Guardians in the same dispute.⁴² A B recollected, in 2002, that handing down clothes was not possible as they were too worn. 'You can't make owt from nowt', said his mother.⁴³ G S, born in Blackburn 1919, told of how her father 'mended our clogs with wood and made plates out of wood, we were that badly off'. She also recollected her mother saying, 'It was better being hungry with a roof over our heads than being in the workhouse and still being hungry,' when she scrimped and saved to pay the rent.⁴⁴ Arthur Worrall, born in Burnley in 1912 whom we met in chapter two as a young employed man, told the interviewer he only possessed a pair of clogs, and no shoes. He was involved with the Queensgate Methodist Church, and 'I could go to the Band of Hope meetings on a Monday night, but not Sunday services, they wouldn't let me go in my clogs.' In addition, he related that he could not play football because he only had clogs. He also spoke of 'being on Town Relief' (outdoor relief) and how his parents got a voucher to obtain basic foodstuff from a local shop. His father was an alcoholic and was often out of work.⁴⁵ Ada Gibson born on 6 April 1915 in Haslingden described her poor childhood when often all she and her brother had to eat was bread dipped in bacon fat her father had left, or sandwiches given to them by teachers at school when they were faint from hunger. At the end of her interview Ada asked the interviewer, 'Why should it have been like that, I mean why should it?'⁴⁶

One condition for Transitional Payments was that any savings had first to be used before payment could be granted. Many PACs were thus criticised for penalising thrift. An article in *The Blackburn Times* in 1931 commented that 'thrift should not be penalised to such an extent that it was discouraged'.⁴⁷ Also in 1932, the Lancashire

⁴² County Borough Burnley, *Outdoor Relief Lists 1930-1931*, pp.75-76, Lancashire Record Office, Burnley Reference: CBBu.

⁴³ A B, Interviewed May 2002. Transcript in author's possession.

⁴⁴ G S, Interviewed May 2002. Transcript in author's possession.

⁴⁵ Arthur Worrall, 1998.0001, North West Sound Archives, Clitheroe Castle, Lancashire.

⁴⁶ Ada Gibson, 1985.0026, North West Sound Archives, Clitheroe Castle, Lancashire.

⁴⁷ *Blackburn Times*, 9 January 1932.

County PAC, thought to be inconsistent by Sir Herbert Samuels, the Home Secretary,⁴⁸ and harsh by recipients of public assistance, was insisting that ‘the thrifty artisan should not be penalised by having his savings taken into account’.⁴⁹ The Lancashire cotton worker had a reputation for thrift and pride. They had established Savings Clubs in the late nineteenth century into which the workers put money aside for holidays, Christmas or clothes, and Insurance schemes for hospital, medical or funeral expenses. During the interwar years, many savings clubs, which had operated since the turn of the century, ceased to exist. They had closed down because any money in the savings clubs was taken into account when public assistance was calculated.⁵⁰ The Transitional Payments (Determination of Needs) Act November 1932 softened certain aspects of the means test, namely its household savings regulations and resolved the immediate crisis in the areas of high unemployment. And, in Miller’s view, the Government and PACs came to a tacit agreement where the latter could be more liberal in their dealings with the means test in return for dropping public opposition to it.⁵¹ Never again would North-East Lancashire be relatively prosperous. In the decades to come, because of the effects of the unemployment of the 1930s, the area would become and remain a disadvantaged area.

Many government spokesmen and middle-class observers believed that the amount of benefit allowed to recipients of Transitional Payments to be perfectly adequate. Allen Hutt (1901-1972), a journalist and Communist Party member, believed, in 1933, that ‘the contradiction between the crushing regime of “economy” for the poor and luxury for the rich’ had been ‘elevated into a doctrine of political economy’. He went on to explain how *The Times* considered unemployment benefit and Transitional Payment as ‘very generous’ and featured correspondence from leading economists, taking as their theme, ‘should the rich economise on their private spending?’ To which

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 19 November 1932.

⁴⁹ Pope, *Unemployment and the Lancashire Weaving Area*, p. 57.

⁵⁰ *Blackburn Times*, 11 July 1931.

⁵¹ Miller, Fredric, ‘The British Unemployment Crisis of 1935,’ p.332.

the collective response was 'To spend less money than we should like to do is not patriotic'.⁵² Wal Hannington, as one might expect, saw things differently. He believed that the 'ruling class which had waxed rich out of the toil of these workers....now urges, through its government, that they be subjected to all manner of indignities when they seek the bare means of subsistence'.⁵³ The evidence nonetheless shows that the Transitional Benefit kept the unemployed on the breadline.

Unemployment, while being a major cause of poverty, was, as we have seen, not the only reason for poverty. Other causes were low incomes, old age, loss of a wage earner, or sickness. In the Lancashire weaving area, low incomes were the primary cause of women having to work. Because men's wages were low, the Pilgrim Trust report noted that 'earning all the time was necessary for the wife',⁵⁴ and as we have already seen a single wage meant poverty to many families. Indeed, working together was traditional in the weaving area for men women and children. Charles Webster, in his 1985 article, 'Health, Welfare and Unemployment,' wrote that it was difficult in the 1930s for the unemployed and low paid to 'meet their obligations, without sliding into debt.' He also wrote that the unemployed and their dependants 'constituted a significant element within the population.' He saw that significance increase when the unemployed and low paid 'are considered in conjunction with the low paid receiving an income not in excess of the benefit rate', as in the cotton industry, and noted that individuals tended 'to oscillate between the two conditions' and were concentrated into the depressed areas, 'which evolved into ghettos of deprivation during the interwar years'.⁵⁵ John Burnett also believes that low paid workers with large families were below the poverty line,⁵⁶ and although the Report to the Pilgrim's Trust concluded that one fifth of all those receiving benefits were as well off, or better off, than they would be

⁵² Hutt, *Condition of the Working Class*, p.239.

⁵³ Hannington, *The Distressed Area*, p.47.

⁵⁴ *Men Without Work*, p.235.

⁵⁵ Webster, 'Health Welfare and Unemployment,' pp. 207-211.

⁵⁶ Burnett, John, *Idle Hands. The Experience of Unemployment, 1790-1990* (London, 1994), pp.245-6.

working,⁵⁷ Burnett considers that this did not mean they were not in poverty. However, he continues, 'a low-paid, unskilled worker with several young children could almost be as well or badly off, when unemployed as when in work'.⁵⁸ In October 1933, Haslingden Municipal Borough Council's Medical Officer of Health reported on applications for free milk from an employed weaver with a wife and two young children, who earned one pound ten shillings per week and an employed machinist with a wife and three young children, who earned one pound nine shillings a week.⁵⁹ Yet the average and median wage of all weavers, including women and juveniles and including the under employed was close to two pounds.⁶⁰ The table below shows the percentage rise in the cost of living for England and Wales for the years between 1929 and 1935. By December 1935, the average increases were: all items 47%, food only, 31%. An almost fifty per cent rise in basic commodities was not matched by unemployment benefit of public assistance.

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
1929	67	65	66	62	61	60	61	63	64	65	67	67
1930	66	64	61	57	55	54	55	57	57	56	57	55
1931	53	52	50	47	47	45	47	45	45	45	46	48
1932	47	47	46	44	43	42	43	41	41	43	43	43
1933	42	41	39	37	36	36	38	39	41	41	43	43
1934	42	41	40	39	37	38	41	42	43	43	44	44
1935	43	42	41	39	39	40	43	43	43	45	47	47

Table 18 Percentage increases in the cost of living 1929-1935. All items, (Food, rent, clothing, fuel, light etc.

Source: Ministry of Labour Gazette October Vol. 44, 1936.

Table produced by me from the above source.

In the 1930s, old age was a difficult time for the poor in high unemployment areas. The *Widows', Orphans' and Old Age Contributory Pensions Act, 1925*, provided pensions to be payable after the age of sixty-five. This pension scheme was applied to all those compulsorily insured under the National Health Insurance Act and the age

⁵⁷ *Men Without Work*, p.235

⁵⁸ Burnett, *Idle Hands*, p.246.

⁵⁹ Medical Officer of Health *Report*, 11 October 1933, Lancashire Record Office, Haslingden Ref: MBH.

⁶⁰ Pope, *Unemployment and the Lancashire Weaving Area*, p.40.

limit for insurance had been reduced from 70 to 65 for men and to 60 for women. The rate of payment for an insured person was ten shillings a week, which meant one pound week for a married couple if both had been insured.⁶¹ Under the *Old Age Pensions Act, 1908-1924*, non-contributory government pensions for those over the age of seventy had been five shillings a week, or seven shillings and sixpence for married couples and it was increased to ten shillings weekly in 1920. Under the *Blind Persons Act, 1920*, the blind were entitled to claim an old age pension at 50 if they 'were so blind they were unable to perform work for which sight was essential.'⁶² Only those with an income of less than twenty-one pounds were entitled to benefit and pensions were withheld from 'lunatics' and criminals.⁶³ The inadequate amount paid in pensions under these schemes compelled large numbers to look to the Poor Law authorities to supplement their pensions to prevent starvation.⁶⁴ In a district like the North-East Lancashire weaving area it was unlikely the elderly had accumulated many savings. Many aged people lived with grown up children, and with the introduction of the household means test, the situation could become grim. Occasions have been documented where elderly parents had to leave their children's homes and depend on the Poor Law Administration simply because their family would not be able to afford to keep them.⁶⁵ Though he believed in the mutual obligation of families to support family members, Economics Professor, Percy Ford (1894-1983), in 1939, wrote that making adequate provision for old age was not possible for the average worker, even with family solidarity.⁶⁶

Sickness was another cause of economic want. The National Insurance Act of 1911 was the beginning of State provision to keep the sick from depending on the Poor

⁶¹ Bruce, M., ed., *The Rise of the Welfare State* (London, 1973), p.207.

⁶² *The Blind Person Act, 1920*, (10&11 Geo.V).

⁶³ Gardiner, J, Wenbourn N, eds., *The History Today Companion to British History* (London, 1995), p.565.

⁶⁴ Morgan, JS, 'The Break-Up of the Poor Law in Britain 1907-47: An Historical Footnote,' *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol.14, No.2, (May, 1948), pp.209-219, p.213.

⁶⁵ Laybourn, *Britain on the Breadline*, p.51.

⁶⁶ Ford, Percy, *Incomes, Means Tests and Personal Responsibility* (London, 1939), p.6.

Law. It was inadequate, and covered only insured workers and did not provide for dependants. John Morgan, in 1948 believed that the amount of sickness benefit paid 'was in many cases too small to make its recipients independent of poor relief.'⁶⁷ The sick, who received no sick pay from employers, unions or friendly societies, and those with no means of support, were dependent on Poor Law Administration and Institutions, or Public Assistance Committees, as we will see in Chapter six.

The *Poor Law Act, 1930*, Part II, decreed 'It shall be the duty of the father, grandfather, mother, grandmother, husband or child of a poor, old, blind, lame or impotent person, or other person not able to work, if possessed of sufficient means to maintain that person.' If that were not possible, 'it shall be the duty of the council of every county or county borough....to provide such relief as may be necessary.'⁶⁸ Details of the relief of the poor and destitute will be examined closely in the chapter concerning welfare. Below are some figures from Blackburn and Burnley which show the numbers of people in receipt of poor relief, persons **not** eligible for government benefit, which demonstrate how economic conditions deteriorated after 1931. Until 1934, Blackburn had more poor relief recipients per thousand than Burnley, mainly because Blackburn was more dependent on cotton than Burnley, which did have other industries. While there were many factors leading to poverty, unemployment was the main reason for poverty in North-East Lancashire in the 1930s, although it must be stated that whole families almost always had to work in the cotton textile areas to make a decent wage. Yet benefits as a matter of policy were almost equal to the wage level of a single cotton worker. As we have seen, a family dependent on one wage in the cotton industry was a family which suffered poverty. Government benefits were not generous, despite what some MPs and Employers' Representatives on Committees thought. Old age pensions were so low they were almost guaranteed to keep an elderly person in a state of

⁶⁷ Morgan, 'The Break-up of the Poor Law in Britain' p.213.

⁶⁸ *Poor Law Act, 1930*, [20 Geo.5].

extreme poverty, because if an aged person had an income of over twenty-one pounds a year, they did not receive a pension.

Poor Relief	Indoor	Outdoor	Total	Rate per 10,000 Popn.
Dec. 1930				
Blackburn	865	2326	3191	255:10,000
Burnley	567	1729	2296	229:10,000
Dec. 1931				
Blackburn	803	2807	3610	294:10,000
Burnley	524	1820	2344	239:10,000
Dec. 1932				
Blackburn	832	4491	5323	430:10,000
Burnley	476	2504	2980	300:10,000
Dec. 1933				
Blackburn	753	5043	5796	474:10,000
Burnley	419	2972	3391	349:10,000
Dec. 1934				
Blackburn	811	4265	5076	418:10,000
Burnley	409	3817	4226	441:10,000
Dec. 1935				
Blackburn	807	4240	5047	421:10,000
Burnley	367	4058	4425	469:10,000

[Table 19 Relief Tables for Blackburn and Burnley 1930-35.](#)

Source: Ministry of Labour Gazette, Vols. 38-43.

Table generated by me from the above source.

The above figures are not for those persons on unemployment benefit, they were for those who were not eligible for benefits. It was legally a duty for families to support and care for members who were disadvantaged, yet these families were themselves poverty stricken through unemployment or low wages and in many cases elderly relatives had to seek recourse from the Poor Law or Public Assistance Committee, and enter the feared Public Assistance Institution (workhouse).

The unemployed, according to the some perceptions, were workshy, abused the dole and cost the taxpayers and ratepayers enormous amounts of money. The 'ruling class', as Matt Perry called them, used their influence to keep these myths in the public forum, and when the Depression began to have a detrimental effect on the country's economy, the unemployed had to make the sacrifices. A ten per cent cut in pay was, to the well-off, possibly of little consequence; yet the loss of three shillings to

an unemployed family on a tight budget was a catastrophe. Professor EP Cathcart, a member of The Advisory Committee on Nutrition believed that 'bad household economy' by working class women played a bigger part than shortage of cash in the majority of cases of malnutrition, while Sir Arthur Robinson, permanent secretary to the Minister of Health, was convinced that 'malnutrition is ignorance quite as much as insufficient income.'⁶⁹ At the same time politicians, as we have seen, had no idea of the finances of the unemployed, or how the loss of even one shilling would be distressing. The unemployed cotton worker had worked in an industry which had been the country's main exporter. It had been the cradle of the industrial revolution, had made many extremely rich, and in the 1930s its population was impoverished and malnourished.

Because the cotton industry had been in depression since the mid 1920s, large numbers of cotton workers had already used up the Unemployment Insurance entitlements, and they were among the first affected by Transitional Payments. The cash relief provided by those regulations, when supplemented by borrowing, scrimping and pooling resources, was scarcely sufficient for most families to maintain the bare necessities of life. When the Unemployment Act, 1934 was enacted, the unemployed had their benefits reduced instead of increased as the Government had promised. Such was the Government's ignorance of how the unemployed had to live, and the level of poverty unemployment had brought they were bewildered at the spontaneous widespread public outburst by the unemployed and employed alike. The unemployed had been passive, accepting subsistence level relief, but when that relief was reduced, they protested violently. There were widespread protests, especially in Wales, the North of England and Scotland, in places with the highest unemployment. The Government had tried to unify the scales of Transitional Payment without any thought to local conditions, and as a consequence of the protests panicked and restored the old PAC rates. There had been an attempt to restore them piecemeal, yet many local

⁶⁹ Quoted in, Madeleine Mayhew, 'The 1930s Nutrition Controversy', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.23, No.3 (1988), pp.445-464.

authorities disregarded orders and quietly returned to the old rates. Local Authorities in North East Lancashire knew the conditions in their community, and while not over-generous with public funds, at least knew the level of poverty in which a large part of their community lived and made efforts to alleviate as much of the effects of poverty as they were able.

CHAPTER FOUR

SOMEWHERE TO LIVE

They said our house was unfit for human habitation in 1934. It was! It was a 'pig hole'. The windows wouldn't open, the plaster was falling off the walls and it was damp. Even our clothes were damp in the drawers. The landlord blamed us because mum and dad were Irish, but the inspector said it was lack of maintenance, and that it was his responsibility.¹

The above quote demonstrates the conditions of many houses in North East Lancashire, particularly in older areas, and the excuses given for not maintaining houses. It also shows that local government were making inroads into the condition of housing. The house mentioned above stood until the late 1990s, albeit with extensive improvements and renovations. This chapter will establish what responses were made in respect of housing conditions, both nationally and locally.

Recent research has revealed certain social factors are among the most important determinants of health in developed countries. These social factors include early childhood experience, the amount of anxiety and worry suffered, and social status.² Absolute material want, such as the kind suffered by many children in North-East Lancashire, was in itself a source of great worry and anxiety making material deprivation and psychological stress almost inseparable. Shortage of food or of other basic necessities would nearly always be accompanied by psychological and social stress. Adverse living conditions, invariably caused by poverty, would have been a social determinant of health in the cotton manufacturing areas of North-East Lancashire. An insufficient water supply, inadequate sanitary arrangements, and houses which were continuously damp were not favourable to good health in a

¹ KM., Resident of Blackburn, born in 1921. Interviewed 5 August 2005. Transcript in author's possession.

² Richard G Wilkinson, *The Impact of inequality*, (New York, 2005), p.9.

population whose health was already compromised by the pollution, dirt, and generally unhealthy standards of the area. Children, whose health was less robust than adults' health, would feel the effects of substandard housing sooner. In this chapter, I will argue that the poor quality of a large majority of the housing stock in the North-East Lancashire cotton towns, combined with a low income was a contributory factor to the poor health in the community, particularly the children, and was another adverse effect of the high unemployment of the 1930s. I will also demonstrate the official responses to poor housing by national and local governments



Figure 5. Air Pollution in Early 20th Century Blackburn.

Source: Image provided by the copyright holder for use in the Blackburn with Darwen Cotton Town digitization Project.

The Evolution of Housing in North-East Lancashire

In Lancashire during the nineteenth century, when new textile mills were built, it was the practice for mill owners to have row upon row of terraced houses built close to mills to attract much needed labour for those mills. These growing workers' colonies comprised endless closed-in rows of terraced housing built of brick or stone with slate

roofs, with either one room downstairs and one room upstairs as in Figure 2, or two rooms upstairs and two rooms downstairs. Sometimes, the houses were built back to back with no dividing space between two houses. The cotton towns of North-East Lancashire became, in effect, towns of mill settlements, laid out in grid-iron streets, with hardly any space for play. The workers developed their own community identity, which paternalist employers sought to increase by encouraging deferential attitudes, involving workers in celebrations for family weddings and other events, and providing outings such as trips to Blackpool. This paternalism would diminish when limited companies were formed and the owners of the mills moved out to large estates in the surrounding countryside.



Figure 6 Back Mary Ann Street, Blackburn. One room downstairs and one room upstairs.

See figure 7.

Source: Image provided by Blackburn with Darwen Council for the Cotton Town digitisation project.

NOTE:
This figure is included on page 105 of the print copy of
the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Figure 7. Map Back Mary Ann Street in centre showing shared lavatory and yard, and Back George Street West with shared lavatory, in bottom left corner.

Reproduced from 1939 Ordnance Survey maps 62.15, 62.16, with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright NC/ 1939

Workers cottages were spartan and unsanitary. There were no bathrooms, no hot water systems, no front gardens, and in most cases a backyard scarcely big enough to turn around in, and in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one to twelve houses would have shared a lavatory, or a pail closet, emptied weekly, a waste water closet, or a fresh water closet. In 1993, Geoffrey Timmins wrote of the critics of the squalid living conditions in Blackburn in the mid 1800s. One of them, John Withers reported in 1853 that 'the inhabitants of 1,165 houses, [Timmins estimated this comprised 15% of housing stock], shared 246 privies, an average of nearly five houses, or some 25 people per privy.' He further reported one street with 35 houses and five privies, one street with 17 houses and one privy, and one street with 37 houses and no privies.³(See figures 6 & 7 as an example) In 1879, Blackburn Corporation promoted a private Act of Parliament, the *Blackburn Improvement Act, 1882*, which dealt with a wide range of municipal problems including creating slum

³ Timmins, Geoffrey, *Blackburn: A Pictorial History* (Chichester, 1993), p.58.

clearance schemes, and improved sewage and water treatment.⁴ Several of the photographs in this Chapter were first used as evidence in Parliament concerning that Act. Gradually, improvements in Blackburn's sewage removal occurred and this depended on an adequate water supply. This supply was established by several reservoirs being built around the town. Timmins noted that 'Daisy Green reservoir was constructed in 1849, Audley reservoir in 1856...and Fishmoor reservoir in 1868'⁵. It is reasonable to expect that with adequate sewage and water supply systems, the water closet would become commonplace. However Timmins reported that because of cost installing water closets was a protracted affair. As late as 1891, there were still as many as 11,500 houses (43 per cent of the total) which depended on tubs for sanitation and 4,346 houses with privy middens.⁶ Unsanitary housing with inadequate lavatories and an insufficient water supply played a part in the high levels of mortality in Victorian North-East Lancashire. However, not all housing in Victorian North-East Lancashire was crowded and unsanitary. The middle classes lived on the edges of towns by the 1870s, but at the end of the nineteenth century, new areas of terraced housing were being built with better conveniences for the working class. Nevertheless, the rents for some of these houses were beyond what the poor could afford. Twentieth century mill owners had no need to build rows of terraced cottages to attract labour because no new mills were being built and there were enough houses for the workers, so they withdrew from investment in housing, making the development of council-built houses necessary. These council houses had an adequate water supply, a bathroom, a hot water service and satisfactory sanitary arrangements. However, rents for most council houses were too high for those whose employment was insecure, which included most of the textile workers in interwar years.

⁴ Forest, A., *Old Blackburn and Darwen* (Preston, 1990), p. 14.

⁵ Timmins *Blackburn*, p.58-9

⁶ *Ibid.*



Figure 8. Backyards and Alleyways. Late 19th Century.

Source: Image provided by Blackburn with Darwen Council for the Cotton Town digitisation project.

Poor people both employed and unemployed, continued to live in old, low-rent properties. Even those inhabitants of our towns whom we have met earlier in Chapter One and who owned their own home, were likely to own a ‘two up, two down’ terraced house. Between 1919 and 1935, various Housing Acts had the stated intention of reducing the housing shortage, which, in 1921, was estimated to be 709,000 and in 1929, 375,000.⁷ The *Housing Act, 1924*, by granting subsidies, encouraged local authorities to build more public housing. These subsidies could not bring the rents within reach of those who were unemployed or poorly paid, and, in 1933, the Minister of Health cut those subsidies,⁸ an action which hampered the expansion of public housing schemes. North-East Lancashire, in contrast with other parts of industrial Lancashire, did not suffer unduly from severe overcrowding, although there was a shortage of affordable houses for rent. The Census of 1921 showed that 3.1 per cent of

⁷ David Lloyd George, *We Can Conquer Unemployment* (London, 1929), p. 28.

⁸ *Housing (Financial Provisions) Act, 1933*, (23 & 24 Geo.V)

the population of Blackburn and 5.6 per cent of that of Burnley was living at more than two to a room, while the figure for England and Wales as a whole was 9.6 per cent.⁹ Most of the housing stocks in the North-East Lancashire cotton towns in the 1930s were built in the nineteenth and early twentieth- centuries, and consequently the housing problem in the area was more one of quality than quantity, with many houses sub-standard. There was therefore, an undeniable need for action to be taken which would create better housing, both public and private, at a rate people could afford.

Housing Legislation.

The above mentioned Housing Acts, and the 1935 Housing Act, attempted to give local authorities the power to demolish or improve insanitary houses, and redevelop urban areas. Social changes during and after World War One were influential in the public's acceptance of the government subsidising house building. Lloyd George's 1918 speech at Wolverhampton, in which he declared that the task facing the government was, 'To make Britain a fit country for heroes to live in,' and that 'it is too much to leave it to the municipalities. Some of them are crippled from the restricted income placed at their disposal....some are good and some are not good. Therefore, the housing of the people must be a national concern'.¹⁰ The speech gave rise to a phrase, not actually written in the speech, 'Homes fit for heroes' which Burnett noted became a rallying cry and an election promise.¹¹ Clearly there was another reason for improving working class housing as we can see in an extract from a speech by King George V to Local Authority Representatives in 1919:

While the housing of the working classes has always been a question of the greatest importance, never has it been so important as now. It is not too much to say that an adequate solution to the housing problem is the foundation of all social progress....If unrest is to be converted into

⁹ Pope, Rex, *Unemployment and the Lancashire Weaving Area* (Preston, 2000), p.5.

¹⁰ Guedalla, *Slings and Arrows*, p.192.

¹¹ Burnett, John, *A Social History of Housing, 1815-1970* (London,1977), p.215.

contentment, the provision of good houses may prove one of the most potent agents in that conversion.¹²

The *Housing Act, 1919*, enacted by the Coalition Government, called for Local Authorities to view their housing stocks, and make and implement plans for providing houses for the working classes, with the approval of the Ministry of Health.¹³ The *Housing (Additional Powers) Act, 1919*, was an Act to authorize the acquisition of land for the development of housing, or for town planning schemes, and to make provision enabling Local Authorities to borrow money to build houses.¹⁴ Although 213,000 houses were built nationally under this legislation, the subsidy arrangements were too costly and were cut back in 1921, and ended altogether when the Conservative Government, elected in November 1922, introduced another Housing Act in 1923, which was intended to encourage private enterprise to build houses. Local Authorities could only build houses if they could convince the Minister of Health, who at the time was Neville Chamberlain, it would be better if they, rather than private builders, embarked on housing projects.¹⁵ This Act reversed the previous policy of Local Authorities being major providers of working class houses.

In 1924, Labour won government and introduced another Housing Act intended to restore Local Authorities as major providers of working class houses, and encourage them to build more houses by granting higher subsidies and promising a long-term housing programme.¹⁶ In John Burnett's opinion, 'This new Act was a recognition that the shortage of working class houses in 1924 was greater than in 1919.'¹⁷ A Treasury subsidy of nine pounds a house or twelve pounds ten shillings in rural areas, annually for forty years would be granted for houses which were built by Local Authorities, but

¹² 'The King's Speech to Representatives of the Local Authorities and Societies. At Buckingham Palace,' *The Times*, 12 April 1919, *Ibid*.

¹³ *Housing and Town Planning Act, 1919*, (9 & 10, Geo.V).

¹⁴ *Housing (Additional Powers Act, 1919*, ((9 & 10), Geo.V).

¹⁵ *Amendments of Housing Acts, 1923*, (13 & 14, Geo.V).

¹⁶ *Housing (Financial Provision) Act, 1924*, (14 & 15 Geo.V).

¹⁷ Burnett, *History of Housing*, p.238.

only if the houses were rented out.¹⁸ Under the this Act, more than half a million houses were built before it was replaced by The *Housing Act, 1930*, which dealt with the clearance or improvement of unhealthy areas and the repair or demolition of unsanitary houses. It also amended the Housing Acts of 1923, 1924, and 1925 which enabled Local Authorities to declare clearance orders and compulsorily purchase property.¹⁹ According to John Stevenson, in 1984, this Act, 'although suspended during the worst phase of the depression' ensured 'more slums were cleared in the years before the war than in any previous period. Between 1931 and 1939 local authorities built over 700,000 new houses, re-housing four-fifths of existing slum dwellers.'²⁰ The Housing Act of 1933 was an Act which brought an end to the power of the Minister of Health, Neville Chamberlain, to grant subsidies for building houses.²¹ The Conservatives disliked public housing schemes because of the cost and because of the competition it imposed on private builders. Martin Pugh, in 1994, noted, 'Municipal housing set a high standard which private builders often failed to match, but with which they had to compete.'²² This Act was followed in 1935 by an Act which attempted to abate and prevent overcrowding, redevelop urban housing and recondition buildings.²³ All the above Acts were intended to encourage the building of houses both in the public and private sectors; however, the housing problem was unsolved during the 1920s and 1930s. The private sector built few houses for letting and Local Authorities did not build enough houses, while rents were too high for those with low-paid jobs, or no jobs at all. Many unemployed or low-paid workers of North East Lancashire could not afford the rents of council owned houses and were compelled to stay in the older, decaying, unhealthy properties which were becoming, or had become slums. Before 1914, only ten per cent of houses nationally were owner occupied, the rest were privately owned

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Housing Act, 1930*, (20 & 21, Geo.V).

²⁰ Stevenson, J., *British Society* (London, 1984), p.222.

²¹ *Housing (Financial Provision) Act, 1933*, (23 & 24, Geo.V).

²² Pugh, M., *State and Society A Social and Political History of Britain, 1870-1997*, 2nd Edition, (London, 1999) p.223.

²³ *Housing Act, 1935*, (25 & 26, Geo.V).

and rented out. Most landlords were small property owners lacking the resources to properly maintain and improve their houses, and during World War One, the government imposed rent restrictions. After the war, some form of rent restrictions remained in place and the private rental sector declined.²⁴

Both Stevenson, in 1984, and Pugh, in 1994, wrote of the high numbers of private houses built in the interwar years. Pugh noted, 'Two-and-a-half million houses were built for sale between the wars and by 1931 thirty-one per cent of all houses were owner-occupied.' He went on to observe how those houses represented a major improvement in the living conditions of millions of families.²⁵ Stevenson had made the same observations ten years previously: houses could be bought 'for as little as £450, about twice the salary of an average professional man.'²⁶ Yet these houses were built in areas that had recovered from the Depression. The Burnley Borough Surveyor, in October 1932, reported to the PAC that he had received applications for the purchase or lease of a portion of land approximately 11 acres belonging to the PAC for the purpose of house building.

It was resolved that advertisements be issued inviting offers for the purchase or leasing of land fronting Casterton Avenue to a depth of 100 feet for the erection thereon of houses to be sold at a price of not less than £500 per house, exclusive of land and that the Housing and Town Planning Committee be offered the remainder of the land as a site for Municipal Houses.²⁷

Stevenson did, however, note that

Emphasis on house building both for private sale and for local authorities tends to obscure the fact that during the interwar years almost two-thirds of all householders rented their house from a private landlord. Rental accommodation had been the norm in the nineteenth-century and it

²⁴ Pugh, *State and Society*, p.223.

²⁵ *Ibid.* P.224.

²⁶ Stevenson, *British Society*, p.223.

²⁷ Burnley PAC Minutes, 19 October 1932.

continued to occupy the biggest sector of the housing market until after the Second World War.²⁸

It was inevitable, because of the poverty and the slow pace of house building, that the poorest housing was rented by the most disadvantaged sector of the community: it was all they could afford.

Local Government and Housing Conditions in North East Lancashire in the 1930s.

As we have seen, North-East Lancashire is well known for its serried ranks of terraced cottages built around mills for cotton mill workers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For the most part, these cottages had been built quickly, cheaply, and according to the Medical Officer of Health for Darwen Doctor James Robinson in 1932, were predominantly damp. This was because 'It has not been the general custom to carry out subsoil drainage before building, with the result that dampness is common because of the subsoil being waterlogged.'²⁹ Woodruff corroborated this when he wrote in his autobiography of his early life in Blackburn, 'there was nothing to stop it [dampness] rising through the flagstones that covered the floor. It got into people's bones.'³⁰ Woodruff described the house he lived in until he went to London looking for work in 1933.

Like all other weavers' cottages, our house was one of an endless row. The outside was brick; the roof was Gray slate. It had four whitewashed rooms, two up and two down. They were about seven feet high, the front rooms measured nine feet by nine feet....The downstairs floors were made of large flagstones, covered with a scattering of clean sand which was swept up and renewed weekly....In winter the stones froze to our feet. The ceilings were wooden floorboards of the upper rooms. There was a tiny yard at the rear, where the rain sat between the cobbles. Beyond was an alley and another unbroken line of cottages.³¹

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Municipal Borough of Darwen, *Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health*, 1932.

³⁰ Woodruff, *Nab End*, p.16.

³¹ Woodruff, *Nab End*, p.11. This house was not demolished until the late 1960s as part of a slum clearance scheme.

Most of the terraced cottages were similar to the one Woodruff described, two rooms downstairs with two or three rooms upstairs, and a small backyard with an outside lavatory. They were built of brick, some stone-faced, with Welsh slate roofs. The majority were built before 1900, and many were more than a hundred years old.³² Some houses were 'back to back', with no sanitation or yards. The Police Act of 1844, which regulated such things as ash pits, cellars, doors, streets and footpaths and nightsoil removal, ended the building of such houses and very few survive today in Lancashire.

NOTE:

This figure is included on page 113 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Figure 9: Serried ranks of terraced houses at Nova Scotia, Blackburn, including mills and canal.

Source: Image provided by the copyright holder Aerofilms for use in the Blackburn with Darwen Cotton Town digitization project.

Various Public Health Acts were having a positive effect on the area. In the United Kingdom, acts were passed by Parliament in 1848, 1872, and 1875 to deal with squalor and disease and to establish a code of sanitary law. The first act set up a Central

³² Darwen, *Annual Reports*, 1935.

Board of Health, which in turn imposed local boards of health. The local boards oversaw street cleaning, refuse collection, water supplies, and sewerage. Housing Acts were passed which gave local authorities certain powers, including provision for slum clearance. Later acts regulated housing conditions and gave local authorities the power to compel owners to maintain unsanitary houses. Under the 1872 act, every local authority had to appoint a medical officer of health. Doctor Vincent Thomas Thierens was Medical Officer of Health for the County Borough of Blackburn from 1928 to June 1959. Dr Thierens was a popular MOH because the members of the community noted with pleasure that he did not use his position at Blackburn as a stepping stone to a situation in a larger County Borough. He died on 28 October 1959 just months after his retirement as MOH for Blackburn. He was the first MOH to originate the idea that a small County Borough [such as Blackburn] could provide better control for tuberculosis by handing management of it over to a large, efficient county organisation.³³ In 1930, Dr. Thierens, described back to back dwellings as a rarity in Blackburn, 'as all houses erected in the Borough since 1854 have been at least obliquely ventilated and provided with a minimum of 180 square feet of open space to the back or side.'³⁴ In the same year he also wrote:

Blackburn, compared with many other industrial towns, is fortunate in the general housing of its inhabitants. The two or three-roomed type house is in the minority; the Census, 1921, gave the number as 2,125, which is equivalent to 6.3% of houses inhabited at the end of 1930. The four to five room types of house makes up the majority. The usual defects are: 1, Dampness due to defective roofs, pointing, *etc.*; 2, Defective water closets; 3, Defective windows, sash cords and frames; 4, Defective plaster and floors, cracked ceilings.³⁵

³³ Obituary, *British Medical Journal*, 21 November 1959, p. 1104.

³⁴ County Borough Blackburn, *Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health*, 1930, p.39.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 1930

The Medical Officer of Health for Burnley, Dr. CD Lamont, noted, also in 1930, 'that houses in the Borough are for the most part substantially built.'³⁶ He went further to note,

In 1930, there were 2,140 back-to-back and 'Single' dwellings in the Borough, of which 1,748 were, by reason of disrepair and sanitary defects, unfit for human habitation, or dangerous, or injurious to the health of the inhabitants, and that in addition there were 203 'through' houses unfit for habitation. It is therefore suggested, that those 1,951 houses should be dealt with as thirty-three small areas and that 1,553 should be dealt with as Clearance Schemes, 312 under Improvement Schemes, and 86 as Individual Unfit Houses.³⁷

Darwen's Medical Officer of Health, in his Report for 1930 wrote that 'The majority of houses are designed to accommodate people of the working classes. Houses for the most part are commodious, lofty, well lighted, and provided with fireplaces. The majority of the floors of the living rooms are flagged. Yorkshire stone has been used for the fronts of most of the houses and bricks for the rear and internal walls.'³⁸ It was, however, the minority of the houses which caused a problem which the Public Health Acts helped remedy. LJ, of Blackburn, in an interview in August 2005 said,

We lived in Spring Lane and it was a terrible house. It was so bad that the inspectors said it wasn't possible to fix. It was a diseased place, cold, damp and smelly. My little brother had bronchitis and got pneumonia and died. It was that house.³⁹

'That house' was demolished under Sections 19 & 20 of the *Housing Act, 1930*. Colne had, in 1931, 1,171 back-to-back houses in 1931, and in his report for 1931, the Medical Officer of Health for Colne, Dr. GM Davidson-Lobban, observed,

So long as rows of back-to-back houses exist, deficient in light and ventilation, aggravated by narrow streets, the absence of gardens or backyards, unventilated food stores and sanitary conveniences a distance

³⁶ County Borough Burnley, *Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health, 1930*.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Municipal Borough of Darwen, *Annual Medical Officer of Health Report, 1930*.

³⁹ LJ, Interviewed 11 August 2005. Transcript in author's possession.

away from the houses, one cannot describe the general standard of housing as satisfactory.⁴⁰

The Medical Officer of Health for Great Harwood, in 1933, stated that in his area, housing conditions were acceptable, with houses built of stone and brick with slate roofs, two or three bedrooms and in good condition.⁴¹ Fenner Brockway, in 1932, wrote of Great Harwood, 'I have rarely been in a town with more indications of respectable comfort'. A trade union secretary told him, 'that's only appearances. The lace curtains often hide the empty cupboards.'⁴²

The Public Health Acts and the Housing Acts of 1925 and 1930 made securing improvements to housing conditions easier. Blackburn was divided into areas which inspectors responsible for that particular area inspected systematically. Defects found by inspectors 'were entered into a schedule and the owners concerned were interviewed by the Chief Sanitary Inspector who pointed out the nature of the defect.'⁴³ Verbal notices were usually effective. If defects were not corrected, a formal notice was served giving owners twenty-eight days to attend to the defect. The Medical Officer of Health for Blackburn, Dr Thierens, noted, 'This method has been enforced in the Borough since 1925 and has resulted in early correction of common housing defects.'⁴⁴ The following example is from Blackburn Health and Housing Committee June 1934:

The Town Clerk reported that the statutory notice served under the Housing Act 1930 Section 18, in respect of the dwelling-house -----, had expired and the owner of the premises had not complied with such notice. The Borough Engineer shall be instructed to invite tenders for executing the

⁴⁰ Municipal Borough of Colne, *Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health*, 1931.

⁴¹ Urban District of Great Harwood, *Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health*, 1931.

⁴² Brockway, *Hungry England*, p.14. Appearances meant, and still mean, a great deal to the people of North-East Lancashire. Professor William Woodruff, in 2000, generated many critical letters to the local newspaper when he wrote about conditions in Blackburn in the 1920s and 1930s.

⁴³ CB Blackburn, *Medical Officer of Health Reports*, 1931.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

works specified in the notice and to submit an estimate of the cost of executing such works by his department.⁴⁵

The owner of the above house was compelled to pay for the repairs to his house.

LC, of Blackburn, interviewed in 2005, gave an example of a landlord who ignored a formal notice in 1932: 'The landlord was given a month to fix it, but he wouldn't, so the council did it and sent him the bill.'⁴⁶ HH, also of Blackburn, gave another example dating from 1933:

Our landlord was rotten. He wanted his money 'on the nail' but he wouldn't do any work until the council inspector gave him a month to fix it, or they'd do it and send him the bill. He probably thought he could get it done cheap, but the inspector came back and made him get it done again.⁴⁷

The Housing Inspector noted, in 1933,

There still remain many landlords who, from a mistaken sense of economy entrust their work to jobbers who are unskilled and untrained in housing repairs. Such workmen invariably do a bad job which fails to pass subsequent inspection.⁴⁸

KM, of Blackburn, whose house was classed as unfit in 1934 recalled: 'The landlord blamed us [for the poor condition of the house] because mum and dad were Irish, (and therefore unused to living in a good house) but the inspector said it was lack of maintenance and it was his responsibility.'⁴⁹ DS, born in Blackburn in 1922, lived in a house classed as unfit for human habitation in 1934. He did not mention it at school because 'they'd have made fun of me.'⁵⁰ SB, born in Blackburn 1922, also lived in a house classed as unfit for human habitation in 1934. He was 'too ashamed' to mention it at school.⁵¹ DSt born in Blackburn in 1920 believed 'It would have been

⁴⁵ CB Blackburn *Health and Housing Committee Minutes*, 12 June 1934. The same page contains thirteen notices which had been ignored, and the Borough Engineer had been instructed to carry out the work.

⁴⁶ LC, Interviewed August 2005. Transcript in author's possession.

⁴⁷ HH, Interviewed August 2005. Transcript in author's possession.

⁴⁸ CB Blackburn, *Health Reports*.1933.

⁴⁹ KM, Interviewed August 2005. Transcript in author's possession.

⁵⁰ DS, Interviewed August 2005. Transcript in author's possession.

⁵¹ SB, Interviewed August 2005. Transcript in author's possession.

better knocking it down and putting us in a better house.⁵² However, the rent they paid (six shillings a week) was all they could afford. Council house rents in Blackburn were between ten shillings and seventeen shillings a week.⁵³ The Medical Officer of Health for Blackburn noted ‘There are many dwellings, not ripe for demolition, which have been allowed to fall into a state of bad repair, yet are capable of being rendered thoroughly fit by sound overhaul and reconditioning.’ Besides requiring the ‘general fabric of the house to be made fit and the house decorated and painted,’ it was also a requirement that ‘adequate domestic equipment’ be installed. These included adequate storage for food, better lighting, laundry facilities and effective ovens or fire ranges.⁵⁴ Interestingly, the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) believed that ‘in view of the costly nature of restoration’, work was only required on such dwellings ‘as will then have an estimated life of 20-30 years’⁵⁵ It is even more interesting that many of the same houses were still inhabited in 2005. Although it must be pointed out that extensive renovations have been carried out.



Figure 10. LJ's street after renovations, 2005.

LJ whose house was classed as unfit for human habitation in 1934, said, ‘It was not a

⁵² DSt., Interviewed August 2005. Transcript in author’s possession.

⁵³ CB Blackburn, *Health Reports*, 1933.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

bad house. It can't have been. It's still standing. But it's been renovated, with a bathroom, kitchen and an inside toilet.'⁵⁶ (See figure10)

In his Annual MOH Reports, Dr Thierens, each year gave detailed lists of work done, and work which needed to be done. He also informed the relevant Sub-Committees of conditions needing attention. In 1932, he made a report concerning houses-let-in-lodgings. These were quite substantial houses divided into lodgings, and as many persons as possible were squeezed into them. These were usually the last resort before entering the workhouse.

The register contains particulars of 82 houses-let-in-lodgings, with a total of 401 rooms, which provide accommodation for approximately 900 individuals. During the year, 13 notices, containing a total of 127 breaches of the bye-laws, have been served upon the owners. The requirements of these notices have been complied with. The attention of the Committee should be drawn to the iniquitous rents charged for rooms at the majority of the houses-let-in-lodgings. These vary from 5/2d (5 shillings and 2 pence) to 12/-d (12 shillings) per week, and the average rent is 8/6d (8 shillings and 6pence....The trade, generally speaking, is one of gross exploitation, which calls for powers to control the rents charged, and to secure a higher standard of domestic comfort and amenity.⁵⁷

Woodruff, in *The Road to Nab End*, gives us a graphic account of how his family, 'our resources and wits finally used up', finally lost the house in which, according to the local PAC, 'we were living on a scale disproportionate to our needs'. It was their way of saying 'poor people did not live on Livingstone Road' (a well-to-do area). In the middle of the night, a 'moonlight flit' in the local vernacular, took the family to Nab Lane. (Nab End in Woodruff's book). Nab Lane was mostly houses-let-in-lodgings, 'all past their prime and seedy looking.' The six members of the family occupied one room: 'In Nab End there was foul crowded shelter, nothing more.' Yet even there, Woodruff noted there was a sense of community.

⁵⁶ LJ, Interviewed August 2005. Transcript in author's possession.

⁵⁷ CB Blackburn *Health Reports*, 1932.

With nothing to lose, these people should have been revolutionaries and thieves. On the contrary, they were the most law-abiding people one could meet. Their luck was out; like ourselves, they'd gone on the dole; they'd then endured the Means Test, which - having assessed their non-existent resources - had either reduced or removed state aid altogether. There was no work to be had. Their reserves had been used up....Beyond the workhouse, which they all feared, there was no one else to whom they could turn⁵⁸



Figure 11. Nab Lane, Blackburn.

Source: Image provided by Blackburn with Darwen for use in the Cotton Town digitization project.

The Common Lodging Houses in the Borough, of which there were 19, which provided accommodation for 733 people, were, according to Dr Thierens, 'of a much higher standard than those provided at most of the houses-let-in lodgings.' Facilities were 'in most cases satisfactory.'⁵⁹ The MOHs for all local government areas also were required to inspect tents, sheds and caravans, underground sleeping rooms and canal barges for living conditions.⁶⁰

The Housing Acts of 1925 and 1930, contained provisions for securing the repair and demolition of insanitary houses. As we have seen, the local authorities in North-East Lancashire were quite vigilant in their inspections. In Blackburn between

⁵⁸ Woodruff, *Nab End*, pp 328-330.

⁵⁹ CB Blackburn *Health Reports*, 1932.

⁶⁰ Blackburn Bye-Laws required underground sleeping rooms to be closed by council and the occupant rehoused.

1930 and 1936, an average number of 12,588 houses were inspected yearly. Of these inspections, an average number of 2,544 houses a year were classed as 'not to be in all respects reasonably fit for human habitation.'⁶¹ Burnley's statistical averages were similar to Blackburn's with a slightly smaller population: 11,980 houses on average were inspected, and 1,972 were classed as 'not reasonably fit for human habitation. However, Burnley's MOH, Dr Lamont wrote of an area where,

The density of houses is 63 to the acre. All the properties in the area present such serious general defects, that from the practical public health point of view, the area is definitely detrimental to the health of the inhabitants. The courts and passages are old and the houses unplanned, arranged in narrow close formation and the paving of the yards in many instances is a disgraceful condition of repair. Ill-ventilation...deficient lighting, dampness, entire lack of proper provision for storage of food ...make these houses entirely unsuitable for human habitation. The infant mortality, total death rate, incidence of infectious diseases in this area during the last decade is much in excess of the corresponding rates for the whole of the town⁶²

These houses were scheduled for demolition. The Burnley MOH noted in the Report for 1933, that when Burnley was surveyed to prepare a clearance and improvement programme for the Ministry of Health, it was found that practically all the older working class properties consisted of houses without ventilation; that is back-to-back and single houses. All the houses were stone built and the majority erected before 1850. 'They are scattered in small areas in different parts of the town and are built in close terrace formation with narrow streets and are generally devoid of modern sanitary amenities.'⁶³

Below is the Schedule for Burnley, prepared for the Ministry of Health.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 1930-1936

⁶² CB Burnley, *Health Reports*, 1930-1936.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 1933, p.63.

Number of Areas	Number Of Houses	Persons to be Displaced	New Houses to be Provided.
Clearance. 47	1,642	6,240	1,248
Improvement. 37	213	809	162
Individual Houses.	4	15	3

Table 20. Clearance and Improvement programme for Burnley.

Source: Burnley *Health Reports*, 1933.

Table generated by me from the above source.

Darwen, a smaller borough, had an average number of 3,900 inspections and an average number of 80 houses 'not fit in all respects for human habitation'.⁶⁴ Nelson had a low incidence of unfit houses owing to its later development as an industrial area and, consequently, houses were newer.⁶⁵ However, the MOH *Report* for 1933 shows 435 houses inspected for defects. None was found unfit, but forty were considered not fit in all respects and were rendered fit.⁶⁶ Colne, being the same size as Nelson, but having been an industrial town longer and having houses which were older, had an average number of 3,000 inspections and an average number of 67 houses not fit in all respects.⁶⁷ The 1930 Housing Act stipulated that if suitable accommodation was not available for the people displaced by demolition orders, the local authority could provide or secure accommodation on condition that 'the resources of the authority are sufficient for the purpose of carrying the resolution into effect.'⁶⁸ The Ministry had issued five principal plan types which fell into two broad categories. 'A' non parlour types and 'B' parlour types. John Burnett noted that 'the most widely built were type A 3, (living room, scullery and three bedrooms) followed by B 3 (living room, parlour, scullery and three bedrooms).'⁶⁹ The A 2 had a scullery, a living room and two bedrooms, the B 4 had a parlour, a living room, a scullery and four bedrooms. The last plan Type was flats which varied in design. Below is a table showing average rents in

⁶⁴ MB Darwen, *Health Reports*, 1930-1936.

⁶⁵ Barker, DJP., & Osmond, C., 'Inequalities in Health in Britain: specific explanations in three Lancashire towns,' in Barker DJP., ed., *Fetal and Infant Origins of Adult Disease* (London, 1992).

⁶⁶ MB Nelson, *Health Reports* Lancashire Record Office, MBNe. 1933.

⁶⁷ MB Colne, *Medical Officer of Health Annual Reports* Lancashire Record Office. MBCo Box 3, 1930-34.

⁶⁸ *Housing Act, 1930*.

⁶⁹ Burnett, *Social History of Housing*, p.223.

1930. The size of the house and the area in which it was built account for the variations in rents payable to the council.

B3. Parlour 3 bedrooms.	Between 17 shillings and 6 pence and 18 shillings and 4 pence per week.
A3. Non parlour 3 bedrooms	Between 12 shillings and 17 shillings and 6 pence per week.
A2. Non Parlour 2 bedrooms	Between 10 shillings and 7 pence and 12 shillings and 6 pence per week.
No details for B4.	

Table 21. Average rents for Council Houses.

Table generated by me from the following source. Blackburn *Health Report*. 1930.

The Blackburn *Health Reports* for 1931 noted, 'that 24 of the 350 houses proposed to be erected during the first year of the five year housing programme be of a small type to be let at low rents to persons displaced by the closing of insanitary housing.'⁷⁰ Colne's Housing Committee noted on 14 April 1932, that the Council had received a letter from the Ministry of Health regarding Council's re-housing proposals. The Ministry wished to know why the Council wanted to 'erect so many A2 type (non-parlour two bedrooms) houses instead of type A3 non parlour type (three bedrooms) which is considered to be more suitable for family requirements.' The Council agreed to the erection of some type A3, but wished to adhere to the original proposal as far as possible owing to the cost. Type A2 houses cost a maximum of twelve shillings and sixpence weekly to rent, while Type A3 cost a minimum of seventeen shillings and sixpence weekly to rent.⁷¹ However, no matter how many new houses were built, they were often priced so that unemployed or low paid families could not afford them without lowering their already inadequate standard of nutrition.

The following numbers and statistics demonstrate how effective Public Health Acts were in the area. In addition to issuing demolition notices, overhauling notices and reconditioning notices, council inspectors also issued notices for houses infested with

⁷⁰ CB Blackburn, *Health Reports* 1931.

⁷¹ Colne MOH *Annual Reports*, Lancashire Record Office, MBCo, Box 3, 1930-34. Explanation for house types will follow later.

vermin, an inadequate water supply, or inadequate sanitary arrangements. The Blackburn *Health Report* for 1929 shows 4,938 houses, out of a total of 32,757 houses, were infested with vermin. In 1931, 2,163 houses were infested, and in 1936, 63 houses were recorded as infested.⁷² These houses were disinfected by the use of hydrogen cyanide gas, while bedding and clothes were steam treated. Insecticides were also freely available to tenants of infected houses.

The provision of adequate water supplies also came under the aegis of Public Health Acts. In Blackburn, in 1930, approximately 500 notices were issued concerning an inadequate water supply. The owners were given twenty-eight days to rectify the problem, or again, the council would do the work and render an account. HR, born in Blackburn in 1922, lived in a house with an inadequate water supply in 1933. He said, 'Our house wasn't too bad, but the council said we had an insufficient water supply and gave the landlord a month to fix it.'⁷³ AH, born in Blackburn in 1915, and who, in 1934, lived in a house which had an inadequate water supply, said, 'The landlord wasn't happy, but he got it fixed.'⁷⁴ In 1934, the number of notices had reduced to 104, and in 1935, the number was further reduced to forty-seven.⁷⁵ In Darwen, many farms and approximately fifty houses in remote areas of the town drew water from a well in 1933, while in 1936, the MOH for Darwen, Doctor James Robertson, noted that 'Houses where there is no adequate water supply are receiving attention and it is hoped that the number will be reduced to a minimum.'⁷⁶ Poor sanitary arrangements were less easily remedied. In Blackburn, in 1930, out of 40,457 lavatories, only 38,135 were fresh water closets, the others being pail closets, which were emptied weekly by the council, slop water closets, or privies. By 1935, the number of fresh water closets had risen to 39,901.⁷⁷ In Darwen, fresh water closets were being gradually provided, and houses

⁷² CB Blackburn *Health Reports*, 1929, 1931, and 1936.

⁷³ HR. Interviewed August 2005. Transcript in author's possession.

⁷⁴ AH. Interviewed August 2005. Transcript in author's possession.

⁷⁵ CB Blackburn, *Health Reports*, 1930, 1934 & 1935.

⁷⁶ MB Darwen, *Health Reports*, 1933 & 1936.

⁷⁷ CB Blackburn, *Health Reports*, 1930, 1935.

with pail closets were disappearing as unfit homes were demolished.⁷⁸ Accrington, with 12,019 houses in 1931 had, according to the Chief Sanitary Inspector, Mr. Hindle, 9,000 tippler closets and 5,000 ash pits. He slightly understated the obvious when he said Accrington, with those figures, 'cannot justly claim high sanitary credentials.'⁷⁹ DSt, in 1933, lived in a house that was 'dark and smelly.' The replacement of a tippler closet with a water closet did not improve the house.⁸⁰ JG, remembered her mother's excitement when their tippler closet was replaced with a water closet. 'Me and my sister kept running out to look because the landlord had put in a posh toilet,' she said. It seems JG and her sister was also excited.⁸¹ Public Health Acts were clearly beginning to make a difference in conditions in the early 1930s.

The unemployed and the poor had great difficulty affording adequate accommodation and at the same time feeding their families a passable diet, which was one of the main consequences of unemployment and low pay. As mentioned above, there was a shortage of low-priced rental accommodation in North-East Lancashire. The Housing Acts between 1919 and 1933 were created in the hope of reducing the housing shortage. Observers of the time, including Spring Rice, M'Gonigle and Kirby, Felix Greene and the Coles, reflected upon the rents payable for council housing and the inability of the poor and unemployed to pay the higher rents without cutting out the necessities. Spring Rice, in 1939, noted that while health should have improved in larger, airier council houses, School Medical Officers commented upon the deterioration of health in children who had moved from bad to good housing. She attributed it to a lower standard of diet.⁸² Without an adequate income, the unemployed and low-paid of North East Lancashire as we have already seen either continued to live in unsatisfactory houses or moved to council houses and scraped by

⁷⁸ MB Darwen, *Health Reports*, 1936.

⁷⁹ MB Accrington, *Health Reports*, 1931.

⁸⁰ DSt. August 2005.

⁸¹ JG, Interviewed August 2005. Transcript in author's possession.

⁸² Spring Rice, Marjorie, *Working Class Wives* (Harmondsworth, 1939), pp.130-153.

on a reduced diet further damaging their health. Mrs Keen, in Felix Greene's *Time to Spare* (1935) had lived in a house where the rent was four shillings a week. This house was demolished and the family was re-housed in a council house at a rent of nine shillings a week. She admitted missing the rent when anything extra needed to be bought and receiving eviction notices. An unemployed man was allowed two shillings weekly in his unemployment benefit or Transitional payment, to feed and clothe a child. So the five extra shillings in rent made a big difference.⁸³ M'Gonigle and Kirby, in 1936, wrote, 'Many families are constrained to put up with a standard of housing unsuitable as regards accommodation, convenience and amenities because they cannot afford to pay sufficient rent to secure these things', and went on to write that this was the reason that those living in the slums stayed where they were. It was also their opinion, that while council houses 'represent a reasonable standard of housing accommodation,...at present, and doubtless for a long time to come, only a portion of the working classes can be housed in Council Houses.'⁸⁴ GDI and MI Cole wrote that despite the increase in house building, 'only a small proportion has gone into the erection of houses which are within the means of ordinary working class families earning relatively low wages.' The also went on to say that those living in slums, even if 'forcibly removed' through slum clearance were compelled to go short of food if they paid a higher rent.⁸⁵ Many post 1945 historians, including Alan Fowler, John Burnett, Charles Webster, Matt Perry, Keith Laybourn, John Benson and Martin Pugh, agree that the least well-off, the ones who desperately needed re-housing, could not afford to rent a council house without cutting down on other things including food and clothing. Perry, wrote, 'higher rents cut significantly into household expenditure on food.'⁸⁶ Laybourn wrote in a similar vein: 'They [council houses] were often pitched at such a price that poor families could

⁸³ Greene, Felix, *Time to Spare* p.86.

⁸⁴ M'Gonigle, GCM, & Kirby, J. *Poverty and Public Health*, pp.212-215.

⁸⁵ Cole GDI, & Cole, MI, *The Condition of Britain* (London, 1937), p.155.

⁸⁶ Perry, Matt, *Bread and Work*, p.70

not afford them without reducing their already poor standards of nutrition.⁸⁷ John Burnett, in 1978, wrote about the fundamental problem being ‘the level of rents in relation to earnings.’⁸⁸ Martin Pugh, besides noting that the unemployed could not afford council house rents, believed that ‘The Conservatives disliked municipal housing on the grounds of cost...and the competition it posed to private builders.’ In Pugh’s view, the reason subsidies were cut in 1933, was not because of the economic climate, but because of political views.⁸⁹ Charles Webster, in 1995, wrote that the most pressing social issue was poor housing and new council estates were largely inhabited by ‘skilled and white collar workers, leaving the poor in rapidly deteriorating housing stocks.’⁹⁰ It is a common theme, both in the 1930s and in the decades following that the low paid and unemployed had to make drastic economies if they wanted to improve their housing. And, as we will see in Chapter Seven, it was the diet which suffered the most, which had in turn an alarming affect on the health of the low paid and unemployed.

In some works of the time, notably the ones which are inclined to the left politically including those by Brockway, Cole, Hutt and Hannington, much is made of housing conditions and overcrowding. Brockway, in 1932, wrote of Blackburn, ‘One feels that the whole place wants sweeping up by a big woman with a big broom and then rebuilding.’⁹¹ Allen Hutt wrote, in 1933, ‘There is an acute housing shortage... [in Lancashire] there are scores of insanitary and unhealthy areas that are among the most shocking in the whole country.’⁹² While Cole, in 1937, wrote ‘the less prosperous areas are in a much worse position than the most prosperous for meeting even the most urgent housing needs.’⁹³ As we have seen, in most Boroughs in North-East

⁸⁷ Laybourn, Keith, *Britain on the Breadline*, p.79.

⁸⁸ Burnett, John, *A Social History of Housing*, p.234.

⁸⁹ Pugh, Martin, *State and Society*, p.194.

⁹⁰ Webster, Charles, ed., *Caring for Health: History and Diversity* (Buckingham, 1995), p.99.

⁹¹ Brockway, Fenner, *Hungry England* (London, 1932), p.9.

⁹² Hutt, Allen, *The Condition of the Working Class in Britain*, p.70.

⁹³ Cole, *The Condition of Britain*, p. 157.

Lancashire, overcrowding was not very prevalent, although housing conditions were highly unsatisfactory. Dr. Thierens wrote, in 1933:

The problem of overcrowding, although rare in Blackburn, presents many difficulties, inasmuch as the families concerned are living under overcrowded conditions through financial inability to secure better accommodation. It is obviously a useless and harsh procedure to serve formal notice to abate overcrowding, which will not only fail to achieve its purpose, but will further increase the suffering of the helpless individuals concerned.⁹⁴

Dr Robertson, (MOH for Darwen), laid the blame for a 'degree of overcrowding' on the lack of small and low rented houses. Poorly paid and unemployed people were unable to pay the rents asked, and no houses were available at cheaper rents. Even in 1935, the Dr Robertson reported 'the overcrowding is not in terms of people to cubic space, but the congregating together in one house of more than two families.'⁹⁵

The inability to pay higher council rents is a common theme among those interviewed. The average weekly rent of a terraced cottage was about seven shillings, while the rent of a comparable council house in Blackburn, in 1931, was between ten shillings and sixpence and twelve shillings and fourpence. The few shillings more were difficult to find for the low paid or unemployed. In his Annual Report for 1933, Dr Thierens, reported that in an analysis of three thousand records of four roomed houses in the Borough, forty-three proved to be overcrowded 'either by reason of insufficient air space or undesirable sex-distribution.' An enquiry into the financial circumstances of the forty-three families showed the following results: the total income ranged from thirty shillings to sixty shillings per week; the average rent was six shillings and fourpence, and only twenty-five of the families affected could afford the rent of a house suitable to their needs. The MOH went on to note that while larger houses were needed for those families:

⁹⁴ CB Blackburn, *Health Reports*, 1931.

⁹⁵ MB Darwen, *Health Reports*, 1933-1935.

Under existing legislation, no subsidy is available for rehousing families dispossessed from houses other than those dealt with as part of an insanitary area under the Housing Act of 1930. Even were such a subsidy available for rehousing occupants of overcrowded dwellings, the majority of families are financially incapable of affording accommodation adequate for their needs.⁹⁶

Two tentative solutions to the problem were put forward by Dr Thierens: that a subsidy should be made available for rehousing the overcrowded, and a system of differential renting introduced for families rehoused.⁹⁷ The Housing Act of 1935 made financial provisions under Part III of the Act, to alleviate overcrowding,⁹⁸ however, this did little to resolve the housing shortage and the overcrowding problem because it took many years of house building before slums could be demolished. In Blackburn, slum houses were still being demolished in the early 1960s, and the remainder of the serried ranks of terraced houses were extensively renovated by government grants up until the late 1990s.

The number of houses built by local authorities did not match the numbers of people waiting to be rehoused. Blackburn in 1930 gained 279 new houses while 1,342 people were waiting to be rehoused, 952 for the cheapest rented house. In 1931, 254 houses were built, while 825 people waited for a house. Even in 1936, after 1,991 houses had been built, there were still 228 on the waiting list. Burnley, in 1931 saw 86 new houses built. In 1932, 92 new houses were built. In 1933, 131 new houses were built, in 1934, 423 new houses were built and in 1935, a further 330 houses were built.⁹⁹ Darwen, because of its smaller size, built an average of fifty-one houses per year in the same period, although the MOH for Darwen noted a decrease in the population because of the 'continued depression.'¹⁰⁰ The MOH for Great Harwood noted a 'sufficiency of supply of houses.' Since 1921, the population had decreased by

⁹⁶ CB Blackburn *Health Reports*, 1933

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Housing Act, 1935*, (25 & 26, Geo.V) Part III.

⁹⁹ CB Burnley, *Health Reports* 1931-36.

¹⁰⁰ MB Darwen, *Health Reports*, 1936.

approximately 2,000, and 'still continues [to fall] owing to the trade depression.'¹⁰¹

Rents payable were similar in all council areas because the Ministry of Health regulated rents. The rents of council houses in Blackburn were reduced in September 1932 on the recommendation of the Health and Housing Committee. The Borough Engineer and the Borough Treasurer had been 'authorised to interview the Ministry of Health with regard to a reduction in rents for the houses erected under the 1919 Assisted Scheme.' The Ministry agreed.¹⁰² The MOH for Darwen noted that a scheme for building sixty-three small houses was waiting for Ministry of Health clearance, and people were leaving the area because of a lack of employment and as a consequence, there were ninety houses available for 'working classes at a reasonable weekly rent.'¹⁰³ Not until the outbreak of World War Two, with its attendant full employment, was the housing shortage in North-East Lancashire eased, if not solved.

Effects on Children.

As we have seen, early childhood experiences and social status were important determinants of health. Richard Wilkinson, an epidemiologist, wrote in 2005, 'Psychosocial risk factors for disease reflect how we think, experience and suffer in our lives.'¹⁰⁴ DS was afraid his school friends would make fun of him.¹⁰⁵ SB was 'too ashamed' to mention his family home had been classed as unfit for human inhabitation.¹⁰⁶ LC was embarrassed because she, and her sisters got free school dinners while others in what she considered was the same situation did not.¹⁰⁷ If those mentioned were 'too ashamed', afraid of being figures of fun, or embarrassed by their circumstances, an element of social exclusion must have been felt. KM did feel social exclusion because of nationality, when the landlord blamed the condition of their house

¹⁰¹ Urban District of Great Harwood, MOH *Annual Reports* 1930.

¹⁰² CB Blackburn *Health and Housing Committee Minutes*, 12 September 1932.

¹⁰³ MB Darwen, *Health Report*, 1936.

¹⁰⁴ Wilkinson, Richard, *The Impact of Inequality* (London, 2005), p.13.

¹⁰⁵ DS. August 2002.

¹⁰⁶ SB. August 2005.

¹⁰⁷ LC. August 2005.

on the fact that ‘mum and dad were Irish.’ The people I interviewed were in their eighties in 2002 and 2005, so psychosocial factor’s had no long term physical effects on them. However, they had vivid memories of those events. AB said that his family were ‘allus hungry’;¹⁰⁸ LS said her father and brother stole coal and wood to keep warm in winter;¹⁰⁹ SY’s baby brother died because, her mother believed, ‘her milk dried up and she couldn’t give him what were wanted’;¹¹⁰ and GS and her family ate off wooden plates her father made because they could not afford pottery ones.¹¹¹ Many children however, did suffer long term effects. DSt mentioned that ‘When things got better, me and my sister got fat. She got heart disease and diabetes and died in her forties.’¹¹² Geoffrey Mather, a local historian from East Lancashire, wrote about his experiences in the 1930s.

A child sees what is. He (the child) has nothing with which to compare that vision. Too young to have a past and not old enough to put the present into perspective, he accepts the things around him as the only things there are. My parents, and other older people, no doubt suffered through fear, insecurity, and, for all I know, lack of money, but they were my shield against such misfortunes. I was a child and therefore all was simple.¹¹³

He realised however, that even in the 1990s, ‘The insecurities of the thirties stalk the land like ghosts.’¹¹⁴ Not all parents could be ‘shields against such misfortunes’. William Woodruff recalled how he and his brother shared a bedroom with his parents. He wrote that ‘Living in such a confined space meant everybody shared everybody else’s joys and sorrows.’¹¹⁵ Children who were ‘too ashamed’, or afraid of being made fun of, or were too embarrassed, about their circumstances, knew what was going on in their homes and their community.

¹⁰⁸ AB August 2002.

¹⁰⁹ LS August 2002.

¹¹⁰ SY August 2002.

¹¹¹ GS August 2002.

¹¹² DSt. August 2002.

¹¹³ Mather Geoffrey, *Tackler’s Tales* (Lancaster, 1993), p.6.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* p.96.

¹¹⁵ Woodruff, *Road to Nab End*, p.12.

Attempts by the National Government to increase the number of houses built for the working classes were not successful. However, the Housing Acts from 1919 to 1935 did make it possible for much of the unhealthy housing to be demolished, reconditioned or renovated. Lloyd George mentioned some local councils were not good because of 'restricted income placed at their disposal',¹¹⁶ although it seems that the North-East Lancashire councils were quite good at looking after their communities. Blackburn Council managed to reduce council house rents in 1932, and even earlier, in the mid 1800s it put through Private Acts of Parliament to improve the town. The local authorities in North-East Lancashire were quite vigilant in their inspections of houses to be reconditioned. Much of the housing stock in the textile areas of North-East Lancashire was old, and because houses had been built quickly, was in poor condition. Many houses were poorly ventilated, were in areas which surrounded by cotton mills, which in many cases were closed and in a state of disrepair. New council-built houses were built in areas close to the edge of towns with fresh air and space. If the people in unsanitary houses had been able to afford these improved houses, and if the numbers of improved houses had increased, then the health and well-being of the families would have been enhanced. The lack of low rent housing for the lower paid and unemployed meant a degree of overcrowding, although as we have seen, most of the overcrowding in our area was caused by more than one family living together, or married children living with their parents due to lack of money for better housing. Dr Thierens, noted the uselessness and harshness of serving formal notices in many cases of overcrowding because of the suffering it would cause to 'helpless individuals', and also drew to the Housing Committee's attention to the gross exploitation of houses-let-in-lodgings. This once more demonstrates the way that local authorities in North East Lancashire knew what the situation was in their areas and took care of those in the community.

¹¹⁶ Lloyd George, Speech at Wolverhampton, 24 November 1918.

CHAPTER 5

WELFARE AND WELL-BEING IN THE COMMUNITY

In this chapter I will focus on the welfare and well-being of the population, particularly children, in the economic crisis of the Depression in order to determine whether the welfare system in place was beneficial to those in need of assistance. This will entail close study of the public health departments of the North East Lancashire cotton towns, and the services they provided for the whole community. The public health system in Great Britain had its beginnings in the nineteenth-century with men like Edwin Chadwick (1800-1890), a social reformer, who wrote *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (1842), and who pressured the government of the day to pass the first Public Health Act; William Farr (1807-1883), one of the first medical epidemiologists who helped bring about advances in hygiene and public health, including drawing attention to maternal and infant death rates and admonishing the Royal Colleges for failing to train doctors in obstetric practices; and Sir John Simon (1816-1904), who became the first Medical Officer of Health for London, and was responsible for the *Public Health Act, 1875*, which provided a complete sanitary code upon which the present British system is founded, and which eventually led to an improvement in the health of the general population. This Act and the ones which followed were those which gave local authorities the power to continue to improve the living conditions in the community.

Public health departments of local government were responsible for implementing successive Public Health Acts which covered water, food hygiene, sanitation, infectious diseases and public clinics since the Acts were passed. They were also responsible for providing, organising and coordinating Maternity and Child Welfare Clinics. The development of these clinics was stimulated by the First World

War which led to the discovery of large numbers of men whose low physical standards, (height, weight, strength and health and physical condition) were found to be due, in many cases, to a lack of skilled nursing and medical care in infancy and childhood, medical care being not universally available in the nineteenth century. The passing of the *Notification of Births (Extension) Act, 1915*, and the *Maternity and Child Welfare Act, 1918*, gave wide and comprehensive powers to local authorities, acting with government approval, to establish services designed to safeguard maternity and child health for children under the age of five before they came under the jurisdiction of the School Medical Service. In this chapter, I will determine how well the North East Lancashire councils responded to the economic crisis. By reviewing the *Local Government Act, 1929*,¹ and the *Poor Law Act, 1930*,² it will be possible to determine how they affected the way the disadvantaged were treated. I will analyse the Acts themselves, in addition to the local government records of North East Lancashire towns to establish what precisely was achieved for the welfare of the community. I will concentrate mainly on one town, Blackburn, which was the largest in the area, but, to a lesser extent, I will use Burnley records, as well as any other available East Lancashire council records. I will also examine the records of maternal and child welfare clinics and other relevant works to determine whether, as is popularly believed by contemporaneous observers and many historians, doctors placed professional self interest before the well-being of clients by preferring MOHs only to advise, not treat patients, and some MOHs (not in our area) not wishing to have their clinics issue milk, or supplements and being seen as ‘food stations’, and I will also show how important these clinics were to the large numbers of women not covered by the National Health Insurance Act. I will explore what other local authority clinics offered, particularly for preschool children, and I will look at the welfare of those children in the care of local authorities, both in cottage homes or boarded out to foster parents. Finally, I will

¹ *Local Government Act, 1929*, (19, Geo. V).

² *Poor Law Act, 1930*, (20, Geo. V).

determine what national government responses were in regarding maternal and child welfare, and the welfare of the population in general, particularly in the prevailing economic climate. We will see that by giving local authorities the powers they did under the Local Government Act and the Poor Law Act, national government gave the responsibility to local authorities to care for their communities while still having a high degree of financial control over local councils. How well the local authorities did care for the community we shall see below.

Maternity and Child Welfare Clinics.

With the *Notification of Births (Extension) Act, 1915*,³ Exchequer grants became available to local authorities, and bodies who provided maternal and child welfare services, which enabled them to improve and extend maternity provision, infant clinics and health visiting. Under the *Maternity and Child Welfare Act, 1918*,⁴ local authorities had the power to provide, ante and post-natal clinics, home visiting, infant welfare centres, and pay midwives' fees in necessitous cases. However, although attendance and advice from centres, was free, the mother was required to contribute, according to her means, towards any services she received. In 1930, as a result of the *Local Government Act, 1929*, the Ministry of Health discontinued direct grants to voluntary bodies and made Exchequer Grants, or block grants to local authorities, which, with local funds and rates, were to provide local government services and expand the services already offered to the people of the area.

The *Maternity and Child Welfare Act, 1918*, although giving wide, comprehensive powers, did not compel local authorities to make use of those powers, and some local authorities did not attempt to carry out their responsibilities fully. However, the Councils of the North East Lancashire cotton towns set a high standard of services for the people in their area. Blackburn, with a population of 125,000 in 1930,

³ *Notification of Births (Extension) Act, 1915*, (5 & 6, Geo.V).

⁴ *Maternity and Child Welfare Act, 1918*, (8 & 9, Geo.V).

had eight maternal and child welfare clinics and three ante-natal clinics, plus a special ante-natal clinic primarily for women with venereal disease. Burnley, with a population of 100,200 in 1930 had six maternal and child welfare clinics open four days a week and three ante-natal clinics open four days a week, with average attendance at the centres of 776 infants and 514 school children weekly. Darwen had two centres with one clinic open daily and the other weekly. The average numbers of mothers attending was 111 weekly, and the average number of children attending was 112. Darwen also had a means tested scheme for free milk in necessitous cases. From January 1934, Darwen had a daily ante-natal clinic. Accrington recorded 7,317 visits to infant welfare centres in 1933. In addition, Accrington employed four health visitors. Haslingden held fortnightly clinics, but had no permanent Medical Officer until 1932. In September 1933, a series of talks were given at Haslingden's Maternal and Child Welfare Centres on breast feeding and infant feeding. A health visitor was employed and made, on average, fifty home visits a month, while an average of 76 infants and 84 preschool children visited the centres weekly between 1932 and 1935. Colne had an average of 750 attendances monthly at the Maternal and Child Welfare Centres between 1930 and 1935. Nelson held Maternity and Child Welfare Clinics weekly. In 1932-33, there were 46 clinics with 405 infants, 401 preschool children and 78 pregnant women registered. These figures, although incomplete and not perfect, do show that the cotton towns of North East Lancashire were making an effort to address the needs of their citizens, and equally important, to encourage parents, through lectures and advertising locally, to attend and take their children to these centres.

Many social commentators at the time, and in later years, wrote of professional self-interest and regard for their status by general practitioners and maternal and child welfare workers. Mothers were given advice rather than medical treatment. At the British Medical Association's (BMA) Annual Representative Meeting, in 1928, the medical professionals' self-interest can be seen when a resolution was passed which

complained of the threat to private medical practices from local authority doctors and health workers, demonstrating a degree of self-interest. At the same meeting, doctors were urged to protest about the practice of preventative medicine by local MOHs; it was the BMA's view that, 'The main sphere of the private practitioner is the giving of medical advice; the main sphere of the public health medical officer is the promotion of healthy conditions for the community',⁵ and they feared that MOHs were encroaching on their preserve. In 1931, at a meeting in Canada, Doctor James Fenton, a MOH in London, said, 'The legitimate sphere of infant and welfare centres is educative, preventative and advisory'. However, since his area of responsibility was the Royal Borough of Kensington, it is likely that his patients were able to afford medical treatment.⁶ The Report of the Save the Children Fund, *Unemployment and the Child* (1933) noted, 'we get the impression however, that the tendency is for those in charge of the [Maternity and Child Health] Centre to concentrate on help to the nursing and expectant mother and to infants'.⁷ The authors of the Report thought this was because of a Circular from the Ministry of Health urging local authorities to pay special regard to service offered in the interests of the economy, which really meant save money.⁸ Jane Lewis, in 1980, wrote of the limited services which were offered at Maternal and Child Health Centres. She found that women were distressed by infant welfare centres' offer of diagnosis and advice but no treatment. This was due, she found, to 'the attitude of doctors who feared the clinics (particularly when they were state-run) would intrude into the province of the GP'.⁹ Lynn Hollen Lees, in 1998, wrote of the limited services offered by local authorities and suggested that 'health visitors and infant welfare clinics dispensed advice on "good mothering" rather than medical knowledge'.¹⁰ Harry

⁵ 'BMAs Private Practice Committee's Interim Report on Encroachments on the Sphere of Private Practice by the Activities of Local Authorities', *British Medical Journal*, II (1928) Supplement, pp. 185-96.

⁶ Fenton, James, 'Maternity and Infant Welfare Service in England and Wales' *American Journal of Public Health and The Nation's Health*, Volume XXI, December 1931, No. 12.

⁷ Save the Children Fund, *Unemployment and the Child*, p.32.

⁸ *Ibid.* MOH Circular 1222, September 1931.

⁹ Lewis, Jane, *The Politics of Motherhood*, p. 108.

¹⁰ Hollen Lees, Lynn, *The Solidarity of Strangers*, (Cambridge, 1998) p. 339.

Hendrick, in 1994, wrote that nutritional supplement was opposed by many Medical Officers of Health, and looked on food rations as a 'short cut to turning their centres into solely food stations', indeed, he wrote of one MOH who felt women should pay to attend centres as they 'would appreciate it more'. He described how easy it was to discourage mothers seeking free milk for themselves and their children. This included 'six separate forms to be completed...applicants had to be inspected by a health visitor...in addition there was a means test and a medical inspection, and successful applicants had to have their cases reviewed each month'.¹¹ The local authorities in North East Lancashire were far more concerned for the health and well-being of those in their community. The rise in the maternal mortality rate in the interwar years, which will be examined in Chapter Seven, demonstrated the need for medical intervention from Maternal and Child Welfare Clinics, not just advice.

The *Local Government Act, 1929*, among other things, transferred the functions of Poor Law authorities to County or County Borough Councils. These councils, under the Act, also took over the Poor Law hospitals and turned the feared and dreaded Workhouse into a Public Assistance Institution, but still called the 'House' in the County Boroughs of Blackburn and Burnley minutes. Woodruff, told us above how the workhouse was the awful final refuge for people whose reserves had been exhausted.¹² The *Poor Law Act, 1930*, worked in conjunction with the 1929 Act. It defined the responsibilities toward relieving the poor, and made families responsible for maintaining their own members if they could afford to. Councils could obtain maintenance orders against families who would not support family members. Councils were also given the power to compel families or the person being relieved to reimburse the council for any relief given. For example, on 28 May 1931, at a meeting of the House Sub-Committee, it was resolved, 'That the money found in the possession of patients on their admission to the institution, amounting to the sum of one pound two

¹¹ Harry Hendrick, *Child Welfare*, p. 144.

¹² Woodruff, *Nab End*, p.330.

shillings and threepence be paid to the Borough Treasurer'.¹³ Another example from the Cottage Homes Sub-Committee Minutes was of a mother who had died in the Institution leaving a life insurance policy of which there remained six pounds after funeral expenses. It was recommended that the PAC claim the amount in respect of maintenance of her three children.¹⁴ Old age pensions, army pensions and widows' pensions were also liable to be claimed by council, unless the claim was waived so the pension could support children or other dependents.

The 1930 Act, rather than abolishing workhouses, gave the Minister of Health the power 'to require the provision of workhouse accommodation', and authorise the council to 'acquire by purchase or hire, any workhouse or other building capable of being converted into a workhouse, and to enlarge or alter it'.¹⁵ The 1930 Act also gave PAC Committees power of parental control over children who had been deserted, or were orphans, whose parents were in gaol, disabled or institutionalised. In addition, the Act gave councils the power to bind children, whose parents were unable to maintain them, to apprenticeships, with councils bound to register young persons taken as servants from workhouses. The Act gave councils the authority to assist in the emigration of any orphan or deserted child under the age of sixteen, or any other poor person who was chargeable to the county or county borough council, or any destitute person having settlement in the council area. The person emigrating, in theory, had to give consent.¹⁶ For example, in February 1932, the PAC officer submitted a recommendation of the Cottage Homes Sub-Committee, that JJ, 'be assisted to immigrate to Canada'. It was resolved, 'That JJ, a deserted child being chargeable to this County Borough, and having consented to emigrate to Canada, necessary steps be taken to effect emigration under the auspices of the Catholic Emigration Association, and that a sum not exceeding twenty-four pounds be expended for such

¹³ CB Blackburn, House Sub-Committee *Minutes*, 28 May 1931.

¹⁴ CB Blackburn, Cottage Homes Sub-Committee 6 December 1932.

¹⁵ *Poor Law Act*, Part II, 21.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 52-68.

purposes'. In April 1932, the Director of Education reported that JJ had been rejected by the Canadian Government Emigration Agent as unsuitable for emigration.¹⁷ A later report, dated 23 May 1933, stated that JJ was discharged from Wellesley Auxiliary Home, South Shields 'for sea employment'.¹⁸ Councils were also given the authority to assist boys wishing to enter naval service. In September 1931, the Director of Education submitted a request from JS, aged 14, 'That arrangements might be made for him to enter for a period of training to enable him to join the Navy or Mercantile Marine Service'. In October 1931, the Director of Education reported to the Cottage Homes Sub-Committee that 'arrangements had been made for JS to enter the National Nautical School, Portishead Somerset, as a voluntary pupil, at a fee of twenty-nine shillings per week', paid for by the PAC. In August 1932, the Director of Education submitted a memorandum from the Captain of the National Nautical School, Portishead, in respect of JS, a pupil sent to the school by the Blackburn PAC, in respect of JS joining the Royal Navy. The request was approved subject to his parents' consent being obtained. JS joined the Royal Navy on 10 October 1932.¹⁹ The Act was also to clarify Settlement and Removal, which had previously been the cause of disagreement between Poor Law areas. The Act gave rules as to who had settlement and who had not. Relief became the responsibility of the area in which the person had grown up, rather than the parish in which they were born.²⁰ This had been a source of animosity between parishes in Great Britain since the introduction of the Elizabethan Poor Laws, and is familiar to those who have read Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. The way the Acts were seamlessly put into practice is demonstrated in the next section which will examine the transition and the mechanisms needed to continue local governance while immense changes were taking place nationally.

¹⁷ CB Blackburn PAC *Minutes*, 24 February 1932, & 5 April 1932.

¹⁸ CB Blackburn Cottage Homes Sub-Committee *Minutes* 23 May 1933.

¹⁹ CB Blackburn, Cottage Homes Sub-Committee *Minutes*, September and October 1931, and August & November 1932.

²⁰ Poor Law Act. Part III.

The Local Government Act, 1929, and the Poor Law Act, 1930: Blackburn as a case study.

The *Local Government Act, 1929*, changed the structure of Poor Law Institutions in England and Wales. The Act abolished Poor Law Unions and their Boards of Guardians and passed their powers to local authorities. Responsibility for public assistance was given to county and borough councils. With the *Poor Law Act, 1930*, Poor Law hospitals were transferred to local government, while workhouses became 'public assistance institutions'. This case study will show how Blackburn, a County Borough with a population of more than 125,000 in North East Lancashire, managed the transition, and demonstrate how a group of people, mostly unpaid, could seamlessly transfer powers from a series of separate entities to one local council. This is a further manifestation of the level of public service prevalent in Great Britain.

On 13 March 1930, at the first meeting of the Public Assistance Committee (PAC), the Town Clerk explained the Administration Scheme produced by the Town Council for discharging functions transferred to them under the *Local Government Act*. Mr GB Pye was appointed Public Assistance Officer, and the Offices of the Board of Guardians were to be taken over by the Town Council. The Board of Guardians had been asked to enter into contracts according to their usual procedure for a period of six months from 1 April 1930, in order to ensure a continuity of supplies during the transitional period. The Lancashire County Council agreed that the ownership, control and management of property owned by the Board of Guardians situated within the Borough of Blackburn should be vested in the Town Council, and negotiations should take place between the Lancashire County Council and the Town Council regarding financial arrangements which would be made in connection with the transfer of such property between the County Council and Borough Council.

The Public Assistance Committee (PAC) numbered thirty-one, and these thirty-one persons made up the necessary Sub-Committees whose membership numbers are listed below. Most members of the Public Assistance Committee were on more than one Sub-Committee, one was on six Sub-Committees, while another was on five Sub-Committees. It is probable that some members were also members of other Sub-Committees, such as Education, Health, Maternal and Child Welfare, or Housing.

House (Workhouse) Sub-Committee	18 Members
Hospital Sub-Committee	18 Members
Children's Homes Sub-Committee	9 Members
Boarding-Out Sub-Committee	9 Members
Stores Sub-Committee	9 Members
Farm and Gardens Sub-Committee	9 Members
Works Department Sub-Committee	9 Members
Five Districts Relief Sub-Committees	7 Members in each
Central Relief Sub-Committee.	7 Members

Table 22. Sub-Committees of the Public Assistance Committee. County Borough of Blackburn.

Source: County Borough Blackburn Public Assistance Committee *Minutes*, March 1930.

Table produced by me from the above source.

It was also resolved that a Special Sub-Committee be appointed to consider and report upon the duties assigned to each of the above mentioned Sub-Committees. The Town Clerk next submitted a letter from the Lancashire County Council requesting the continued use of the Poor Law Union offices when the Act came into force on 1 April 1930. The Town Clerk was then asked to inform the PAC what regulations would be necessary for the government and control of the institution (workhouse), the buildings, the officers, the staff and inmates. The Board of Guardians were requested to make orders for relief to continue for a suitable period after 1 April, and the Special Sub-Committee was asked to decide on the granting of relief.²¹

In the second meeting of the PAC, on 20 March 1930, a report dated 18 March was tabled which would inform all Sub-Committees of their duties. The House Sub-Committee's duties would be to carry out and perform the requirements imposed by the

²¹ CB Blackburn, *Minutes of the Public Assistance Committee and Sub-Committees*, 13 March 1930.

Poor Law Order 1930. The Children's Homes Sub-Committee and the Boarding-Out Sub-Committee had to wait for members to be appointed and so were adjourned. The Education Committee was asked to submit a draft scheme to the PAC which would deal with the maintenance of children separated from their parents (boarded-out). The Stores Sub-Committee's duties concerned purchasing all stores needed for the smooth running of other departments, keeping a financial watch, and accounting stores twice yearly. The Hospital Sub-Committee's function was to discharge the requirement defined by the *Poor Law Order, 1930*, including purchasing drugs and surgical necessities, interviewing and appointing staff subject to confirmation by the PAC. The District Relief Sub-Committee's brief was to hear and determine all applications for out-relief, and to supervise relief generally. The Works Sub-Committee was to be responsible for all repairs and regulating Works Departments, electricity, transport and telephone installations. The Report was accepted and members of Sub-committees were appointed.²² At the PAC meeting on 9 April 1930, all Sub-Committees were operating and reporting.²³ Although there were many paid members of the Town Council, clerks and management staff for example, for such a large-scale change to be up and running smoothly in such a short time with a group of people who were largely volunteers, is quite remarkable.

Boarded-Out Children.

It is impossible to access records concerning children except for general information records because, as we have seen previously, restrictions are in place.²⁴ There is some information still available in local government collections, and it is this which I will use in this section albeit with individuals' initials rather than full names.

²² *Ibid.* 20 March 1930.

²³ *Ibid.* 9 April 1930.

²⁴ Records freely available on a research trip in 2004 were unavailable in 2007 because of Data Protection Acts enacted by the Parliament of Great Britain.

Boarding-out was originally the practice of placing workhouse children in the long-term care of foster parents who usually received a weekly allowance for each child staying with them. This system was seen as the closest approximation of a home life a Poor Law Union could provide. More important, it was financially economical. Under paragraph five of the Town Council's Administrative Scheme under the *Local Government Act 1929*, the responsibility for maintaining boarded-out children became the duty of the Education Committee, which was responsible to the PAC. Boarded-out children were visited monthly by official visitors who reported to the Director of Education. As we have seen earlier, a Sub-Committee, working with the Education Department was responsible for children in Cottage Homes and children boarded-out. This Sub-Committee dispensed grants for boarded-out relief which were reviewed quarterly. Providing funding to purchase clothing for children boarded-out was also the responsibility of the Sub-Committee. Regulations were the same for all councils, but the records I will use are from the Blackburn Cottage Homes Sub-Committee. The Sub-Committee had a certain amount of flexibility in their dealings with the children for whom they were responsible. For example, in December 1930, it was resolved by the Sub-Committee, 'that each boarded-out child receive one shilling extra in Christmas Week'.²⁵ Later when unemployment rose, the Sub-Committee applied to the Ministry of Health for permission to grant assistance to boarded-out children who could not get a job.²⁶ Two young people whose records cover the periods we are dealing with, and show where they were when the period ended, were KT, born in Blackburn in 1919 and IVL, born in Blackburn in 1921. The case studies which follow concern these two young women, but could be any young person boarded-out by the local council.

²⁵ CB Blackburn, Cottage Homes Sub-Committee *Minutes*, 2 December 1930.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 1930-35.

Case Studies.

IVL was born in 1921 and was boarded-out in April 1931 to a Mr L, her maternal grandfather.²⁷ He received a grant of five shillings a week for two weeks, then seven shillings and sixpence for a further week then ten shillings a week thereafter. In the Cottage Homes Sub-Committee records IVL was first mentioned in April 1931 when she was originally boarded-out, then again in May 1931 when her boarded-out relief was continued and again in June 1931 when the Sub-Committee resolved to supply her with a pair of shoes and two pairs of stockings.²⁸ There are numerous occasions in the Cottage Homes Minutes where the supply and payment of clothing for IVL was mentioned during the next several years. In March 1934, IVL was removed from Mr L's care and boarded-out with a Mrs D. The Sub-Committee required a further report when IVL reached the age of fourteen. In December 1934, IVL's parents applied to the Sub-Committee for her to live with them, which was granted for a probationary period of six months, with a boarded-out allowance of five shillings a week. She was again removed from their care on 8 February 1935 when she was placed in the Cottage Homes. When the Sub-Committee read the report produced when IVL turned fourteen, they decided, after consulting IVL, to investigate a place at a school for domestic training. On 30 April 1935, the Sub-Committee resolved that an application be made for a place for IVL at the Toxteth Park Girls' Home for Domestic Training and a maintenance payment of ten shillings weekly be approved. IVL was admitted to the Toxteth Park Home in Liverpool on 21 May 1935 and was removed from the Children's Homes Register. In August 1935, the Sub-Committee resolved to allow IVL one shilling weekly pocket money. In addition, the Sub-Committee received monthly reports from the Training School concerning her progress and behaviour. On 20 August 1936, the Chairman of the Cottage Homes Sub-Committee, Councillor Worden reported to the Sub-Committee that IVL had been placed in a situation and he had 'authorised an outfit costing eight

²⁷ CB Blackburn Children's Homes, *Register of Children*, 1924-1936.

²⁸ Cottage Homes Sub-Committee *Minutes*, 6 December 1932.

pounds to be provided', which the Sub-Committee approved.²⁹ I have been unable to discover any more details of IVL because of restrictions, and attempts through the local newspaper were fruitless. It seems, however, that IVLs welfare was paramount and she was given a chance to learn a trade which would enable her to earn a living.

KT was born in 1919 and was boarded-out with her sister JT (for whom there is little information) to their grandmother in 1930. As with IVL, there was regular mention of clothing required and provided for both sisters. On 8 January 1935, the Director of Education reported that an Inspector from the Ministry of Health had visited K and JT, as well as other boarded-out children in respect of their living conditions. There is no record of what he found, but the sisters stayed with their grandmother so their living conditions must have been satisfactory. On 8 October 1935, the Director of Education reported that KT had reached the age of sixteen years, and was in attendance at Commercial Classes at the Technical College. The Sub-Committee resolved to apply to the Ministry of Health for permission to 'grant assistance in respect of the girl as and when necessary to 31 December 1935. On 1 November 1935, the Director of Education again noted that the Ministry of Health's sanction for boarding-out relief to KT would cease on 31 December 1935. Application was again made to the Ministry of Health for permission to assist KT. Permission was given then and again in March 1936. In August, the Sub-Committee again, were applying for permission to assist KT when the Director of Education received a report from the Head of the Technical College which informed them that KT had been placed in a situation at Plymouth on 13 August 1936.³⁰ Plymouth was 250 miles away from Blackburn and KT's family. KT was just seventeen.

The two young women mentioned above received different treatment because of their level of education. IVL left school when she was fourteen, and then sent away

²⁹ CB Blackburn, Cottage Homes Sub-Committee *Minutes*, 1932-1936.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 1930-1936

for domestic training, while KT attended school until she was sixteen, and then went to the Technical College for Commercial Classes. Both however, although in different ways, were cared for well, and were given the means to earn their living. Most children who had been boarded out or had been placed in schools were given the opportunity to learn a trade which would make them employable.

The Poor Law Act.

Under the *Poor Law Act, 1930*, when a child was maintained by a council, and in that council's opinion the child's parents, if living, were unfit parents, the council could claim 'parental rights' over that child until they reached the age of eighteen.³¹ In May, 1930, under those powers, Blackburn's PAC claimed parental rights for sisters E and BG because their mother, 'in the opinion of this Committee, by reason of her mode of life, is unfit to have control of her children'.³² The same thing happened to M, J and GM, whose mother, in May 1932, was considered 'unfit to have control of her children'.³³ S and DB, for whom the council assumed parental rights in May 1932, had a father who was an 'unfit person' and a mother who was unfit 'by reason of mental deficiency'. Both were deemed unfit to have control of their children.³⁴ The PAC could also take legal action against those 'neglecting to maintain persons...who have become chargeable to the County Borough',³⁵ namely JJC, who had abandoned his wife and children, and RW, who also had abandoned his wife and children.³⁶ It was not only deserting husbands who faced legal action, adult children of those granted relief faced legal proceedings to maintain their parents. For example, in September 1930, CT was ordered to pay two shillings weekly in respect of out-relief granted to his mother, E. Similarly, AR was ordered to pay two shillings and sixpence weekly in respect of out-

³¹ *Poor Law, 1930*, Part II, 52.

³² CB Blackburn PAC *Minutes* 19 May 1930.

³³ *Ibid.* 25 May 1932.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Poor Law Act* Part II.

³⁶ CB Blackburn PAC *Minutes*, 19 May 1930.

relief granted to his mother S.³⁷ As the economic crisis gained momentum, and unemployment grew, the lists of legal actions recorded in PAC *Minutes* grew accordingly.

Inmates of the Institution (Workhouse), if they were in receipt of a pension, had that pension appropriated toward the cost of maintenance, unless the pension recipient had dependents. Parents of children in the Institution were required to pay a certain amount toward the cost of maintaining their children. There are records of wives, husbands, sisters, brothers and offspring being ordered to pay maintenance.³⁸ On Saturday, 29 March 1930, three days before the 1929 Act and 1930 Act came into force, there were 1,115 inmates in the Blackburn Institution, 368 men, 250 women and nineteen children between the ages of three and sixteen years all in separate wards. 146 men, 195 women and eighty-one children were in the separate infirmary, with fifty of those children under three.³⁹ When the Acts came into being, we see a similar number, but 294 were chargeable to the Lancashire County Council because their settlement was in the County Council Area.⁴⁰ Money in the possession of inmates admitted to the Institution was appropriated toward the cost of maintenance. For example, in May 1930, the records show that 'the sum of two shillings and seven pence found in the possession of CF on her admission to the Institution', was paid to the Borough Treasurer.⁴¹ Residents of the Institution were cared for quite well, if not generously. Nonetheless, as previously noted, the workhouse was feared by anyone who could possibly end there. In July 1930, a piano was purchased for patients in the infirm ward at a cost of seven pounds ten shillings.⁴² At a meeting in August 1930, it was resolved 'that an artificial limb be purchased for JG, an inmate of the Institution, at

³⁷ *Ibid.* 8 September 1930.

³⁸ CB Blackburn, House Sub-Committee *Minutes*, 2 April 1930.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 19 April 1930.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 7 May 1930.

⁴² *Ibid.* 16 July 1930.

an estimated cost of nineteen pounds five shillings'.⁴³ In September 1930, HW, an inmate of the County Mental Asylum, Whittingham Hospital, and chargeable to Blackburn County Borough, 'was supplied with artificial teeth', while MAF, also chargeable to the County Borough of Blackburn, and a patient at Langho Colony (a mental health facility) 'received artificial teeth at an estimated cost of five pounds ten shillings'.⁴⁴ On occasions such as Christmas or public celebrations, those in the Institution were given extra rations such as cake or treats. Men were usually given tobacco, women were usually given sweets and the wards were decorated.

Below is a resolution from the Blackburn House Sub-Committee detailing what was required for 'Christmas Festivities'.

1. That the dinner of inmates on Christmas Day shall consist of four ounces of beef, mutton or pork (weight cooked), eight ounces of potatoes, with pickled cabbage, twelve ounces of plum pudding and one pint of coffee per inmate.
2. That in addition to the ordinary diet, four ounces of bacon shall be issued to each inmate for breakfast on Christmas Day, and one egg for breakfast on Boxing Day.
3. That each male inmate be supplied with one ounce of tobacco and a pipe, each female inmate with three ounces of tea and four ounces of sugar, each child with six ounces of sweets, and each inmate with an apple and an orange.
4. That each inmate be supplied with eight ounces of cake on Boxing Day and New Year's Day.
5. That the Stores Sub-Committee be requested to purchase the additional provisions required.
6. That the Institution shall be decorated as usual.
7. That a concert be provided on Boxing Day.⁴⁵

At a meeting of the Blackburn PAC, in 1931, it was decided that 'extra allowance of out-relief be made to out-door poor (in their own homes) chargeable to this County Borough at Christmas, whether resident or non-resident, and accordingly that out-door relief be granted during the week including Christmas Day to persons who are actually in receipt of relief on that day. Adults one shilling and sixpence, and children one

⁴³ *Ibid.* 6 August 1930.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 17 September 1930, & 26 May 1931.

⁴⁵ PAC *Minutes* 18 November 1931.

shilling each'.⁴⁶ Many inmates were elderly persons with no one to care for them, persons who from the late 1950s would be in senior citizen's homes. Until these homes were built, the elderly infirm had to be cared for somewhere, and the Institution, no matter what stigma, fear and dread it engendered, was a better place to be properly cared for than to be at home, alone and neglected.

Uncertainties for children under the Poor Law Act

Incidents concerning two children in the period between 1933 and 1936 demonstrate the uncertainties faced by children without families, or in care. HT, born in 1919, and MR, born in 1920, both received the same unsettling treatment by the Cottage Homes Sub-Committee. HT, over whom the Council had parental rights, had shown an interest in farming and the boarding out committee placed him with a farmer, Mr T, in November 1933. In June 1934, a farmer, Mr H, applied to the Sub-Committee for a farm hand and HT was transferred to Mr H's farm. In June 1935, HT was again transferred to yet another farmer, Mr P. However, regardless of that transfer ordered by the Sub-Committee, HT was allowed to return to the farmer, Mr T, for whom he worked originally. In November 1935, HT was again in the Cottage Homes, from where he was transferred to Queen's Park Hospital, the Institution, temporarily, 'with a view to his being transferred to a suitable home'. On 7 January 1936, HT applied through the YMCA Community Service Scheme for Farm Work in Great Britain for training in the farming sector. The Cottage Homes Sub-Committee gave its permission and HT was accepted by the YMCA for the scheme.⁴⁷ HT was discharged from the County Borough of Blackburn Children's Homes on 18 January 1936 to the YMCA Training Farm, Bristol.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 25 November 1931.

⁴⁷ CB Blackburn Cottage Homes Sub-Committee *Minutes* 1933-1936.

⁴⁸ County Borough of Blackburn Children's Homes, *Register of Children*.

MR received the same disconcerting treatment from the Sub-Committee. On 4 June 1935, MR was allowed to accept a position in the Downey Nursing Home, St Anne's-on-Sea. Before she could take up the position, on 2 July 1935, Reverend JMGJ applied for MR to be in service to his family. The Sub-Committee noted that, 'notwithstanding Minute No. 164, the application be referred to the chairman for decision'.⁴⁹ In August 1935, according to the Minutes, 'MR shall be transferred to Reverend JMGJ, (Minute 696)'.⁵⁰ The situation must have been unsuitable to either MR, or more likely Reverend JMGJ, because on 31 December 1935, MR was returned to the Cottage Homes. She was discharged from the Children's Homes on 8 January 1936, 'To Service'.⁵¹ Both HT and MR seem to have been moved from situation to situation for the convenience of others. The only obvious reason MR was given permission to take up a position she wanted, and then prevented from taking up the post in order to go into service for Reverend JMGJ, was because he had influence with the Sub-Committee. It appeared that HT was also moved from where he wanted to be, to somewhere the Sub-Committee wanted him to be, however, there is no proof of this in the records.

The Sub-Committee, besides dealing with boarded-out children, also dealt with children in the Cottage Homes. They were the arbiters who had a significant amount of power. They were fully conscious that they were responsible for spending ratepayer's and taxpayer's money. At times, they seemed a trifle mean-spirited, although they followed the regulations laid down in the *Local Government Act 1929*. The Director of Education reported that the mother of three children had died, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. After funeral expenses, six pounds remained from the insurance policy and the Sub-Committee recommended to the PAC that the money be claimed in

⁴⁹ Cottage Homes *Minutes* 2 July 1935.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 20 August 1935.

⁵¹ *Register of Children*.

respect of the children's maintenance.⁵² On the other hand, children from the Cottage Homes went away to summer camp every year, and the children were provided with pocket money.⁵³ The Sub-Committee was also responsible for removing children who were living in unsatisfactory conditions. In April 1931, the Director of Education reported that AA 'had attained the age of fourteen years, and that owing to the home environs it would be advisable for her to enter a training home'. The Sub-Committee resolved 'That in view of the exceptional circumstances of the case, arrangements be made for AA to be admitted to St Agnes House, Manchester'. Payment of seven shillings and sixpence for her maintenance was approved by the Sub-Committee, and the Ministry of Health was asked to approve.⁵⁴ Mrs EC of Greaves Street, Blackburn, applied for permission for her eight year old son to live with her in a furnished room. Her request was not granted.⁵⁵ In May 1933, the Director of Education submitted a memorandum from the MOH, Dr Thierens, regarding the home conditions of two children E and E.R. The Sub-Committee granted boarding-out relief, which allowed the family to move to healthier premises. In July 1933, the family moved into a healthier council house on the Green Lane council housing estate.⁵⁶ This demonstrates the way that the Sub-Committee attempted to assist families and keep them together by working collectively with the MOH and the Housing Sub-Committee.

The Sub-Committee was also responsible for how children in its care were handled when they did not follow the rules. They also dealt with 'unsatisfactory behaviour' by children both boarded-out and in Cottage Homes. In April 1933, the Director of Education submitted a report concerning 'the unsatisfactory conduct of CS'. The Sub-Committee made the decision to apply for the admission of CS to St Joseph's Home, Victoria Park Manchester. She was admitted to this home in May 1933 at a

⁵² Cottage Homes Sub-Committee *Minutes* 6 December 1932.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 2 May 1932.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 14 April 1931.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 6 December 1932.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 23 May 1933 & 1 July 1933.

weekly charge to the PAC of seven shillings and sixpence.⁵⁷ The Sub-Committee was responsible for all children, orphaned, abandoned or in need of care up to the age of eighteen, hence the need to obtain permission from the Ministry of Health to support young persons who were unemployed. In fact, one of the Cottage Homes was the Working Boys Home, which had an average occupancy of eight boys. The Sub-Committee also approved the adoption of children for whom the PAC had assumed parental control. In addition, the Sub-Committee approved attendance at Grammar Schools when children in their care won scholarships, and assisted with uniforms and books for boarded-out children.⁵⁸ The Sub-Committee granted an extra ten shillings a week boarded-out relief for one group of siblings boarded-out with their grandmother on condition she gave up her early morning work.⁵⁹ In April 1935, boarded-out children received an extra shilling to celebrate King George V's Jubilee. Also in April, owing to increased numbers in the Cottage Homes, it was decided that 'another foster mother (RC) be appointed'.⁶⁰

The provision of clothing for boarded-out children was not handled very discreetly. Every item of clothing, including underwear was itemised in a register that was available for public viewing. Even the nurse, Miss Baines, had to apply to the Sub-Committee for clothing and travel expenses, which was itemised in the register. On the whole, however, the Cottage Homes Sub-Committee took good care of the children after the fashion of the time, yet they were a little unfeeling by twenty-first century standards. We saw the treatment of HT and MR earlier and recognised they did not have much say in their affairs. However, there are a series of notes in the records in January 1932 where JH aged 16 was boarded-out with a Mr and Mrs S. Owing to their illness, the Sub-Committee resolved that JH should be returned to the Working Boys Home. On 1 February 1932, Mr and Mrs S wrote to the Sub-Committee asking that JH

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 4 April & 30 May 1933.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 15 August 1933.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 9 January 1935

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 2 April 1935.

be allowed to continue to reside with them. Permission was granted and the PAC and the Ministry of Health were notified that the Boarding-Out Sub-Committee had decided that JH would be allowed to reside with Mr and Mrs S regardless of their illness.⁶¹ This instance demonstrates that the Sub-Committee did listen and put the welfare of children first. It also shows how the local authorities could bend the rules because they knew local conditions, and traditions. All the above makes it obvious that local authorities, at least those in North East Lancashire, did all in their power to create reasonable conditions for the children in their care, and the children and disadvantaged in the community in general.

Special Schools

The first Act of Parliament for the prevention of cruelty to children, an Act given the popular name of the 'Children's Charter', was passed in 1889. This Act enabled the state to intervene in relations between parents and children. The *Children's Act 1908* established juvenile courts and introduced the registration of foster parents.⁶² In 1927, a Departmental Committee was formed to report and recommend action on the treatment of young offenders.⁶³ The *Children and Young Persons Act 1932* broadened the powers of juvenile courts and introduced supervision orders for children at risk.⁶⁴ The following year a further Act combined all existing child protection laws into a single piece of legislation.⁶⁵ Until the 1908 Act, children were tried in the same courts as adults, however, this Act established juvenile courts to deal with people under sixteen. Reformatory and industrial schools had been recognised by the state as early as the mid 1800s, but the power to send children to prison was not abolished until 1908, when the Act declared that no person under the age of fourteen could, in any circumstances,

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 12 January & 1 February 1932.

⁶² *The Children and Young Persons Act, 1908*, (8 Edw. VII).

⁶³ *Report of the Departmental Committee on the Treatment of Young Offenders*, March 1927, Cmd. 2831.

⁶⁴ *The Children and Young Persons Act, 1932*, (21, Geo. V).

⁶⁵ *The Children and Young Persons Act, 1933*, (22 Geo. V).

be placed in prison.⁶⁶ Children committed to industrial schools, if under the age of eight, could be boarded-out by the managers of the school until they reached the age of ten. Regulations were revised in 1921, but the Committee on the Treatment of Young Offenders noted, in 1927, that 'comparatively few children are so boarded-out partly because in recent years it has not been the practice to send very young children to industrial schools'.⁶⁷ Under the 1908 Act, children who were found begging, who were homeless, who were destitute, or had an unfit parent could be sent to industrial schools, or placed in the care of a 'fit person'. A child whose parent or guardian could show a child was beyond control could be sent to an industrial school or placed under the supervision of a probation officer. A child, who was maintained in a workhouse and was 'refractory', could also be sent to an industrial school, as could children who were truants. Industrial schools were originally founded 'to deal with the problem of child welfare by providing education and industrial training for the class of children from whom delinquents were mainly drawn'.⁶⁸ They had, in later years, become reformatory schools where courts sent young offenders.

Local authorities were required to contribute towards the cost of maintaining children and young persons sent to industrial schools from their areas. In February 1932, the Home Office sent letters to councils informing them that 'the Secretary of State has decided to continue the existing flat rate of fifteen shillings a head as the contribution to be made by Local Authorities towards the cost of maintenance of children and young persons in Reformatory and Industrial Schools during the financial year 1932-1933'. In February 1933, the flat rate was reduced to fourteen shillings.⁶⁹ There were several industrial or Home Office Schools used by courts in the North East Lancashire area, and some children sent to these institutions were very young. In March 1932, two boys aged six and seven years respectively, were committed by the

⁶⁶ *Children's Act* (8 Edw. VII).

⁶⁷ *Treatment of Young Offenders*, p. 63.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p9.

⁶⁹ Borough of Colne, *Education Committee Minutes*, 5 February 1932, & 3 February 1933.

Colne Borough magistrates to St Joseph's Industrial School until they reached the age of sixteen,⁷⁰ while KC, aged eight years, was committed by the Blackburn Borough magistrates to Axwell Park Home Office School in November 1932.⁷¹ Some such schools were famous. Wellesley Nautical School, for example, was founded in 1868 'to provide shelter for Tyneside's waifs and to train young men for service in both the Royal Navy and the Merchant Navy'. Wellesley became a Home Office School in 1933, but continued to train boys, some of them attending voluntarily, for seagoing trades.⁷² Nevertheless, young boys continued to be sent there by magistrates. WT, aged eleven years, was committed to Wellesley Nautical School in April 1933. TMD, aged ten years was committed to St George's School, Freshfield, Liverpool, in May 1933 until he reached sixteen years of age. WB, aged eleven years, was committed to Thorparch Grange Home Office School, Boston Spa, Yorkshire, in March 1935. RH, of Blackburn Cottage Homes, aged nine, was committed by a magistrate's order to the care of the Blackburn Education Committee in June 1935. He was placed in Nazareth House School Manchester, until he reached the age of sixteen. In July 1935, this was changed and he was admitted to St George's School, Rochdale. KI, a ten year old girl, was committed to Blackbrook House Approved School, St Helen's. JL, aged twelve and PD, aged eleven, were sent to St George's Approved School, Liverpool.⁷³ The Blackburn County Council records show many applications from parents and pupils alike for leave from the institutions on probation, some of which were granted, and some of which were not. For example, a mother Mrs M, applied for her son WS, to be allowed to return home from Wellesley Nautical School from 15 July 1933 on three months probation. Her application was approved.⁷⁴ WR was allowed home on licence from Wellesley Nautical School from 26 June 1935 'work having been found for him'.⁷⁵ LB,

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 18 March 1932.

⁷¹ CB Blackburn *Education Committee Minutes* 21 December 1932.

⁷² Wellesley Nautical School Website. www.wellesleynauticalschool.htm.

⁷³ CB Blackburn, *Education Committee Minutes*, 1933-1935.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 12 July 1933.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 9 July 1935.

of Blackburn, aged fifteen years, who had been placed on licence 15 August 1934, was recommitted to Axwell Park School, Blaydon-on-Tyne, on 6 December 1934.⁷⁶ One attendee at Wellesley Nautical School was refused home leave because of 'adverse home conditions'.⁷⁷ Some of these children seemed to be very young to be sent to approved schools, and the last illustration may indicate that others might also have been sent to these schools on account of poor home conditions. This is also a demonstration of how local authorities attempted to protect children, for whom they were responsible, from poor conditions at home.

Local Hospitals

One of the aims of the 1929 Act was to remove pauperism as the one criterion for access to medical treatment. As we have seen above, the Act abolished the Poor Law administration system and placed all it had administered under the control of new PACs in Counties and County Boroughs. Included were hospitals and workhouses formerly administered by the Poor Law Board of Guardians. The North East Lancashire area was administered by four Poor Law Unions, Blackburn, Burnley, Clitheroe and Haslingden, and there was a workhouse in each union, plus smaller ones in some areas. The Blackburn Union had 24 parishes and townships; the Burnley Union had 26 parishes and townships; the Clitheroe Union had 33 parishes and townships; and the Haslingden Union had 10 parishes and townships. The Blackburn Union Workhouse became Queen's Park Hospital, a Public Assistance Institution; the Burnley Union Workhouse became Primrose Bank Public Assistance Institution; the Clitheroe Union Workhouse became Coplów View Public Assistance Infirmary; and the Haslingden Union Workhouse became the Moorland House Public Assistance Institution. Both Blackburn and Burnley County Boroughs had Municipal Hospitals, formerly Voluntary Hospitals. Blackburn had the Blackburn and East Lancashire Royal Infirmary, founded

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 21 January 1935.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 5 May 1933.

in 1865, while Burnley had the Municipal Hospital, founded in 1887, which later joined with Primrose Bank to become Burnley General Hospital, and the Victoria Voluntary Hospital founded in 1884. Accrington, a Municipal Borough, had the Victoria Hospital for Accrington and District, a Voluntary Hospital, founded in 1894.⁷⁸ There were several small cottage hospitals and dispensaries, but most sick people in North East Lancashire attended these hospitals. Children from Darwen attended Queen's Park Hospital, or Manchester Children's Hospital. Orthopaedic cases from Darwen went to Ancoats Hospital in Manchester, or Biddulph Grange Orthopaedic Hospital, Stoke-on-Trent.⁷⁹ In addition, the Lancashire Mental Hospitals Board was responsible for institutional accommodation for patients suffering mental disease in one of the five hospitals in Lancashire, the largest being Whittingham, which in 1932 had over 3,000 patients and 433 staff, once the biggest asylum in Europe. This was the Mental Health Hospital most used by North East Lancashire councils. All this would suggest that health care was being gradually brought under the umbrella of local government which would make accessing medical treatment easier. And we can conclude from this that local authorities were responding positively to the effects of poverty and poor health upon those in the community who were at risk, both physically and mentally.

Local Authority Clinics

Most local authority clinics came under the auspices of the School Medical Services, which came under the control of the Local Education Department. In England and Wales all 315 local education authorities provided some form of medical treatment, although the level of treatment varied considerably from area to area. Treatment was given in the local authorities' own clinics, or by arrangement with public or voluntary hospitals.

⁷⁸ The National Archives, *Hospital Records Database*.

⁷⁹ Darwen *Annual Health Reports*.

The numbers of local authorities in England and Wales providing treatment for the following ailments by 1936 were as follows

NOTE:
This table is included on page 159 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Table 23. Local Authorities providing treatment in England and Wales, by 1936. ⁸⁰

Dental services were available at child welfare clinics for preschool children, at ante-natal clinics for pregnant women and school dental clinics for school children. Dental treatment was available at dental hospitals, in the out patients departments of most general hospitals, and in municipal clinics, while PACs generally had arrangements for giving dental treatment. Many local authority clinics were for children, except for the Tuberculosis (TB) clinics, the Venereal Disease (VD) clinics and the orthopaedic clinics which dealt with adults as well as children.

Blackburn, a County Borough, had an Inspection Clinic, which was for the special examination of cases referred by school nurses, teachers and attendance officers, and a minor ailments clinic daily. There was an ophthalmic clinic twice weekly; a daily dental clinic (by appointment); an ear, nose and throat (ENT) clinic; a remedial exercise clinic; a daily TB clinic; a monthly orthopaedic clinic; a VD clinic four days weekly (twice for men and twice for women); an ultra-violet light therapy clinic; and an x-ray clinic for the treatment of ringworm. Finally, there was a diphtheria immunisation clinic three times a week.⁸¹ Burnley, also a County Borough, had similar clinics to Blackburn. There was an inspection clinic; a minor ailments clinic; ophthalmic, dental and orthopaedic clinics; ultra-violet light clinics twice weekly; and TB and VD clinics. In addition, there was a 'cleansing station' for the treatment of scabies and 'the cleansing

⁸⁰ The *Report on the British Health Services*, PEP, (London, 1937).

⁸¹ CB Blackburn MOH *Annual Reports*, 1930-36.

of verminous cases'. There is no record of a diphtheria immunisation clinic, but there were two public vaccinators.⁸² Accrington, Haslingden, Great Harwood, Colne, Nelson and Darwen and all smaller villages and centres came under the supervision of the Lancashire County Council (LCC), who, while providing some clinics, had arrangements with the County Boroughs of Blackburn and Burnley for other clinics and hospital treatment for the North East Lancashire Municipal Boroughs. For example, orthopaedic cases for North East Lancashire were treated at Biddulph Grange Orthopaedic Hospital, (see figure 13) at Biddulph near Stoke-on-Trent, almost fifty miles away, which was a long way in the thirties when cars were rare and money for rail fares difficult to find, and therefore, children who were sent to Biddulph Grange were unlikely to see their parents often, if at all, until they returned home.



Figure 12. Biddulph Grange Orthopaedic Hospital, Biddulph, Stoke-on-Trent. C.1940

Source: North Staffordshire Nursing History Group. The Staffordshire Past Track. Arts and Museum service for the Staffordshire County Council.

⁸² CB Burnley MOH *Annual Reports*, 1930-36.

Patients from Accrington and Darwen suffering from VD went to clinics at the Blackburn and East Lancashire Royal Infirmary for treatment by arrangement with the LCC. The Education Departments in most local authority areas were responsible for free medical treatment to children whose parents could not afford to pay. For example, in the minutes of every meeting of the Blackburn Education Committee there was a section named *School Attendance Reference*. This reference, besides making decisions on school staffing and building matters, made decisions concerning School Clinics; the School Medical Service; admitting children to industrial schools and children's homes; the treatment of school children at the Public Assistance hospital, Queen's Park Hospital, and the use of the Police Motor Ambulance. *The School Attendance Reference* for 29 January 1930 reported on the 'Treatment of School Children at Queen's Park Hospital':

1. That the report of the eight operative cases for adenoids and enlarged tonsils be approved and payment made according to terms set out.
2. That the Watch Committee (responsible for the police) be paid the sum of sixteen shillings for the use of the Police Motor Ambulance'.⁸³

At every meeting, there were similar reports, sometimes noting Queen's Park Hospital, and at other times noting The Blackburn and East Lancashire Royal Infirmary; however what is most notable is that as the Depression got deeper, the number of cases treated at the local hospitals grew. In December 1931, a Sub-Committee comprising five people was appointed by the Blackburn PAC 'to deal with charges to be made upon parents whose children receive operative treatment for tonsils and adenoids'.⁸⁴ The Medical Case Sub-Committee for Accrington considered applications for free medical treatment. Most applications were for spectacles, treatment for the removal of tonsils and adenoids, and for free school meals. Most applications were granted free, but in some applications, parents were asked to contribute a nominal amount. For example, on 8 December 1932, in the case of RC, his parents were asked to pay one pound

⁸³ CB Blackburn Education Committee *Minutes*, 29 January 1930.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 23 December 1931.

towards the cost of a calliper. In the case of DS, his father was asked to double his offer of one shilling a week towards the cost of treatment at Biddulph Grange Orthopaedic Hospital. On 5 December 1935, the parents of NW were asked to pay two shillings towards the cost of his spectacles. The School Medical Service was usually the service which picked up problems in children's health; however, it was the Education Departments which were responsible for the payment of children's hospital treatment. They were also obliged to help defray the costs of maintenance of medical equipment. In December 1930, the Blackburn Education Committee agreed 'that four-tenths of the cost of the X-ray apparatus installed be paid by the Education Committee'.⁸⁵ Treatment of school children at Queen's Park Hospital was paid for by the Committee and payment recovered from parents if they could afford it. The Committee also reimbursed the Watch Committee for the use of the ambulance. There is also mention in the Education Department *Minutes* of arrangement being made for school children to have use of the public baths. From November 1931, the public baths were hired for children to be bathed at the cost of four pounds ten shillings a week for all children; however, there was no mention of the scheme after Easter 1932.⁸⁶ Other health and welfare responsibilities of the Education Department will be covered in Chapter Seven, which will examine the health and the effects of unemployment on children and families in North East Lancashire,

Welfare provisions improved gradually in the interwar years. Several Acts of Parliament were partly the reason for the improvement in the treatment of the disadvantaged. One was the *Maternity and Child Welfare Act, 1918*, which gave local authorities the power, if they so wished, to improve the provision of care for mothers and infants. The North East Lancashire cotton towns did use the powers given to them to provide ante and post-natal clinics for mothers, infants and preschool children. More positive treatment could have been given, rather than the advice offered which may

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 17 December 1930.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 1930-1932.

have decreased maternal and children's health given the high rates of infant and maternal mortality in the area.

The 1930 Act gave the local authority power of parental control over children who, for one reason or another, needed care and assistance, and the Education Departments determined children in need and made provision for their care, and where that care would take place. The local authorities also had the power to assist anyone in their care to emigrate, but there were instances where unscrupulous councils rid themselves of destitute adults and children. However, according to Antonio Buti, in 2002, children recruited to the emigration scheme came either from 'charitable or religious institutions,' or parents who were unable to look after their children and 'sought assistance from private organisations rather than have them admitted to workhouses.' The organisations were notably, Barnardo's, Fairbridge and the Catholic Church. The *Poor Law Act, 1930* required for 'orphans or deserted children' to appear before two Justices of the Peace and agree to emigrate. Buti argues that British governmental regulations were lax pre World War Two, and unaccompanied children under the age of sixteen who had no relatives in Australia were sent to Australia from Great Britain under schemes approved by the various Australian governments.⁸⁷ Many of these children were treated abominably, as we know from the Australian Senate Enquiry in June 2000 on the issue of child migration, when, on the motion of Senator Andrew Murray in June 2000, the Australian Commonwealth Senate referred the issue of child migration to a select committee for report and enquiry. That report, entitled 'Lost Innocents: Righting the Record' was published in August 2001.⁸⁸ There is no mention in North East Lancashire Council records of children in the area being assisted to immigrate to Australia. It is more likely that larger cities such as Manchester or

⁸⁷ Buti, Antonio, 'British Child Migration to Australia: History, Senate Enquiry and Responsibilities,' *Murdoch University Electronic Journal of Law*, Volume 9, Number 4, (December 2002).

⁸⁸ Australian Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 'Lost Innocents: Righting the Record' (AGPS, Canberra, 2001).

Liverpool, with much larger populations than North East Lancashire towns assisted their children to immigrate to Australia. Most records I have studied from North East Lancashire mention Canada, or the Merchant or Royal Navy.

The *Local Government Act, 1929* and the *Poor Law Act, 1930*, made great strides toward improved welfare for those whose need was greatest, the poor, the old and the very young. These Acts removed the stigma of pauperism, if not the fear it engendered in the old and the poor, although the mechanisms of the Poor Law and pauperism existed under other names. The Board of Guardians became the Public Assistance Committee which performed the same duties, and the Poor Law became Public Assistance. The Workhouse became the Public Assistance Institution and the destitute became the necessitous poor. These Acts, by placing Poor Law hospitals and Infirmaries under the control of local authorities removed pauperism as the one criterion for receiving free medical and dental treatment. Large numbers of clinics both for children and adults were provided. The 'necessitous poor', the children and the elderly, were cared for, and the inmates of psychiatric hospitals, especially long-term inmates, received care and treatment, which for the time was adequate.

Children with disabilities did not suffer through a lack of money. We have seen how local authorities paid the fees for the deaf, blind, epileptic and intellectually and physically disabled children. Young offenders, like truants who would not be seen as offenders today and be treated lightly, were sent away to approved schools. One can only wonder what crime was carried out by the two young boys aged six and seven who were sent to an approved school until they were sixteen, or the nine year old boy from the Blackburn Cottage Homes, or the long lists of children under the age of twelve who were sent to approved schools. There seemed to be a large number of approved schools in the North of England, but in fact they were as numerous in the rest of England and Wales. It could also be that many children were sent to approved schools and residential homes because of their home conditions.

The Maternity and Child Welfare Act, 1918, The Local Government Act, 1929, the Poor Law Act, 1930, and the Children and Young Persons Act, 1933, meant that the disadvantaged were cared for quite well. Health care improved under the umbrella of the local authority clinics, and the Public Assistance Institution although viewed with trepidation, looked after those, who, for whatever reason, could not look after themselves. The local authorities were also permitted to take over parental rights of children at risk, either in unfit or unsuitable homes, or children in need of supervision. The systems mentioned and the improvements in local authority clinics and services, laid the foundations towards a welfare state in the United Kingdom where, in theory at least, no-one would be denied care because they were poor. It is probable that the effects of unemployment, low pay, sickness and old age, could have been far worse if the above regulations had not been put into place, and if the local authorities in North East Lancashire had not been so efficient, and had not known just what was happening in their area. They were only limited in what they could do because of financial circumstances. The Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education allocated Block Grants to Local Authorities which only went so far.

CHAPTER SIX

THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Unemployment and the resultant poverty had a detrimental effect on housing, health and welfare in North-East Lancashire in the early 1930s. In this chapter I will examine five broad areas which, besides juvenile unemployment, were administered by the Education Departments in North-East Lancashire. Firstly, I will deal with school supply and the improvement of premises. I will discuss the number of schools which were built in the period, and the condition of the existing schools in a national context. Secondly, I will consider special schools, both local schools, and residential schools, again locally and nationally. Thirdly, I will consider secondary and tertiary education including grants, scholarships and loans to students, and see how accessible higher secondary and tertiary education was to the North East Lancashire child from a poorer background. My fourth area for examination will be the social function of schools in a crisis such as that of the early 1930s. In this context, I will examine the School Medical Service to determine what treatment was available for sick children and if regular medical inspections were available, and also discover what medical provision was made for pre school children. Finally, I will examine the School Meals Service, how it was organised and who decided on the provision of free meals. This chapter will show that the economic crisis and high unemployment had an adverse effect on education and everything related to it, not only in North East Lancashire, but nationally.

The Development of Compulsory Education and the Various Education Acts

Up until 1870, there was no legal obligation for children to attend school. The *Education Act, 1870*, gave the newly established School Boards the power to require children to attend school between the ages of five and ten. The *Education Act, 1880*, turned this power into a requirement. The passing of the 1870 Act, mapped out England and Wales into School Districts, each of which might have a School Board with the duty of providing Elementary Education within its borders. The *Education Act, 1902*, empowered the newly established Local Education Authorities for Counties and County Boroughs to aid higher education and to provide new secondary schools. One important consequence of this Act was the attention given to training teachers. The Board of Education proposed an alternative to the pupil-teacher system in place before 1900. Any secondary school pupil who had attended secondary school for at least two years, and who wished to become a teacher could claim a grant for a year and then either serve for another year as a student teacher, or go directly to a teacher training college.¹ Many Local Education Authorities adopted this scheme, in particular the Local Education Authorities in North East Lancashire. In 1903, the Board of Education were to adopt a new policy in respect of the training of Pupil Teachers, 'The Regulations for the Instruction and Training of Pupil Teachers', which intended that pupil teachers should receive instruction in a Secondary School up to the age of sixteen. This created a need for a more generous provision for scholarships and bursaries which would enable pupils from public elementary schools to attend secondary schools. The Board of Education urged local authorities to arrange an adequate scholarship system which would enable all candidates for a pupil teachership to receive a sound general secondary education. In 1904, a new type of training

¹ Curtis, SJ, *History of Education in Great Britain* Sixth edition (London, 1965), pp.328-9.

college for teachers was recognised, the municipal training college, for the most part provided by local education authorities. In 1907, the Regulations for Secondary Schools required Secondary Schools to open a proportion of free places, ordinarily 25 per cent of the scholars admitted, without payment of fees to pupils from elementary schools who applied for admission, subject to the applicants passing an entrance test. The general result of these arrangements was that teachers began to devote more attention to the instruction of children under the age of eleven. Although primarily designed to further secondary education, these arrangements indirectly helped in the development of public elementary schools and introduced a definite break in education at the age of eleven.

The Education Act, 1918, 'with a view to the establishment of a national system of public education available to all persons capable of profiting thereby', enforced compulsory attendance at school up to the age of fourteen, and made it the duty of Local Education Authorities responsible for elementary education to make adequate provision by means of Central Schools for organising courses of advanced instruction for the older or more academically capable children, including those who remained at school beyond the age of fourteen. The Act also required local authorities to submit to the Board of Education schemes showing plans for the development of education of various types in their areas in future years. These provisions of the 1918 Act emphasised the need for a complete reorganisation of the education of children below the age of eleven.²

As the education system in England began to evolve, the government appointed a series of consultative committees to make recommendations and report on the development of state education. The First World War was to put an end to consultative committees until the war was over. In 1920, the first of six reports under the chairmanship of Sir William Henry Hadow, which would cover all stages of

² *Education Act, 1918*, (8 & 9, Geo.V).

schooling from nursery to leaving school, was presented. Three of those reports are important to us. *The Education of the Adolescent*; *The Primary School*; and *Infant and Nursery Schools*. The 1926 Report, *Education of the Adolescent*, suggested a different classification for the successive stages of education before and after the age of 11 plus and felt all children should go on to some form of secondary education. The report also suggested raising the school leaving age to 15 plus by 1932 if at all possible. The 1931 Report, *The Primary School*, dealt with the education of children between the ages of seven and eleven which, the report concluded should have been the age range for primary education. In its recommendations for reorganisation of the curriculum, the report noted that the elementary school curriculum in English schools had developed during the nineteenth-century 'by an irregular process of accretion, now one subject and now another having been grafted onto the original stock of the 3R's.'³ Children went to school to learn things which could not be taught well at home, 'reading, writing and ciphering.' Real life was learned by the child from real life, from parents, play or early work. The schools now (in 1931) had to teach children to live.⁴ The Committee saw that the curriculum 'is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than of knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored.'⁵ The 1933 Report, *Infant and Nursery Schools*, dealt with infant and nursery schools and considered staffing of such schools and the training of teachers. The report also stressed the needs of such schools in the case of premises and equipment.

The recommendations of the various Hadow Committees related to the structure of the public education system and its curriculum. However, these recommendations were, in many areas, ignored and forgotten. Derek Gillard noted, in 2006, that schools, post-Hadow 'bore all the hallmarks of the [old] elementary system in terms of cheapness, economy, large classes [and] ancient and inadequate

³ *Hadow Report 1931*, p.91.

⁴ *Ibid*, p.93.

⁵ *Ibid*.

buildings,⁶ and these 'ancient and inadequate old buildings', and the large classes are the buildings and the system to which we will now turn.

School Supply and Improvement

In a chapter concerning the effects of poverty and unemployment on education it will be useful to discuss the number of schools both locally and nationally in the 1930s, and the conditions in those schools, particularly in North East Lancashire. However, it will also be useful to examine the history of school building. The Special Report of the Ministry of Education, which dealt with the Board of Education between the years of 1900 and 1950, noted the 'repeated sequence of survey, resolution, retrenchment' which marked the 'gradual growth and improvement of educational buildings.' After the First World War, and with the enactment of the 1918 Education Act, local education authorities were required to submit a development plan for school building in their area. As was usual in this period, economic circumstances determined any progress in school building. A survey of existing school buildings resulted in a 'black list' of schools with 'defective school premises.' The Board of Education's chief concern was to get as many schools off this black list by closure, replacement or improvement. The lack of financial resources in many non-provided schools (denominational) created a problem, and, as we shall see later, the number of non-provided schools was as many as four fifths in some areas of Lancashire. This was because of high numbers of Catholics in the area, particularly in larger cities, possibly because of Irish immigration, but mainly because Lancashire had always had a higher percentage of Catholics than the rest of the country since the Reformation.⁷ Notwithstanding this, between 1925 and 1927 the volume of school building more than

⁶ Gillard, D. 'The Hadow Reports: an introduction,' *The Encyclopaedia of Informal Education* www.infed.org/schooling/hadow_reports.htm. Accessed 20 August 2007.

⁷ Father Dave Lannon, Salford Diocese Archivist, in a conversation, 12 February 2007.

doubled, and out of a total of 2,827 schools placed on the 'black list' in 1924, 2,000 were removed from the list by the Second World War.⁸

The condition of the majority of the schools in North East Lancashire was similar to housing conditions: poor. The Ministry of Education and the local Education Departments were fully aware of the poor conditions in many schools and made provisions for improvement. The Board of Education, in the *Annual Report* for 1930, commented on improving schools and of schools being developed on open-air lines. The *Report* also noted that, 'in new schools, the placing of sanitary blocks under cover and within easy reach of children has become almost an invariable practice'.⁹ Doctor Thierens, (also School Medical Officer (SMO) for Blackburn), in his Report for 1930, described the situation in most schools in the town when he wrote:

The Education Committee is fully alive to the desirability of providing Open-Air School accommodation for all and has ensured that the schools already erected at Roe Lee and Audley, and the one in course of erection at Intack conform to the highest ideals of open-air education. Continuation of this policy will eliminate the old-fashioned school with its dark, badly-ventilated classroom where education and health inevitably suffer from the devitalising influence of unhygienic surroundings on teacher and scholar alike. The attitude of scholars at Roe Lee and Audley, one of mental and physical alertness and happiness, is in sharp contradistinction to that noted in many schools in the town so designed as to exclude fresh-air, light and sunshine, rather than permit entry.¹⁰

When a new public housing estate was planned in Blackburn, a new elementary school was included. Dr. Thierens mentioned Roe Lee School, (see figure 14) which was part of a garden housing estate, built in the late 1920s, and when plans were drawn up for a new estate of 374 houses, six acres of land were allocated for a primary school site.¹¹

⁸ *Education 1900-1950* The Report of the Ministry of Education, (London, 1951), pp.93-95.

⁹ Ministry of Education, *Report of the Board of Education*, 1930.

¹⁰ Dr. V T Thierens, *School Medical Officer's Report*, 1931.

¹¹ County Borough Blackburn, *Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, December 6 1932.



Figure 13. Roe Lee School 1933. Note the open classrooms.

Source: Photograph provided by Blackburn with Darwen Council for the Cotton Town digitization project.

Both County Boroughs had poor housing, and Burnley like Blackburn, when planning new public housing estates, set aside land to build new schools. Burnley's SMO Dr DC Lamont also commented unfavourably on the conditions of some of the older schools in the town. He wrote, in his Report for 1931.

A number of schools are old and therefore do not conform to the modern conception of hygienic school buildings. The floors are worn and difficult to keep clean. The windows are badly arranged; with the result that natural lighting is not as efficient as it should be. Many of the schools are situated in localities closely surrounded by dwellings and other buildings and consequently the amount of playground space is limited. Sanitary arrangements in some schools do not conform to modern ideals.¹²

The Ministry of Education in the *Annual Report* for 1931 also comments on improving schools and of new schools developing on open-air lines. In addition, the report noted, 'In new schools, the placing of sanitary blocks under cover and within

¹² Dr. D C Lamont, *School Medical Officer's Report*, 1931.

easy reach of children has become an invariable practice.¹³ This provides evidence that the Board of Education and Local Education Departments were fully aware of poor conditions in many schools, and made provision for improvement. Nationally, there were 20,867 schools in England and Wales in 1931 with plans submitted for 191 new schools and plans for extensions and improvement for 1,155 existing schools, with 211 schools closed for various reasons, mainly unsuitability; they were too small, too old or no longer suitable for a school.¹⁴ Blackburn, a County Borough with a population of approximately 123,900 in 1931, had fourteen nursery classes,¹⁵ forty-five primary schools and six secondary schools, two of which are shown in figure 15, while Burnley, a County Borough with a population of approximately 97,000 in 1931, had twenty-eight primary schools and two senior schools. Both County Boroughs had poor housing, and Burnley, as with Blackburn, when planning new public housing estates set aside land for a new school. By 1936, when this study ends, Blackburn had forty-seven schools, two Central Secondary Schools, and four Grammar Schools, two Church of England and two Roman Catholic, with 14,892 pupils enrolled. This number had steadily decreased since the highest number of 18,250 in 1922 which was a consequence of a birth increase following World War One.¹⁶ Burnley, at the same time, had twenty-eight schools and two Grammar Schools with 12,534 pupils enrolled.¹⁷ The Education Act, 1918, provided for the payment of annual substantive grants to Local Education Authorities in aid of education. These grants:

Would not be less than one half the expenditure in aid...and, if the total sums payable...to an authority in any year fall short of one half of that expenditure, there shall be paid by the Board of Education...a deficiency grant equal to the amount of the deficiency.¹⁸

¹³ Ministry of Education, *Annual Report of the Board of Education*, 1931.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ County Borough Blackburn, *Medical Officer of Health Reports*, 1930.

¹⁶ County Borough Blackburn, *School Medical Officer's Annual Report*, 1936.

¹⁷ County Borough Burnley, *Education Committee Annual Report*, 1936.

¹⁸ Education Act, 1918, (8 & 9 Geo. V.).

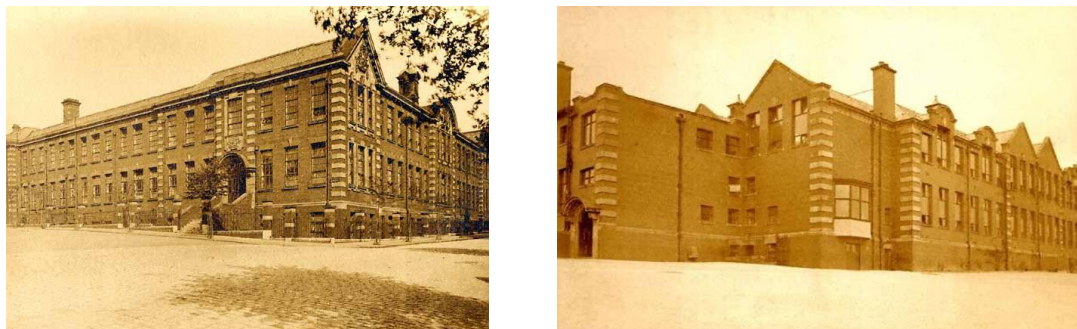


Figure 14. Blakey Moor and Bangor Street Central Schools 1932.

Source: Photographs provided by Blackburn with Darwen Council for use in the Cotton Town digitization project

The economic crisis of the early 1930s would change this. The Labour Government became alarmed by the crisis, and called into being Sir George May's Economic Committee to advise the Chancellor of the Exchequer about reducing expenditure. Several rigorous reductions in spending were made when the Committee published its findings in July 1931. The fifty per cent Exchequer grant for school building was withdrawn, teachers' salaries were cut and other economies were made. No new schools were to be built unless as part of a new housing estate.¹⁹ The guarantee for a fifty per cent Exchequer grant was abolished.²⁰ An example of the reduction is evident when one compares the Blackburn Education Committee's Estimates for the years 1929-1936. In 1929, the elementary education substantive grant was £105,000, while in 1936; the grant was £108,106, which included a Home Office grant of £6,916 for the maintenance of children in care. The Higher Education substantive grant was £19,500 in 1929, and in 1935, £21,420.²¹ The National Economy Act, 1931, was passed for the purpose of effecting economies in expenditure, and under this Act, the National Economy (Education) Order was promulgated on 1 October 1931.²²

¹⁹ Curtis, S.J., *History of Education*, p.352.

²⁰ Simon, Brian, *The Politics of Educational Reform 1920-1940*, p.175.

²¹ Blackburn Education Committee *Estimates for Borough Rates 1929-1936*.

²² *The Report of the Board of Education*, 1931.

The Board of Education, in their 1931 Annual Report also noted, 'As a result of the economy measures adopted in September, only a small amount of capital expenditure has been approved since that day.' It was also noted that 'the Board's architects have for some time been engaged in considering the possibilities of building schools of lighter construction with a view to reducing capital costs.'²³ Nevertheless, a new council junior school was opened in Blackburn in October 1931, and another was designated a senior school, with the infant and junior departments closed.²⁴ Burnley opened two new schools in early 1932, an elementary school and a nursery school.²⁵

While the conditions were not very good, there are many instances in Local Authority records of renovations and improvements to schools. Several instances in the Burnley Education reports record new hot water systems for hand basins in special schools and re-flooring, painting, and re-surfacing playgrounds.²⁶ Blackburn, a larger County Borough, with at least twenty-four extra schools, did more renovations. There were many instances of re-painting, re-flooring, installing electricity, and re-surfacing playgrounds.²⁷ The Medical Officer of Health for Darwen, in his Annual Report, noted that, 'many inspections were made particularly during vacations....Defects in buildings; means of ventilation; drainage and pavement of yards was referred to the Education Secretary for attention.'²⁸ Other smaller Boroughs, including Accrington, Haslingden, Great Harwood, Colne, Nelson and Clitheroe all had similar reports.²⁹ In Blackburn in 1930, £3,180 was spent in repairs and renovations, in 1936, £ 3,900 was spent. These amounts are combined for council and non-provided (denominational) schools.³⁰ Although Local Authorities were financially responsible for both council and non-provided schools, they were not responsible for non-provided school buildings, which

²³ Board of Education *Annual report*, 1931.

²⁴ Blackburn Education Sub-Committee *Minutes*, 28 October 1931.

²⁵ Burnley Education Sub-Committee *Minutes*, January 1932.

²⁶ Burnley Education Committee, Special Services Sub-Committee, 1930-1936.

²⁷ Blackburn Education Elementary Sub-Committee, 1930-1936.

²⁸ Borough of Darwen, *Annual Reports of the Medical Officer of Health*, 1930-1936.

²⁹ Various Medical Officers of Health *Reports*, Lancashire Record Office, 1930-1936.

³⁰ Blackburn Elementary Committee, Estimates for Borough Rates, 1930-1936.

the governors had to maintain.³¹ The number of non-provided schools in Lancashire, responsible for providing and maintaining school buildings as we have seen was as many as four fifths in some areas.³² Owing to the recommendations of the Hadow Report, *The Education of the Adolescent*, 1926, which called for the reorganization of elementary education and the abandonment of all-age schools, many non-provided schools were in financial difficulties. Although the reorganisation was only formally established in the 1944 Education Act, it was to become government policy from 1928.³³ In fact the Chairman of the Blackburn Education Committee, in 1930, arranged a conference between the General Purpose Sub-Committee and Church of England School Managers to consider the suggested reorganisation of Church of England and Council Schools in the Borough, and to 'secure for all pupils in attendance therein a break at the age of 11 years and a fresh start on a new stage of education in accordance with the Hadow Report.'³⁴ We see many more instances of this in Blackburn County Borough Reports. In November 1930, the School Managers of four Church of England Schools, Holy Trinity, Griffin, St. Silas' and Wensley Fold CE Schools were asked by the Borough Engineer to prepare plans of proposed extensions or alterations to the school premises in connection with the scheme for reorganisation of schools.³⁵ Rising costs and the burden of that reorganization were a constant source of concern for school managers.³⁶ D W Dean noted, in 1969, that Cardinal Bourne, Roman Catholic Primate of Great Britain, 'admitted on many occasions that the strains on his community in providing new schools were now so serious', he would have liked some financial assistance.³⁷ Blackburn Education Department, in June 1932, asked the Town Clerk whether it was legal for the Local Education Authority to

³¹ Dean, D. W., 'The Difficulties of a Labour Educational Policy: The Failure of the Trevelyan Bill 1929-1931, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 3. (Oct., 1969), p.294.

³² Simon, Brian, *The Politics of Educational Reform 1920-1940*, p.150.

³³ Gillard, D., (2006) *The Hadow Reports: an introduction*, <http://www.dg.dial.pipex.com/articles/educ27.shtml>.

³⁴ CB Blackburn *Minutes of the General Purposes Sub-Committee* 21 May 1930.

³⁵ *Ibid. Educations Sub-Committee Reports* 18 November 1930.

³⁶ Dean, Failure of the Trevelyan Bill, p.293.

³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 294.

share the cost of surfacing the girls' playground at St. Peter's R.C. School.³⁸

Apparently, it was. In September, it was resolved:

It be a recommendation to the Education Committee, that, subject to the surfacing of the playground being carried out to the satisfaction of the Borough Engineer, a grant be made to the managers of St. Peter's R.C. School to cover one-third of the cost of the surfacing of that portion not previously surfaced, the estimated cost being £58.13s. 4d.³⁹

One correspondent, James Johnson, who answered my query in the local newspaper in Blackburn, and who attended St. Peter's in the 1930s commented on the state of the boys' playground, 'Half the boy's playground was dirt', that was not surfaced until after the war. He also commented on the state of the toilets. 'There were washbasins in the boys' toilets which were in the school yard. However, in winter they froze solid and were unusable. The same applied to the toilets. It was rare that they were used even in summer, because the doors did not shut which resulted in a jeering audience, and acute embarrassment.'⁴⁰ The same correspondent wrote 'When we began to get school dinners, Sister Loyola, (the headmistress) had a bench in the playground with soap and water so we could wash our hands before going into the "dining room". That soon went by the board.'⁴¹ William Woodruff wrote of St Peter's, to which he took an instant dislike: 'It was a forlorn building with a large bell in the belfry; the Gray stone walls had blackened with age and dirt. A bare cindered yard at the side, from which dust blew most of the time, was the playground.'⁴² A meeting of Head Teachers of Infant Schools recommended that provisions should be made in cloakrooms for seating, and cloakrooms should have bowls for hand washing, places for towels and a supply of warm water for washing.⁴³ By twenty-first century standards, conditions in the schools in the textile areas of North-East Lancashire's were abysmal, but by 1930s standards in North-East Lancashire, they were relatively normal, if not healthy.

³⁸ Blackburn Education Committee *Minutes* 29 June 1932.

³⁹ *Ibid.* September 1932.

⁴⁰ J. Johnson, by email to author, 6-8-07.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 1-8-07.

⁴² Woodruff, *Nab End*, p.129.

⁴³ Blackburn Education Sub-Committee *Minutes* 9 July 1934.



Figure 15. St Peter's RC School, Cleaned and Modernised in the mid 1960s.

Source: Authors Collection dated 2007.

Education and Special Schools.

Under the Education Act, 1921, Part V, Local Education Authorities were obliged to make suitable provision for deaf, blind, disabled or epileptic children, either in special classes or special schools. However, the statutory foundation for special educational provision for disabled children began in the last decade of the nineteenth-century. The Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act, 1893, and the Elementary Education (Defective and Epileptic Children) Act, 1899, were the cornerstones for what legislation followed for disabled children.⁴⁴ Subject to the provisions of the Poor Law Act, 1930, councils could send any poor blind or deaf and mute children 'to any certified school, if the managers are willing to receive the child, and may pay the reasonable expenses incurred in the maintenance, clothing and

⁴⁴ *Education 1900-1950*, The Report of the Ministry of Education p.72.

education of the child.⁴⁵ Blind, deaf and epileptic children could be sent to residential schools, or could be boarded out in a home conveniently placed near a certified school. The same conditions applied to physically or intellectually disabled children, although physically disabled children more often than not went to local schools.

Blackburn, the largest County Borough in the area, had, in 1930, a residential school for severely physically disabled children (based in Queen's Park Hospital, the Public Assistance Institution), two open-air schools and two open-air classes. Blind children, depending on their religion, went either to the Home for the Blind in Preston, or the Catholic Blind Asylum in Liverpool (later to become St. Vincent's R.C. School for the Blind). Deaf children were sent to the Royal Cross School for the Deaf in Preston, or St. John's R.C. Institution for the Deaf and Dumb in Boston Spa, near Leeds, in Yorkshire. Children with epilepsy, for which there was no treatment in the 1930s, were either in institutions, rather than a certified school, in ordinary elementary schools, in an open-air class, or did not attend school at all, depending on the severity of the condition. Intellectually disabled children went to Regent Street Special School, which had accommodation for thirty children, were committed to institutions, or did not attend any place of learning. By 1936, the Council had acquired a six acre site to build a new open-air school, had a residential school for physically disabled children and twenty-eight nursery classes. Blind, deaf and epileptic children went to the same schools they went to in 1930, except some epileptic children were sent to certified schools in Liverpool or Hertfordshire. Blind juveniles underwent training at local Workshops for the Blind, the cost borne by the Local Education Authority. All trainees were compelled to attend three classes in Braille weekly. On completion of training, they were found employment by the Blind Person's Act, Committee.⁴⁶ The *Blind Persons Act, 1920*, made it a duty of local authorities to provide for welfare of the blind and gave them

⁴⁵ Poor Law Act, 1930, Part II, 55.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 1936.

power to maintain or contribute to the maintenance and homemaker schemes.⁴⁷ In many areas, local authorities delegated the welfare of the blind to voluntary associations. Blackburn and Burnley did not; they took care of the welfare for the blind, and had specific welfare workers for that purpose.

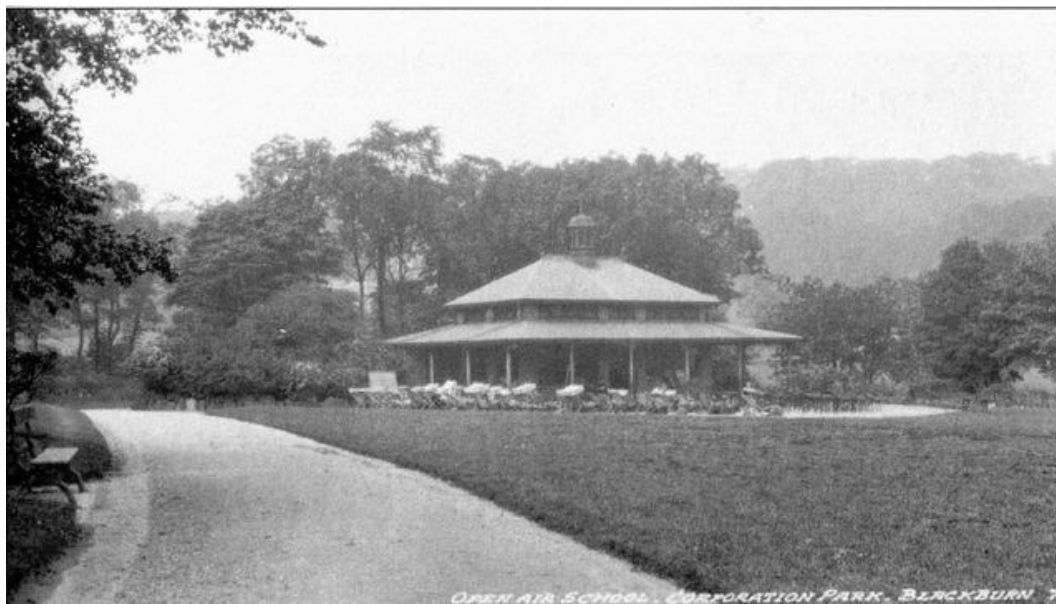


Figure 16. Open Air School 1938. For children with chest problems. It was later to become a school for the partially sighted.

Source: Image provided by Blackburn with Darwen Council for the Cotton Town Digitization Project.

Burnley, the second largest County Borough in the area, had, in 1930, a school for blind and partially sighted children, an open-air class and two schools for intellectually disabled children. As with Blackburn, Burnley sent children away to schools in other areas. Blind children to Preston or Liverpool, depending on religion; deaf children went to Preston or Boston Spa in Yorkshire; and epileptic children either to schools in the area, to no school at all or away to Liverpool or Hertfordshire. By 1936, there were also two classes for 'dull and backward' children. Children with a severe physical disability went to Biddulph Grange Orthopaedic Hospital in Staffordshire for treatment.⁴⁸ Other towns in the area either sent their disabled children to Blackburn or Burnley, or to the above mentioned certified schools. Other Special

⁴⁷ *Blind Person Act, 1920*, (10 & 11 Geo.V).

⁴⁸ County Borough Burnley, Medical Officer of Health *Reports*, 1930-1936.

Schools, particularly Industrial Schools and Home Office Approved Schools have been extensively examined in chapter five, however, a few main points will be briefly mentioned here in order to clarify the subject under discussion. As we have seen, under the *Poor Law Act, 1930*,⁴⁹ the local PAC could claim parental rights over a child if, in the council's opinion, the child had unfit parents. Also, in line with the provisions of the above Act, the council could send any poor, blind or deaf or mute children to any certified school and could pay the reasonable expenses incurred in maintenance, clothing and education of the child.⁵⁰ The *Children and Young Persons Act, 1932*, broadened the power of juvenile courts and introduced supervision orders for children at risk.⁵¹ Children who were homeless, who were destitute, or had an unfit parent, could be sent to Industrial Schools, and a child whose parents could show the child was beyond control could also be sent to an Industrial School or be placed under the supervision of a probation officer.

The Local Education Authorities paid the fees for children attending these institutions, but parents were expected to contribute towards the maintenance of their child. Blackburn Education Sub-Committee Minutes has many references to children sent away to these schools. For instance, in September, 1931, SEB. aged six, was sent to the Homes for the Blind, Preston, and her parents paid one shilling a week towards her upkeep. In February 1932, DW aged five, was recommended for admission to the Homes for the Blind, Preston, and his parents' maintenance contribution was to be one shilling and sixpence per week. WKC aged six was admitted to the Royal Cross School for the Deaf on 21 November 1933 and his parents were required to pay five shillings a week as their share of his maintenance. However, parents paid nothing if they could not afford it. For example, the parents of VD, a pupil

⁴⁹ *Poor Law Act, 1930*, (20 & 21 Geo.V).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* Part II, 55.

⁵¹ *Children and Young Persons Act, 1932* (21 Geo.V).

at Royal Cross School, in June 1935, paid nothing 'owing to their unemployment.'⁵² Most children and young persons attended these schools until they reached the age of sixteen when they were allowed to return home. For instance, W.H. was discharged from St. Vincent's R.C. School for the Blind on 12 April 1933, 'having reached the age of sixteen years.'⁵³ Because the Local Education Authorities were paying the fees for children at these schools, the Education Sub-Committee's permission had to be obtained for the children to return home for school holidays. One example is M.H., of Blackburn, a student at St. John's R.C. Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, who received the Sub-Committee's permission to return home for the midsummer holidays in July 1933.⁵⁴ There were other schools for children with disabilities; however, the ones mentioned above were the ones Local Councils in North East Lancashire used most. Children with disabilities received adequate care and training even if parents had little money. Local authorities did much more for the children in their care than is usually believed and would not allow disabled children to return to their homes if conditions were unsatisfactory. They had either to stay in school, or were boarded-out by the Education Sub-Committee, demonstrating a high degree of care for the vulnerable in their community.

Secondary and Tertiary Education: Grants and Scholarships.

In 1907, the Education (Administration Provisions) Act, 1907, would enact regulations which insisted that in all fee paying secondary schools in receipt of a grant, twenty-five per cent of the admissions each year were to be free places for children from elementary schools. SJ Curtis, wrote in 1948 that, 'In order to maintain the standards and efficiencies of the secondary schools, candidates for free places were to be selected on the result of an attainment test designed to discover whether they were

⁵² Blackburn Education Department Sub-Committee *Minutes*, 1930-1936.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 24 May 1933.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 12 July 1933.

able to profit by a secondary-school education.⁵⁵ A General Scholarship Examination was held annually for Blackburn children between the ages of eleven and twelve who were attending public elementary schools.⁵⁶ The Education Act, 1918, gave power to local authorities to pay maintenance grants to scholarship recipients at secondary schools, which enabled young people to benefit from a secondary education without being disadvantaged through poverty. The Education Act, 1921, would consolidate the formula for paying grants.⁵⁷ The Education Sub-Committee Reports for Blackburn and Burnley contain details of all maintenance grants allowed by the Maintenance Grants Sub-Committee. For example, the average maintenance grant between 1929 and 1936 was £3 per year, although several pupils received £1.10.0d (possibly through a means test), and there were several instances where a grant of money and books were given.⁵⁸ In Blackburn, the Convent of Notre Dame, a Catholic Girl's Grammar School received grants of £2.3.4d for each pupil, the sons or daughters of Blackburn residents, who attended for a full term.⁵⁹ Only later, after the Depression, did the examination for a free place become a special-place examination, and parents of children selected to grammar-schools were required to pay fees. However, in response to a Board of Education Circular 1421, which brought up the raising of fees for secondary schools, the Education Sub-Committee in Blackburn noted:

Concerning raising fees for secondary schools. Generally in Blackburn owing to the serious trade depression which has resulted in diminished family incomes, more and more parents are finding it difficult to pay present school fees. They, (Sub-Committee) stress therefore that an increase in fees at the present time must result in some children being deprived in secondary education.⁶⁰

The fees are shown in a table below.

⁵⁵ Curtis, SJ, *History of Education*, p.326.

⁵⁶ Blackburn Education Department *Minutes* 1930-1936.

⁵⁷ Curtis, *History of Education*, p.344-5.

⁵⁸ Blackburn and Burnley Education Sub-Committees, 1929-1936.

⁵⁹ Blackburn Higher Education Sub-Committee, 21 January 1930.

⁶⁰ Blackburn Education Committee, 10 October 1932.

Up to £234 per annum, plus £26 for each other dependant.	No Fee
Up to £235-£286, per annum plus £26 for each other dependant	£3. 3. 0d
Up to £287-£312 per annum plus £26 for each other dependant	£6. 6. 0d
Other cases of family income not coming within these limits	£9. 9. 0d

Table 24. Fees for Secondary Schools and Ranges of Income.

Table produced by me from Blackburn Higher Education Sub-Committee Minutes. 1929-1936

We have seen earlier that some textile workers would earn £2 per week or less, which would put them in the low income range, and therefore would pay little or nothing for school fees.

In addition to maintenance grants, the Local Education Authorities made loans to training college or university students. For example, in 1929, loans of £50 towards the payment of fees and the cost of books were made to LB and AG in respect of their university courses with repayments to commence 1 January 1932 and 1 January 1933. In January 1932, there is evidence of the unemployment crisis in North-East Lancashire taking effect when LG was granted permission to repay his loan at the rate of £2 per month instead of £3. In 1934, he was granted permission to repay his loan at the rate of ten shillings a month.⁶¹ Not all loans were for £50. For example, two loans, one for £40 and one for £20 were made for Training College fees and the cost of books, both to be repaid at the rate of £3 per month from 1 January 1933. The loans were interest free. KK and IM were allowed to defer commencing payment of their loans until 1 July 1932, and 1 January 1933 respectively. All these loans were means tested, and a poor child had to pass an examination to gain a scholarship to a secondary school otherwise they had to stay at public elementary schools until the Education Act of 1944 which changed the regulation allowing for full secondary education at purpose built schools.

⁶¹ Blackburn Higher Education Sub-Committee *Minutes* 1929-1936.

As we saw above in the section concerning the development of education, there existed a scheme for student teacher training. Blackburn Education Committee submitted the names of six young people appointed as student teachers, two male and four female, for the years 1930-31. The students were student teachers for one year then went to a teacher training college. The same years, it was noted that no candidate would be appointed without a matriculation certificate. In 1933-4 it was noted that student teachers would be appointed only for one year then they would be required to attend a training college. Local Education Departments were required to inform the Board of Education of any decisions made concerning student teachers, because the Board of Education made the final decisions about student teachers.

The Role of the Education Departments in a Time of Crisis: The School Medical Service.

The Education Departments in North East Lancashire were responsible for more than just education. They were responsible for the physical and moral welfare of the children in their area, in addition, the Education Department was also responsible for ensuring that living conditions of children were adequate, if not, they were obliged to take measures to redress the problems. The 1929 Local Government Act and the 1930 Poor Law Act gave local authorities the power to assume parental control over children who had been deserted or were living in unsuitable conditions. The Education Sub-Committee was accountable for children who were 'boarded out' (the official term for fostered), and were responsible for their clothing and living conditions. Children in care were placed in special schools, jobs or apprenticeships and even encouraged to emigrate if they wished. Children who were thought to have behavioural problems were sent away to Training Schools.

It was long after elementary education became compulsory that any provision was made for the physical needs of children. It was towards the end of the nineteenth-century that it became clear that many children were prevented by sickness or disability from receiving full benefit from an education. In 1904, a report from the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration had been set up as a result of public concern at the poor physical quality of recruits for the Boer War. This report had a special section on school children and the Committee drew attention to the need for improvement in the hygienic conditions in schools and recommended a systematic medical inspection of school children. The Education (Administrative Provisions) Act, 1907 provided for the establishment of a school health service making it the duty of local education authorities to provide for the medical inspection of children in public elementary schools, and giving them the power to make arrangements for attending to their health and physical condition. The Education Act, 1918, made it compulsory, for local education authorities to provide medical treatment for conditions such as, minor ailments, defective vision and dental disease, rather than before, when local authorities had the ability to do so and some declined to act.⁶²

The Director of Education was also responsible for administering the Mayor's Fund for Clogs for Poor Children. This fund depended on voluntary contributions from sporting clubs, social clubs, private subscriptions and collecting boxes placed in shops around the town. All the towns in North East Lancashire had a clog fund to provide clogs for children who had no footwear. Studying the figures below from the Blackburn fund demonstrates how the industrial depression deepened in North East Lancashire during the early 1930s. The figures also show that the years 1932 and 1933 were the worst years of the industrial depression for Blackburn, and figures show that it was the same for the rest of North East Lancashire.

⁶² Education 1900-1950 Ministry of Education pp. 64-5.

NOTE:
This figure is included on page 187 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

Figure 25. Figures for the Mayor's Clog Fund for Blackburn 1929-35

Source: CB Blackburn Education Department *Minutes*, 1920-35

By the late 1920s, the School Medical Service, especially in the textile area of North-East Lancashire, was working well, as will be shown in Chapter 7. It became a valuable tool against poor health which was exacerbated by the poverty caused by the economic crisis. Blackburn, Burnley, Darwen, Haslingden, Accrington, Accrington, Colne, Nelson and Clitheroe all had school clinics although Haslingden, with a population of over 17,000, was without a Medical Officer of Health for several months in 1932 until a temporary Medical Officer of Health was appointed on 14 December 1932.⁶³ Blackburn and Burnley, as the only County Boroughs in the area, had the most school clinics. The Board of Education (Special Services) Regulations provided for the medical inspection of all children in public elementary schools as soon as possible in the first twelve months following their first admission to school, when they reached the age of eight and between the ages of twelve to fourteen years. The School Medical Officer (SMO) for Burnley noted that head teachers were given notice at every routine examination that they could submit any special cases in other age groups they wished the Medical Officer to see. The same notice was given in Blackburn.⁶⁴ In 1930, Blackburn had a School Medical Officer, a Deputy SMO, an Assistant SMO who held six sessions per week, and a 'Lady' [sic] Assistant Medical Officer who held one session a week for school medical inspections. A nurse accompanied the doctor to prepare children for examination, including weighing and measuring children and

⁶³ Borough of Haslingden, *Medical Officer's Annual Report*, 1932.

⁶⁴ Blackburn and Burnley School Medical Officers *Annual Reports*, 1930.

conducting eye tests. There were also two dental surgeons and two dental nurses.⁶⁵ In Burnley, there was a Medical Officer of Health (MOH) who was the SMO, a Deputy MOH and TB Officer, who was also Assistant SMO, two Assistant MOH (Ladies) [sic] who acted as Assistant SMOs and three health visitors who also acted as School Nurses. In addition, there was one full time dental surgeon (for over 13,000 children) and a dental nurse. The dentist also held one session a week for pregnant and nursing mothers and preschool children, and one evening session for TB patients.⁶⁶ The MOH in North-East Lancashire councils was invariably the SMO, and SMO Reports were included in the Annual MOH Report. Extensive records were kept of school medical inspections, and will be examined in detail in Chapter Seven. Nonetheless it is possible to follow the trade depression by using some of those records now to show how unemployment affected the community.

When examining the School Medical Officers' records for North-East Lancashire, we find those from Blackburn and Burnley very useful, because they are the most easily accessed and the most detailed. In 1930, the SMO of Blackburn examined 4,707 children and recorded 601 children with below normal nutrition. Burnley's SMO examined 4,153 children and found 2 cases of malnutrition. Blackburn had a reputation for sympathetic interpretation of regulations. In Chapter 3 we saw that the Ministry of Labour threatened to replace Blackburn's PAC with a government commissioner because of 'high Poor Law scales and generous allowances.' The reporting of poor nutrition demonstrates this sympathetic interpretation. Blackburn and Burnley had similar populations, similar unemployment patterns and similar housing conditions so poor nutrition figures should have been similar, however, Blackburn's SMO (Dr Thierens) reported below normal nutrition more sympathetically than Burnley's MOH (Dr Lamont) who reported only malnutrition, not below normal

⁶⁵ Blackburn School Medical Officers *Annual Report*, 1930.

⁶⁶ Burnley School Medical Officers *Annual Report*, 1930.

nutrition⁶⁷ In 1931, Blackburn's SMO examined 3,811 children and found 801 cases of poor nutrition, while in Burnley, 3,934 children were examined with 21 cases of malnutrition found. In 1932, 3,937 Blackburn schoolchildren were examined and 801 were found to be below normal nutrition, while Burnley's SMO examined 4,020 children and found 24 cases of malnutrition. A similar pattern may be observed in the 1933 reports. Blackburn saw 4,061 children examined with 850 cases of below normal nutrition, and Burnley out of 4,385 children examined found 61 cases of malnutrition. In 1934, the numbers began to go down, and in 1935, the Board of Education required the SMOs to change the way nutritional findings were to be recorded. This, wrote Charles Webster in 1982, was to enable the Board of Education to 'place the most optimistic construction on these results' to prove there was no physical deterioration in the public's health.⁶⁸ The numbers of children reported with poor nutrition, not just with malnutrition, proved that there was physical deterioration in the public's health, especially in North-East Lancashire.

The School Meals Service

As with the School Medical Service, the School Meals Service came about by legislation, (the Education (Provision of Meals) Act, 1906,) which enabled authorities to assist in providing meals for children 'attending an elementary school [who] are unable by reason of lack of food to take full advantage of the education provided for them.'⁶⁹ The Board of Education issued a circular in January 1907 which explained that the Act was purely permissive, and imposed no duty upon local authorities to provide school meals. The Circular noted 'that the Act was primarily of educational character and had the object of insuring that children attending public elementary school should no longer

⁶⁷ Pope, Rex, *Unemployment and the Lancashire Weaving Area, 1920-1938* (Preston, 2000).

⁶⁸ Webster, Charles, "Healthy or Hungry Thirties", *History Workshop Journal* 13, 1982, pp.110-30, p.119.

⁶⁹ Education 1900-1950, Ministry of Education, pp. 67-8

be prevented by insufficiency of suitable food from profiting by the education offered'.⁷⁰ During the early 1930s, there was a need for supplementary feeding for many children as becomes evident when Local Education Authority records are closely examined.

The SMO's reports for Blackburn and Burnley list the figure for free meals, although children attending open-air schools or classes were graded as 'delicate' and part of the regimen was a substantial midday meal. Below are sample menus from the Blackburn SMOs report for 1930.

Sample menus

Monday : Vegetable Stew. Jam Tart.
 Tuesday: Meat and Potato Pie. Milk Pudding.
 Wednesday: Irish Stew. College Pudding and Custard.
 Thursday: Cornish Pasty, Potatoes and Gravy. Coconut buns.
 Friday: Hot Pot. Currant pastry.

Monday: Shepherds Pie and Gravy. Parkin.
 Tuesday: Hot Pot. Sultana Pastry.
 Wednesday: Irish Stew and peas. Syrup Pudding and Custard.
 Thursday: Meat and Potato Pie. Milk Pudding.
 Friday: Stewed Steak Carrots and Gravy. Rock Buns.⁷¹

All the above and school meals were prepared at the Mayson Street Central Kitchens, where school meals continued to be prepared well into the 1960s until new schools, which had kitchens on the premises, were built. In fact, extra staff had to be employed at Mayson Street kitchens to cope with the extra school meals in 1930.⁷² Children who received free meals were chosen by SMOs or school nurses. In his report for 1930, the SMO for Blackburn wrote:

Children in need of free meals are referred to the Education Department by the School Medical Officers. Enquiries into the financial circumstances of children thus recommended are made by the Education Department, and arrangements are then effected for the provision of meals. Dietaries are drawn up by the School Medical Officer and the Director of Education in

⁷⁰ Board of Education Circular 552, 1 January 1907.

⁷¹ Blackburn School Medical Officer's Report 1930.

⁷² CB Blackburn Elementary Education Sub-Committee *Minutes* 26 October 1932.

collaboration with members of the Domestic Science School staff. The arrangements made are adequate and results obtained are satisfactory.⁷³

The Burnley SMO, in his annual report for 1932 noted that,

The system of providing Free Meals for necessitous children has been in operation for twenty-one years. The exceptionally rapid increase in numbers receiving free meals during the last two years occasioned the opening of several additional centres, until in July, 1932, there were ten such centres.⁷⁴

In Burnley, as in Blackburn recipients for free meals were chosen by a Special Services Sub-Committee by the 'application of a scale approved by the Board of Education, taking into consideration income and number in family.'⁷⁵ Between 1930 and 1934, when unemployment was at its worst in North-East Lancashire, the numbers of children receiving free meals increased dramatically. There was greater need for free or subsidised meals because of high levels of unemployment and the rise in poor nutrition.⁷⁶ DS, born in Blackburn in 1920, said in 2005, 'We did get free school dinners, but they were not good. I suppose they filled us up.'⁷⁷ Nelson, a town less affected by unemployment than other North-East Lancashire towns showed a dramatic increase in meals provided in 1931. In January 1,450 meals per month were provided, while in November, 5,874 meals per month were provided. By April 1933 5,974 free dinners and 2,328 free teas were provided for the month. The free dinners were for 119 children from 34 families and teas to seven children from ten families.⁷⁸ In addition, free or subsidised milk was made available for school children, infants and pregnant and nursing mothers. The SMO for Burnley noted in his report for 1933,

During 1932, an increase in the amount of milk issued free was occasioned by debility, malnutrition etc., and consequent on the prolonged presence of unemployment. In 1933, there was a further increase in the amount of free milk provided, particularly to expectant and nursing mothers. Whereas the

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Burnley School Medical Officer's Report 1932.

⁷⁵ Burnley School Medical Officer's Report 1932.

⁷⁶ LC, Interviewed 2005. Transcript in author's possession.

⁷⁷ DSt, interviewed 2005. Transcript in author's possession.

⁷⁸ Municipal Borough Nelson, Education and Sub-Committees Reports 1931-1933.

number of infants supplied with free milk increased by only 27, expectant and nursing mothers who were given free milk or meals increased from 201 in 1932 to 314 in 1933. The regulation that extra nourishment shall be granted on medical grounds only and not sociological conditions, is adhered to strictly. New milk [not powdered] is provided.⁷⁹

Some meals mentioned in reports were 'milk meals', which was a one-third pint bottle of milk, and the sociological conditions regulations meant that a family's financial situation was not taken into account when supplying free milk, only health reasons. Borough of Colne records show that in 1930, forty-six cases were given free milk. By 1934, the number had risen to seventy-nine.⁸⁰ On 5 September 1934, the Board of education issued a Circular which had reference to supplying milk under Section II (1) of the Milk Act, 1934, to children in schools. As from 1 October 1934, milk for consumption by children in schools was to be supplied for one-half penny for one-third pint of milk instead of a penny as had been the case hitherto. The object of the scheme was to increase the amount of milk consumed by children under voluntary arrangements in place in elementary schools. The Board of Education requested that Local Education Authorities encourage such arrangements. The Circular also suggested that in appropriate cases the provision of free milk to children selected by School Medical Officers.⁸¹ By 1935, almost fifty per cent of school children in Britain received milk at school,⁸² and the national figures below tell a lamentable story of poor nutrition.

1931	265,393 children	32,737,037 meals
1932	295,000 children	40,314,000 meals
1933	320,000 children	47,858,200 meals
1934	400,000 children	62,304,600 meals

Table 26. Figures free school meals.

Sources. Board of Education Annual reports, 1930-1934.

Table produced by me from above sources.

⁷⁹ Burnley Medical Officer's Report 1933.

⁸⁰ Municipal Borough Colne, Education and Sub-Committee *Reports* 1930-1934.

⁸¹ Board of Education Circular 1437, 5 September 1934.

⁸² *Education 1900-1950*, Ministry of Education, p.70.

These figures show how the economic crisis had a detrimental effect on children nationwide. Blackburn and Burnley's SMOs had both commented on the improvement of children's attitude, behaviour and health with increased nutrition, and that this increased nutrition needed to be provided by the state because local authorities finances were being stretched by the rise in children needing extra nutrition.

Unemployment with its resultant poverty did have a detrimental effect on children's education in the early 1930s, mainly because of poor nutrition, but partly because of conditions in the schools. Schools in North-East Lancashire were in poor condition for the most part and the National Economy Act, 1931, ensured there was an inadequate amount of money to replace them. The Act slowed down the building of new schools. On the other hand, Special Schools were not compromised by the economic crisis and adequate provision was made for both physically or intellectually disabled children, although there was some mention of children who received no education at all because of their disability. The accessibility of a senior secondary education at central schools for poorer children was inadequate and dependent mostly on income. Scholarships did not cover the cost of uniforms and although Local Education Authorities gave grants for books and such, clothes were quite expensive. The Local Education Authorities in North-East Lancashire helped tertiary students, although the help was with loans which had to be repaid rather than grants which did not. The School Medical Service was adequate and children's health safeguarded, however, the School Medical Service records clearly demonstrate how schoolchildren's health deteriorated as the depression deepened. Malnutrition increased despite the government's insistence that there was no physical deterioration in schoolchildren's health. Lastly, the dramatic increase in the numbers of schoolchildren medically diagnosed to be in need of free meals and milk, and the fact that children studied better with adequate nutrition, gave proof that children's education did suffer as much as housing and welfare because of unemployment and its attendant poverty. Higher

incomes and better housing conditions would have improved the standard of living, not only of children, but also of their families, as Dr Thierens, who we have met several times, noted the above when he said, 'education and health inevitably suffer from the devitalising influence of unhygienic surroundings'.

CHAPTER 7

THE HEALTH OF THE COMMUNITY

A large percentage of working class children are growing up under-nourished, ill-clad, ill-shod, with disastrous results upon the next generation. Frequently the allowances provided under the Means Test involve semi-starvation.¹

The above quotation from Fenner Brockway in 1932 shows what he thought about the poverty in Britain in the 1930s. Unknown to Brockway, however, was that the disastrous results he wrote about were more serious than he thought. The government of Britain, in the 1930s was financially conservative, and in this chapter, I will demonstrate how that financial conservatism would cause long-term health problems, and that the main cause of poor health of the community in North East Lancashire was not, as previously supposed by many social commentators, the paucity of health care, but the lack of means to purchase nourishing food because of low wages, or low unemployment benefits. An abundance of literature exists concerning the health and welfare of the poor and unemployed in Britain in the 1930s, and we have examined it in the literature review. It is necessary, however, to revisit some work to reinforce my argument that the national government's role in the question of poor nutrition was lacking in any constructive action. This was a government diligent in attempting to disprove poor nutrition or malnutrition in the areas severely affected by unemployment. The report Save the Children Fund in 1933 noted that the lack of adequate resources 'at the disposal of unemployed parents', had a marked effect on the physical well-being

¹ Fenner Brockway, *Hungry England*, pp. 222-3.

of children.² Journalist and political activist, Allen Hutt, noted in 1933 that the burden of impoverishment was affecting children's health because many children did not appear to have 'a sufficiency of fresh vitamin-containing foods'. He also pointed to a decline in 'normal nutrition' among school entrants in Blackburn, a point that will be established later in the chapter.³ Communist leader, Walter Hannington asked in 1937 whether the British Medical Association (BMA) Committee appointed in 1933 to decide a diet which was adequate to maintain health and working capacity, was formed for 'humanitarian, social or economic reasons'. He believed it was for economic reasons, and he treated with contempt not only the Ministry of Health, 'the guardians of the public well-being', but also the BMA for 'indulging in controversy' about the minimum upon which a human being could exist.⁴ Marjorie Spring Rice, in *Working Class Wives* (1939), which she based on a survey of 1,250 married working women collected by the Women's Health Enquiry Committee, showed various family budgets, and noted that a large part of the population was too poor to buy enough of the kind of food necessary for the maintenance of sound health.⁵ The School Medical Officer for Cumberland, in his 1932 report, noted that the poor and unemployed had insufficient money to provide an adequate diet for a child 'even on the plainest and simplest lines'.⁶ No report, book or enquiry from the early 1930s could say that the poor and unemployed families were well fed. Some, which we will examine later, blamed working class mothers for ignorance or laziness in not feeding their children correctly, but Hannington, who wondered at the 'well-to-do woman assuming the right to instruct the working class mother on the way she shall spend four shillings or less on twenty-one meals a week',

² Save the Children Fund, *Unemployment and the Child* p.17.

³ Allen Hutt, *The Condition of the Working Class in Britain*, p. 87.

⁴ Walter Hannington, *The Problem of the Distressed Areas*, p. 57-8.

⁵ Marjorie Spring Rice, *Working Class Wives*, p.155.

⁶ Dr Kenneth Fraser, Cumberland School Medical Officer, *1932 Report*, Quoted in Hannington *The Distressed Areas*, p 50.

rebutted these accusations.⁷ Dr GCM M'Gonigle, who had clashed with the government when he blamed poverty for ill health in the book he co-wrote with J Kirby, *Poverty and Public Health*, sent a letter to *The Times* in 1936 saying, 'insufficient purchasing power and not ignorance of food values is the dominant cause of malnutrition', and he pointed out that those in government, who had long denied the existence of malnutrition, now blamed it on the poor for eating the wrong food.⁸ The government, as we shall see later, were increasingly concerned in private about undernourishment. Politically, the government could not afford to admit that malnutrition existed, or publicly recognise that poverty was causing the said malnutrition because acknowledging that poverty was causing malnourishment would mean being compelled to raise benefits.

In the interwar years, but particularly the 1930s, the impact of poor nutrition on health created a contentious debate. One side, the national government and its supporters, blamed the ignorance of the average working class housewife who knew nothing of food values, or how to manage a household budget. The other side showed repeatedly that poor nutrition had little to do with ignorance or poor budgeting, and everything to do with having insufficient money to buy enough food. Physician and pharmacologist, Sir Edward Mellanby (1884-1955), who discovered that vitamin D deficiency caused rickets, argued, in 1927, that a good diet 'would be as revolutionary as was the introduction of cleanliness and drainage in the last century'.⁹ Families who were dependent on unemployment benefits or transitional payments did not have enough money to provide a 'good diet'. Fenner Brockway, in 1932, wrote of a 'large percentage of working class children growing up undernourished, ill-clad and ill-shod,

⁷ Hannington, *The Distressed Areas*, p.60-61.

⁸ GCM M'Gonigle, letter to *The Times*, 26 March 1936.

⁹ John Macnicol, *The Movement for Family Allowances* (London, 1980), p.46.

with disastrous results upon the next generation'.¹⁰ The Save the Children Report *Unemployment and the Child*, commented on the fact that while unemployment increased, there was a reduction in the benefit allowed which 'must have increased the risk of malnutrition for families subject to prolonged unemployment, and it is certain that there are classes where the risk is very great'.¹¹ Spring Rice's *Working Class Wives*, based as we have seen on a survey by the Women's Health Enquiry Committee, informed the country that 'no unemployed married man with a family under the Assistance Board...receives enough money to buy adequate food for himself, wife and children'.¹² M'Gonigle and Kirby, in *Poverty and Public Health*, published in 1936, focussed upon the effects of poor nourishment on the incidence of rickets and tooth decay. Also in 1936, Sir John Boyd Orr (1880-1971), a Nobel Peace Prize winner,¹³ and who, during World War Two would advise the government on diets, published a report called *Food, Health and Income*. In it he claimed that more than fifty per cent of the nation's diets were inadequate for good health, even for those with an adequate income.¹⁴ Today, in 2008, much is made of 'junk food' having a detrimental effect upon the health of the population. 'Junk food' is far more expensive than healthy home cooked food, but many, people, both working class and middle class still buy it. My point however, is that the poor of North East Lancashire could not afford better food in the 1930s; starchy carbohydrate food was cheaper and filling. Thirty years later in 1966, Lord Boyd Orr, in his autobiography *As I Recall*, reminisced how Government Ministers and Civil Servants put pressure on him to suppress his report, in which he

¹⁰ Brockway, *Hungry England*, p. 222.

¹¹ Save the Children Fund, *Unemployment and the Child*, p.77.

¹² Spring Rice, *Working Class Wives*, p. 155.

¹³ Sir John Boyd Orr was awarded the 1949 Nobel Peace Prize for his scientific research into nutrition and his work as the first Director-General of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. www.Nobelprize.org accessed 7 February 2008.

¹⁴ John Boyd Orr, *Food, Health and Income*.

revealed the appalling amount of malnutrition among the people of Britain. It was difficult for the Ministry of Health to claim there was no malnutrition in Britain when an expert in nutrition had clearly demonstrated that there was.¹⁵ Other contemporaneous writers and commentators used anecdotal evidence to link poverty to ill-health, including Fenner Brockway in 1932, Allen Hutt in 1933 and Walter Hannington in 1937.¹⁶ We can say, therefore, with a high degree of certainty that no independent commentators of the time believed that the poor and unemployed were adequately fed.

The government, when challenged, responded in a conventional manner. When the Medical Research Council (MRC) wanted the government to inform the population about the new findings in nutrition, they demurred. The practical applications of the new science, including the 'protective foods' such as dairy foods and high protein foods would have entailed increased benefits and in turn would have had extensive implications in the political and economic climate of the time; the country was in the midst of a financial depression and the financial conservatism of the early 1930s precluded increasing benefits. In her 1988 article, 'The 1930s Nutrition Controversy', which deals with the Ministry of Health's response to criticism of the Food Section of the Ministry of Health, Madeleine Mayhew noted that Sir Edward Mellanby, who was a member of the MRC, criticised the Ministry of Health's Food Section for not undertaking 'sufficient public education in health', a move that Mayhew believes could have had political repercussions. Eventually, the government formed the Advisory Committee on Nutrition, whose brief was to advise the government on minimum dietary levels and nutritional matters. The Committee membership was, according to Mayhew, deliberately chosen from personalities who would 'neutralise one another', thus

¹⁵ Lord Boyd Orr, *As I Recall* (London, 1966) pp.114-118.

¹⁶ Brockway, *Hungry England*; Hutt, *The Condition of the Working Class in Britain*; and Hannington, *The Problem of the Distressed Area*.

reducing the risk to the Ministry of Health of 'having to come down on the side of those with a positive policy'.¹⁷ Sir Edward Hilton Young, the Minister of Health, made it clear to the committee that he did not expect them to attempt to translate minimum subsistence diets into cash terms.¹⁸ However, the Committee's Second report made suggestions as to suitable minimum diets for adult males, adult females, and children less than fourteen years of age.¹⁹ These suggestions for a minimum diet had economic implications as Professor Cartwright, a Committee member, realised. The diets would 'cost more than the average working man can afford', and he feared that transitional beneficiaries and others may have seized on the report 'to measure what their allowances should be'.²⁰ This, as we have seen, is what happened. The Government and its supporters, as we have also seen, blamed ignorance for poor nutrition not lack of funds. World War One veteran, Sir Francis Fremantle, a Conservative MP, asserted in Parliament that overeating or a bad choice of food caused much ill health. He said, 'Hunger to a certain extent is a very good thing'.²¹ Professor Cathcart, a Nutrition Committee member, believed that bad cooking and inefficient household economy played a larger part in poor nutrition than a shortage of cash, while Sir Arthur Robinson, Permanent Secretary to the Minister of Health, maintained that 'malnutrition is ignorance quite as much as insufficient income'.²² There is, however, a large amount of evidence which makes nonsense of the previous statements by government members and supporters. The Save the Children fund, in 1933, gave a selection of family

¹⁷ Madeleine Mayhew, 'The 1930s Nutrition Controversy', p. 447-8.

¹⁸ PRO. MH 56/56 11 January 1934. Report of a discussion between Hilton Young (Minister of Health), Professor Greenwood, (Chairman of Committee), and Sir Arthur Robinson, (Permanent Secretary to Minister of Health).

¹⁹ Ministry of Health Advisory Committee on Nutrition, *The Criticism and Improvements of Diets*, (HMSO, 1932).

²⁰ PRO. MH 56/51, undated, from Dr Thomas Carnworth, to Sir George Newman. Quoted in Mayhew, *1930s Nutrition* p.449.

²¹ *House of Commons Debates*, 1936, vol. 317, col. 157, Sir F Fremantle, 4 November.

²² Mayhew, *1930s Nutrition*, p.450.

budgets. One family of eight in Lancashire received thirty-nine shillings and eight pence transitional payments and public assistance, and spent twenty-four shillings on food. Breakfasts were invariably bread, fried or toasted, or porridge. Another family in Lancashire, with two children, received twenty-seven shillings a week, and again, bread was the staple for breakfast and tea.²³ Mrs Keen, from Darwen, received forty-three shillings and three pence a week for a family of eight, out of which she spent nine shillings on rent, four shillings and sixpence for coal, three shillings and sixpence on milk and was left with twenty-four shillings for everything else, food, clothes, shoes and cleaning materials. 'Even if we spent all this on food' she said, 'it would only be about fivepence each a day...it's mainly bread and marge we live on and jam sometimes for the children at tea'.²⁴ Mrs Pallas, a mother of five whose husband was unemployed, told the BBC in a series of interviews conducted and broadcast in 1934, 'They say we ought to drink a pint of milk a day'. That would have cost twelve shillings and threepence for a family of seven out of the thirty-three shillings they received in transitional payment. Mrs Pallas said, 'Our Medical Officer wrote an article...and said white bread, marge and tea was no good for anyone. Well, that's our main diet and thousands more like me'.²⁵ AB, born in 1914 in Blackburn and interviewed in 2002, said 'We were allus hungry. The Vicar used to tell mi' Mam she weren't buying stuff which were good for us, but she had to fill us up'.²⁶ Rex Pope, researching for his book, *Unemployment and the Lancashire Weaving Area*, published in 2000, was told by one interviewee, 'shopping was a nightmare, always a penn'orth of this and a penn'orth of that'.²⁷ Ada Gibson, who was born in 1915, and whom we have already met, said in an

²³ Save the Children Fund, *Unemployment and the Child*, pp 109ff.

²⁴ Quoted in Felix Greene, *Time to Spare*, p.84-5.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 32.

²⁶ AB, Interviewed May 2002. Transcript in author's possession.

²⁷ Pope, *Unemployment and the Lancashire Weaving Area*, p.77.

interview recorded in 1985, 'I had a rotten childhood, and when you look back you ask, "Why should it have been like that? No money and nothing to eat". Not just our family, but lots of families'.²⁸ She grew up in the 1920s and her testimony and that of many others shows that a great many children had their health compromised by unemployment before the 1930s industrial depression. These examples show that an insufficient income went a long way towards causing malnutrition, although ignorance of nutrition had a part to play.

In November 1933, the BMA's Nutrition Committee published a report on diets and nutrition which caused great consternation at the Ministry of Health because the BMA's minimum food requirements were higher than those which the Ministry's own committee had recommended in 1932. Worse, in the Ministry of Health's view, they had translated the diets into cash requirements.²⁹ This was the beginning of the controversy between the Ministry of Health and the British Medical Association that had aroused Hannington's contempt. On reading the BMA report, the Ministry went into damage control labelling the report as a 'Labour Party tract, and a stunt set up by M'Gonigle' who was 'socialistically inclined'.³⁰ The report caused a certain amount of unease in government circles for one main reason: the amount of money the BMA Committee recommended as the minimum necessary for a man, woman and child to exist, was more than the unemployed, or even the low paid employed received.³¹ Some textile workers in North East Lancashire worked for wages which were sometimes lower than the means-tested allowances.³² The Government, mindful of unemployment benefits, claimed that the BMA minimum requirement was too high. Accepting the BMA's

²⁸ Ada Gibson, North West Sound Archives Recording, 1985.0026.

²⁹ Hannington, *The Problem of the Distressed Areas*, p.65.

³⁰ Mayhew, *1930s Nutrition*, p.451.

³¹ Hannington, *The Problem of the Distressed Areas*, p.56.

³² Brockway, *Hungry England*, p.17.

minimum requirements would demonstrate that unemployment and public assistance benefits were too low for to afford an adequate diet. The BMA Committee recommended an intake of 3,400 calories a day for a male and 2,800 calories a day for a female.³³ The Ministry of Health, however, suggested that 3,000 calories a day for men and 2,600 calories a day for women were sufficient.³⁴ There was no special attention paid to the extra need of the pregnant woman or the nursing mother.³⁵ The Ministry of Health and the BMA, to resolve the controversy, held a joint conference and they agreed upon and issued a 'Sliding Scale of Calorific Requirements per Day'.³⁶ A report which Hannington believed 'did nothing to clear up the mystification to which the earlier reports had given rise', while the *Medical Officer* journal reported in 1934, 'since many people do not have the monetary means to purchase either of these minimums, one would expect some evidence of malnutrition'.³⁷ Margaret Mitchell believes that the national government's 'intransigent facade was built upon the fixed [political and economic] orthodoxy characteristic of the interwar period'.³⁸ This political and economic orthodoxy made it possible for the national government to ignore or deflect mounting social evidence of malnourishment among a large part of the population.

Infant mortality rates (IMR) and maternal mortality rates (MMR) are statistics which normally act as general indicators of health and nutrition standards. The textile manufacturing areas of North East Lancashire were notorious for high levels of infant and maternal mortality, and were all above the national average. In Blackburn and Burnley, the two County Boroughs in the area, the IMR fell faster in the interwar years

³³ *British Medical Journal* 25 November 1933.

³⁴ Ministry of Health, White Paper, *Nutrition* (London, 1934), p.4.

³⁵ Mitchell, *Women and Children*, p.114.

³⁶ Ministry of Health, *Nutrition*, pp. 6-7.

³⁷ *The Medical Officer*, 11 August 1934, p.59.

³⁸ Mitchell, *Women and Children*, p.116.

than in the rest of England and Wales. Blackburn and Burnley's IMR fell by 36 per cent compared with 25 per cent in the rest of the country. However, even with the reduction in the IMR, Blackburn and Burnley had IMR's above the national average, as we see below.

Year	Blackburn	Burnley	Nationally
1930	83	75.5	60
1931	61	85.9	66
1932	66	86.4	65
1933	71	74.7	64
1934	57	70.3	59
1935	63	66.4	57

Table 27. Infant Mortality Rates for Blackburn, Burnley and England and Wales per 1000 births.

Source: CB Blackburn MOH *Annual Reports*, 1930-1935.
 CB Burnley MOH *Annual Reports*, 1930-1935.
 Ministry Of Health *Annual Reports*, 1930-1935.

Tables 27 & 28 produced by me from the above sources.

We can attribute the overall falls in the IMR to developments in public health and social welfare in the Boroughs, particularly maternal and child welfare clinics.³⁹ The IMR however, rose in the Boroughs of Colne, Haslingden, Darwen and Accrington, while the rate in Padiham and Nelson fell. Dr Markham, Medical Officer for Nelson, wrote, 'although it is pleasing to report a lower infant mortality rate, it would be a matter of greater congratulation if this figure could be maintained or even show a reduction over a period of years'.⁴⁰ Most Medical Officers were quite realistic about falls in the IMR. The improvements in child welfare could not help but improve them but were worried about the MMR.

³⁹ CB Blackburn MOH *Annual Reports*, 1932.

⁴⁰ Nelson Medical Officers *Report* 1932, Lancashire Record Office, (MBNe).

Year	Blackburn	Burnley	Nationally
1930	4.4	4.4	4.4
1931	3.88	5.8	4.11
1932	5.38	6.5	4.06
1933	5.95	6.5	4.23
1934	4.71	14.6 # <i>See below</i>	4.1
1935	4.71	5.25	3.93

Figure28. Maternal Mortality Rates for Blackburn, Burnley and England and Wales per 1000 births.

Source: CB Blackburn MOH *Annual Reports*, 1930-1935.

CB Burnley MOH *Annual Reports*, 1930-1935.

Ministry of Health, *Annual Reports*, 1930-1935.

While in most areas the IMR rate was gradually falling, it was a different matter with the MMR. Blackburn's Medical Officer of Health, Dr Thierens wrote in his report for 1931:

Blackburn has for many years...occupied an unenviable position as regards maternal mortality. This year, however, the Blackburn rate of 3.88 compares more than favourably with the corresponding rates for other industrial towns and for England and Wales as a whole. However, the Blackburn Maternal Mortality Rate has been consistently high over a period of 40 years, and has further exhibited wide fluctuations year by year; it is not improbable that the reduction, though welcome, is in part fortuitous, and therefore unlikely to be maintained.⁴¹

He was correct and the following year, 1932, the rate rose to 5.83 per thousand births.⁴² Blackburn's MMR was higher for the 1920s and early 1930s than it was in the 1890s. Allen Hutt, in 1933 saw this to be a 'general characteristic of maternal mortality in Lancashire; over a period of twenty or forty years motherhood has become not less, but more dangerous'.⁴³

#The MOH for Burnley, Dr Lamont noted in his report for 1934:

The high death rate associated with childbearing in 1934 is a cause of some concern. It is more than double the average rate of the last ten

⁴¹ CB Blackburn MOH *Annual Reports*, 1931.

⁴² *Ibid.* 1932.

⁴³ Hutt, *Condition of the Working Class*, p.82.

years,--this despite the fact that never before have there been better ante-natal supervision by midwife, doctor and clinic and more facilities for specialist advice and hospital treatment. A perusal of the following summary...shows that half the deaths occurred in women having their first babies. In nine cases the women had no ante-natal care prior to the confinement or abortion. In seven cases death could probably not have been prevented, but in the remaining fifteen there is a possibility that, with ante-natal supervision...a fatal termination might have been avoided. Lack of...cooperation of the patient was an important factor contributing to a fatal termination in eight cases; in these the patients either refused to take the advice of the health visitor and midwife to have ante-natal supervision by a doctor or refused to enter hospital when first advised or left hospital against medical advice.⁴⁴

Because the IMR was falling, the rise in the MMR gave cause for concern, and there were calls for investigations into the rise.

Any suggestion that poor health and poor nutrition, and infant or maternal mortality was caused by poverty, which in itself was caused by insufficient unemployment benefits, was politically controversial, because the government did not believe they could afford to increase benefits. Sir George Newman, Medical Officer to the Ministry of Health was prepared to admit privately to Dame Janet Campbell, the Medical Officer in charge of maternal and child welfare at the Ministry of Health, that the Ministry could not respond to calls for an investigation into maternal mortality because such an investigation 'could have just one ending, namely, the demonstration of a great mass of sickness and impairment attributable to childbirth, which would create a demand for organised treatment by the state',⁴⁵ and embarrass his department. The Government denied that poverty was the cause of poor nutrition or health and put the blame on mothers. Mothers caused infant mortality by not taking

⁴⁴ CB Burnley MOH *Annual Report* 1934.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Jane Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood* (London, 1980) p.190.

advantage of infant welfare clinics, and women caused maternal mortality by not attending ante-natal clinics. In fact, a Ministry of Health Committee on Maternal Mortality blamed that mortality on 'an excessive amount of difficult midwifery, much of which is probably caused by pelvic contraction, of which rickets is the most common cause'.⁴⁶ Rickets is notoriously a disease of poverty and malnutrition. Jane Lewis believes that the Government avoided the issue of poverty by concentrating on the improved maternity services and the clinical causes of maternal mortality.⁴⁷ In 1934, Kermack, McKendrick and McKinlay, published a paper in *The Lancet* which suggested that the reduction in infant mortality was 'dependent in a large measure on improvement of maternal health'.⁴⁸ However, in 1939, when the Women's Health Enquiry Committee conducted a survey of married working women, they noted that pregnant women were 'quite often malnourished', and women's health only received attention when it was connected with childbearing. They further noted that women tended to become 'progressively less fit with the birth of each child'.⁴⁹ In the 1930s, formal contraceptive advice was difficult for working class women to access, and extensive birth control was opposed because of fears that the population was in 'terminal decline'.⁵⁰ Webster, in his forthright way, saw that 'in response to this demographic crisis the intelligentsia became as concerned about under-fertility as they had previously been about the excessive reproduction among the working classes'.⁵¹ Titmuss noted, in 1943, that the higher fertility in the depressed areas 'prevented a

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Kermack, WO, McKendrick, AG, McKinlay, PL, 'Death Rates in Great Britain and Sweden', *The Lancet*, March 31, 1934, pp.698-703, p.703.

⁴⁹ Spring Rice, *Working Class Wives*, pp.19-20.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 44.

⁵¹ Charles Webster, 'The Health of the Schoolchild During the Depression', in eds. Parry, N, & McNair, D, *Fitness of the Nation* (Leicester, 1983), p.70.

calamitous fall in the size of the population'.⁵² Spring Rice noted, in 1939, that 'contraceptive advice seems practically nonexistent [and there is] a deplorable ignorance or prejudice on the part of the professional medical attendant'.⁵³ In *Time to Spare* (1935), Mrs Keen of Darwen said, 'There is no [family planning] clinic in our town. There is no-one to show us any different'.⁵⁴ Yet continuous childbearing was seen to be a cause of ill-health. Living conditions in the cotton textile area of North East Lancashire had long been and were still poor in the 1930s. Lancashire as a whole had a poor record for maternal mortality, as evidence from the MOH's for Blackburn and Burnley has shown. Low wages, the tradition and need for women working in the mills until late in pregnancy, and the generally unhealthy conditions in homes, factories and in the polluted valleys played a large part in high infant and maternal mortality. If the low paid and the unemployed had had sufficient means to purchase a healthy diet then the IMR would have declined rapidly. The MMR was a different matter. It was influenced not only by a poor diet, but by the physical condition of the mother and the quality of maternal medical care. Irvine Loudon, born in 1924, was a GP who retired in his early 50s and took up an academic post writing medical history. He has written several books and articles. In an article published in 1999 in the *Independent*, stated that:

There was another aspect of maternal mortality which was most unusual. In contrast to most mortality rates, the risk of dying in childbirth was consistently highest in the upper and middle classes. The explanation is quite simple. When there were few deliveries in hospitals, most of the labouring classes were delivered at home by midwives who rarely interfered in normal labours. Amongst the upper classes, however, most mothers were delivered by doctors who tended to intervene unnecessarily

⁵² Richard Titmuss, *Poverty and Population* (London, 1943), p. xxviii.

⁵³ Spring Rice, *Working Class Wives*, p.44.

⁵⁴ Greene, *Time to Spare*, p.85.

and....more likely than midwives to be carriers of streptococcus which was the cause of almost all deaths from puerperal sepsis.⁵⁵

Loudon, in an article in 2000, again wrote about maternal mortality in the 1930s. He noted that Rochdale had the highest rate of maternal mortality in the country until ‘an exceptionally vigorous’ MOH was appointed who reformed maternal care and reduced the MMR substantially.⁵⁶ This demonstrates that improved maternal care was as important as an adequate diet and the slight reduction in the MMR in North East Lancashire was a result of improved maternal medical treatment, which could have been more forceful if more finance had been available.

Sir George Newman, in his *Annual Report* to the Ministry of Health for 1932, told Parliament:

After all, sound nutrition in a pregnant woman is obviously the only way of sustaining her health and strength and that of her forthcoming child. She should become accustomed to a diet which includes ample milk – two pints a day- cheese, butter, eggs, fish, liver, fruit and vegetables, which will supply her body with the essential elements, salts and vitamins.⁵⁷

A pregnant woman whose husband was unemployed could not follow such a diet when, in 1932, transitional payments benefit was twenty-nine shillings a week and milk cost three and a halfpence a pint.⁵⁸ Anne Hardy, in 2000, was of the opinion that Sir George Newman was a better politician than a social reformer, more concerned with providing political support for his colleagues than developing new approaches to health and social conditions.⁵⁹ Sir George Newman (1870-1948) was the Chief Medical Officer to the Board of Education from 1907 and during the First World War

⁵⁵ Irvine Loudon, ‘The rapid decline of death in childbirth’ *The Independent*, 27 October 1999.

⁵⁶ Irvine Loudon, ‘Maternal mortality in the past and its relevance to developing countries today’ *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 2000, (suppl): 241S -6S, p. 244S.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Hannington, *The Distressed Areas*, p.55.

⁵⁸ Webster, ‘Health Welfare and Unemployment’, p.208.

⁵⁹ Anne Hardy, *Health and Medicine in Britain Since 1860* p.78.

became the Chief Medical Officer to the Ministry of Health. He was the author of many influential contributions to public health, including works on infant mortality, public health and preventative medicine. The poor diet of most of the low paid and unemployed would not have created healthy children, and as we shall see, that poor diet could have been a ticking time-bomb. Nevertheless, children whose health was compromised needed adequate medical treatment and the medical services in North East Lancashire were adequate.

Although medical services had improved since World War One nationally, comprehensive medical supervision for the preschool child in the early 1930s was not freely available. Medical attention, however, was widely available in the North East Lancashire towns. Blackburn, the largest County Borough in the area, with nearly 32,000 families, had six separate centres for maternity and child welfare, and six nursery classes with accommodation for 550 children.⁶⁰ Burnley, the second largest County Borough in the area with 25,000 families, has six maternity and child welfare centres which were open four days a week and three antenatal clinics four days a week, but no provision for nursery schools until 1932.⁶¹ Darwen, a Municipal Borough with approximately 10,500 families, had one clinic with two weekly sessions where children under five were examined and weighed and the results were recorded.⁶² In Haslingden, an Urban District with approximately 4,000 families, there were fortnightly clinics from 1932 onwards.⁶³ The Great Harwood Council, an Urban District with approximately 3,500 families, provided fortnightly clinics with an average attendance at

⁶⁰ CB Blackburn MOH *Annual Reports*, 1930-36.

⁶¹ CB Burnley MOH *Annual Reports*, 1930-36.

⁶² MB Darwen, MOH *Annual Reports*, 1930-34.

⁶³ MB Haslingden, *Health Officers Report*, October 1933, Lancashire Record Office, (MBH).

each clinic of thirty-four out of a population of 13,820.⁶⁴ Accrington, a Borough with more than 12,000 families, had no day nurseries, but nearly 7,500 visits a year to Child Welfare Centres. There was no information on whether older children attended.⁶⁵ Nelson, a Borough with 11,000 families, held weekly Maternity and Child Welfare clinics, school clinics daily and an orthopaedic clinic weekly. More than 400 older children attended welfare clinics annually besides infants.⁶⁶ Nelson was known locally as 'Little Moscow' or 'Red Nelson' and was more generous socially than other local authorities. These figures would suggest that there was ample coverage for the population, however, the facilities offered were not utilised as well as they could have been. Health visitors gave widely publicised lectures at many clinics in an attempt to persuade more mothers to attend clinics, and close examination of local authority records for North East Lancashire shows that numbers of mothers using Child Welfare clinics rose annually. Nursery schools would have provided more health care for preschool children, but although local authorities had the power to provide nursery schools for children under the age of two, there were less than 7,000 children in such schools in England and Wales,⁶⁷ while in North East Lancashire only Blackburn with six, and Burnley with one, had nursery classes. The cause was most likely the economic climate. With so many unemployed, and so many mills closed, the income from rates in the cotton towns may have been too small for the local authorities to afford them.

In Blackburn and Burnley, children were examined in accordance with the Board of Education (Special Services) Regulations which provided for medical

⁶⁴ Great Harwood UDC, *Annual Medical Officer Report*, 1931-35, Lancashire Record Office, (UDGh).

⁶⁵ MB Accrington, *MOH Annual Reports* 1933-35.

⁶⁶ MB Nelson, *MOH Annual Reports*, 1930-34, Lancashire Record Office, (MBNe).

⁶⁷ PEP, *Report of the British Health Services*, p.117.

inspection of all children in public elementary schools as soon as possible in the twelve months following their first admission (entrants); on attaining the age of eight years (intermediates); and their attaining the age of twelve years of age (leavers). In addition, in Burnley, records were kept by health visitors of all children born in Burnley. Children were visited at intervals up to the time they began school, and the histories filed. When a child began school, the record was passed on to the school clinic giving the medical officer access to the child medical history.⁶⁸ Blackburn's School Medical Service was, according to Bernard Harris in 1995, 'run on comprehensive and progressive lines'.⁶⁹ Detailed records were kept, including records for uncleanliness; clothing and footwear; nutrition; height and weight; eye problems; rickets and deformities; hearing problems; skin diseases (ringworm *etc*); speech defects; dental disease; intellectual disabilities; and general health problems. A record was also kept regarding Diphtheria vaccination, which the school medical service provided free.⁷⁰ While Blackburn's School Medical Service (SMS) was 'comprehensive and progressive', and the Burnley MOH's record keeping was widespread and all-encompassing, the poor conditions in which the children lived could not be redressed. The number of children routinely examined in Blackburn and found to require treatment averaged 22 per cent in 1929-1932, and 33 per cent in 1933-35.⁷¹ The number of Burnley schoolchildren requiring treatment increased as they got older. In 1933, 37 per cent of the entrants aged three to seven required treatments; in the eight to nine age groups, 39 per cent required treatment; and in the twelve to fourteen age groups, 43 per cent were in need of treatment.⁷² In Accrington, the average number of

⁶⁸ CB Burnley MOH *Annual Reports*, 1931.

⁶⁹ Bernard Harris, *The Health of the Schoolchild* (Buckingham, 1995), p.115.

⁷⁰ CB Blackburn MOH *Annual Reports* 1929-1935.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² CB Burnley MOH *Annual Reports* 1932-35.

children requiring treatment was 18 per cent for the period 1933-35.⁷³ M'Gonigle and Kirby, in 1936, recorded that routine medical inspections for England and Wales in 1933 totalled 1,833,499, with 303,199 requiring medical treatment, a percentage of 17.33.⁷⁴ So Blackburn which, as we have seen, had a 'comprehensive and progressive' SMS had 27 per cent of its children requiring medical treatment, and Burnley which kept a watch on its children's health from birth had 40 per cent of its children requiring medical treatment, while the average for England and Wales was just over 17 per cent. The entire textile areas had a similar number of children with below average condition, both medically and physically, while the area on the whole had adequate medical care. Poor living conditions must have played a part in this reduced medical condition, but the major blame must have been caused by poor nutrition caused by limited monetary means to buy a reasonable diet.

The dental health of children in North East Lancashire was far worse than their physical health. In England and Wales, for most of the 1930s, there was less than one dentist for 10,000 schoolchildren. Charles Webster labelled the dental scheme as 'the one area of undisguised and conspicuous failure in the school medical service'.⁷⁵ To study SMO reports for dental health is to read a litany of failure, although poor nutrition has been blamed for poor dental health. In Blackburn, in 1930, 79 per cent of children examined needed dental treatment. The SMO, Dr Thierens, whom we know well now, complained in 1930 of apathy encountered among parents who preferred extraction rather than take their children for earlier treatment. In 1931, he stated that wholesale extraction was not the policy of the School Dental Service, on the other hand, many parents declined to attend the dental clinic with their children earlier. He also reported

⁷³ Municipal Borough Accrington, *Medical Inspection of Schoolchildren 1933-35*.

⁷⁴ M'Gonigle & Kirby, *Poverty and Public Health*, p.43-44.

⁷⁵ Charles Webster, 'The Health of the Schoolchild During the Depression', p.76.

in 1931, that Child Welfare Centres were educating mothers on the importance of dental hygiene. By 1936, the number of children requiring treatment had fallen to 64 per cent.⁷⁶

In Burnley, in 1931, there was only one dentist to treat 4,000 patients a year, when 1,500 patients were considered the maximum by the Dental Association. This was to cause a problem. Between 1930 and 1934, the percentage of children requiring dental attention rose from 45 per cent, to 63 per cent. In November 1934 a second dentist was employed by the Burnley Council. The 1935 annual report noted:

In 1934, only half of the elementary schools were examined and consequently some of the children inspected in 1935 had not been seen for nearly two years. An astonishing fact among school children in Burnley is the large numbers of carious incisors, especially the lower incisors. Many are found to be septic or to have such large cavities that extraction is the only treatment. For these cases artificial teeth are now provided on payment of the cost of the denture. The number accepting this benefit, however, is very small, only two having availed themselves of it during 1935.

During 1935 10,326 children were notified as requiring treatment, and the following gives the history of these cases.

Attending School Dental Clinic.	6,745
Received Treatment from own Dentist.	46
Parents Indifferent	3,777
Treatment not Advised by own Doctor.	9
Left School or Could not be Traced.	40
Left Town.	8
Remaining to be followed up at the end of the year.	268 ⁷⁷

⁷⁶ CB Blackburn, MOH *Annual Reports* 1930-1935.

⁷⁷ CB Burnley MOH *Annual Reports*, 1930-36.

In Accrington, in 1933, 7,985 children were examined and 4,976 required treatment. In 1934, 8,019 were inspected, 5,028 required treatment, and 2,578 received treatment.⁷⁸ In Blackburn, the number of children inspected annually rose from 6,563 in 1930, to 10,634 in 1936. The increase was such that a third dentist was hired in 1935.⁷⁹ The Political and Economic Planning report for 1937 noted that less than three quarters of school children in England and Wales were dentally inspected each year.⁸⁰ There were several reasons for dental disease; a lack of interest in some parents concerning their child's dental health; the economic climate and the daily struggle to provide enough food to fill children; and the poor nutrition caused by insufficient means to buy healthy food.

Local authorities were required by the Board of Education to keep records of examinations by the School Medical Service. Extensive records are available for Blackburn and Burnley, while other smaller boroughs' records are not as detailed. Blackburn's records are particularly extensive and arranged in tables, often with the previous several years noted, while Burnley's records, although just as detailed, were harder to follow. As we have seen, children were medically examined as entrants, intermediates, and leavers, with other children examined if teachers or the school nurse thought it necessary, and the number of parents attending medical examinations was noted. Records for the level of nutrition in children were kept; a record of the number of children vaccinated for diphtheria was kept; the level of cleanliness, both in head and body was noted, as was the condition of children's clothes and footwear; speech defects, visual defects and physical defects such as rickets were recorded. Tuberculosis records for children were kept, as well as deaths of children caused by

⁷⁸ Municipal Borough Accrington *Annual Medical Officer's Report 1933-35*.

⁷⁹ CB Blackburn MOH *Annual Reports 1930-1936*.

⁸⁰ PEP, *British Health Services*, p.8.

TB, and 'special schools' for children with various disabilities were also recorded, as were follow up visits from the school nurse. The following is a close examination of those records, beginning with Blackburn.

The number of parents attending medical examinations was important because it enabled the medical inspector to gain an accurate medical history, and it enabled the medical inspector to give appropriate advice, and could obtain the parent's consent should the child require treatment. The MOH for Blackburn noted in 1930:

As in previous years, the percentage of parental attendances is highest in the entrant and lowest in the leaver group. None the less total percentage of attendances is 12.3 higher than in 1929 and there is an increase in attendances in each group examined.

The records for uncleanliness for 1930 show that a total of 4,312 children were examined; 2 had dirty heads; 461 had nits; 5 had dirty bodies; 79 were flea bitten; 24 had unsatisfactory clothing; and 11 had unsatisfactory footwear. The MOH noted that the 'The body cleanliness figure for boys shows an increase of 1.1% and that for girls shows a similar improvement'. By studying the nutrition charts contained in the MOH reports, we see that records began to show a decline in nutrition levels as early as 1928 before the depression had really taken hold. Below are the percentages of children presenting with *normal* nutrition.

	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934
Boys	90.6	88.1	85.7	80.9	76.5	83.9	86.2
Girls	87.4	86.1	86.4	85.0	82.7	83.1	86.1

Table 29. Percentages of children showing normal nutrition in Blackburn.

Source. Table produced by me from Blackburn MOH Annual Reports, 1928-1934

In 1935, the Board of Education required a change in the way nutrition was recorded.

As a consequence 21 boys and 36 girls presented with bad nutrition.⁸¹

In the MOH report for 1931, Dr Thierens noted,

The standard of nutrition continues to decline and shows but a small improvement over the war period (1915-18). Malnutrition is the result of an insufficient or incorrect dietary, which may be brought about by financial inability to provide the requisite sustenance. The needs of children affected by this cause are readily met by the provision of meals under the Education Authority's scheme.⁸²

The figures in table 29 shows how the number of children sufficiently fed fell gradually from 1928 to 1932 before beginning to rise, quite possibly as a result of the provision of free school meals.

Burnley's records are slightly different from Blackburn's and there are not as many comparisons, however, they show the same story. Below are the numbers of children diagnosed with malnutrition at school medical inspections.

1930	1931	1932	1933	1934
2	21	24	61	24

Table30. Children with malnutrition in Burnley.

Source: Table produced by me from CB Burnley SMO *Annual Reports*, 1930-1934.

In 1935, when the Board of Education required different notifications for poor nutrition, there were no cases of malnutrition recorded. As with Blackburn, the numbers of children with poor nutrition worsened between 1930 and 1933, when the Depression was at its worse.

The numbers of children suffering rickets, tell a similar story to the nutrition figures. Below are the numbers of children with rickets in Blackburn, and for Burnley,

⁸¹ CB Blackburn MOH *Annual Reports* 1930-35

⁸² *Ibid.*1931.

although slightly fragmented because I did not have the complete records for 1930 and 1934.

	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935
Slight	120	80	246	279	190	188
Marked.	3	8	18	44	38	50

Table 31. Blackburn figures for rickets.⁸³

Source. Table generated by me from above records.

	1931	1932	1933	1935
Required Treatment	30	32	29	11
Required observation	176	202	5	

Table 32. Burnley figures for rickets.⁸⁴

Source. Table generated by me from above records.

These tables demonstrate how the severity of the industrial depression in 1932 and 1933 translates into children with slight or severe rickets, mostly caused by poor diet and reduced conditions. The SMOs of Blackburn and Burnley expressed concern at the decline in nutritional standards which they attributed to the quality of food consumed, rather than quantity. In fact Dr Lamont, Burnley's MOH noted:

There are many children who do not appear to have a sufficiency of fresh vitamin-containing foods. In the present state of unemployment the efforts of the mother of a family must of necessity be directed more towards supplying a sufficiency of food of the less expensive variety, and consequently there is a danger of children getting too much starchy food and too little fresh milk, fresh vegetables, fresh fruit and fresh eggs. Fresh milk, unfortunately, plays too little part in the dietary of the school child.⁸⁵

⁸³ CB Blackburn MOH *Annual Reports* 1930-35.

⁸⁴ CB Burnley MOH *Annual Reports* 1930-1935.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 1931.

Blackburn's MOH, Dr Thierens, noted in 1933 that:

Enquiries carried out by members of the School Medical Staff indicate that much of the subnormal nutrition in Blackburn school children is due not to actual insufficiency of food as to its unsuitability. Bread and jam, or cake and toast with tea...cannot be regarded as nourishing or economic fare.⁸⁶

The lack of fresh vitamin-containing food connects rickets with poor nutrition. Rickets is caused by a lack of vitamin D, as we have seen above, and an adequate diet would have remedied this. Rickets was also a cause of difficulties in childbirth. Records for Accrington, in 1933, showed no evidence of malnutrition, but recorded two cases of rickets, while in 1934, one case of malnutrition was noted with no cases of rickets recorded.⁸⁷ Haslingden, in 1932-33 recorded four cases of rickets, and fifty-one children were found to be suffering from varying degrees of malnutrition.⁸⁸ The SMO in Preston, Dr Critchley, reported that 'the general health of the children showed a uniform decline...the unprecedented trade depression and consequent unemployment being the direct cause'.⁸⁹ The MOH for Preston, Dr FA Sharp, remarked in 1934, 'In plain words, bread, jam, margarine and tea have taken the place of milk, meat, eggs, fish vegetables and fruit. While the former give satisfaction, and maintain weight, they will not give health or strength and will not build up resistance against disease'.⁹⁰ Dr JJ Butterworth, County MOH for Lancashire, noted in 1934, that malnutrition had risen slightly. Eleven hundred and fifteen children (compared with 626 in 1933) were found to be suffering from malnutrition.⁹¹ This was more than a 'slight rise'. It is also worth

⁸⁶ CB Blackburn MOH *Annual Reports*, 1933.

⁸⁷ Municipal Borough Accrington MOH *Annual Reports* 1933-34.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 1932-34.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Hutt, *Condition of the Working Class*, p.87.

⁹⁰ *Medical Officer*, 10 November 1934, p.196.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 17 November 1934, p.238.

noting that the Lancashire County Council area did not include the large industrial centres. Even with medical services available and school meals, unemployment, low unemployment benefits and low wages had a negative impact on children's health.

The above records show that many children were severely undernourished, and when unemployment benefits were inadequate to keep children in reasonable health, local government had to provide more free meals and milk. However, with the financial crisis of 1931, Board of Education officials told local authorities that children could not receive free meals unless they were both 'necessitous and undernourished', and access to free meals was controlled by both the imposition of a means test and by a medical inspection.⁹² Bernard Harris wrote that the most important weapon local government had to improve nutrition and combat malnutrition was 'the provision of school meals'.⁹³ Under the *Education (Provision of Meals) Act 1906*, local education authorities were allowed to aid any charitable committee undertaking to provide food for primary school children. Initially, regulations did not allow education authorities to contribute to purchasing food, but they were allowed to supply free meals to those children whose parents could not afford to pay for them. Most likely with the same reasoning used for the establishment of the SMS: for children who were 'unable by reason of lack of food to take advantage of the education provided for them'.⁹⁴ These limitations were removed in 1914 and local authorities were then able to provide meals and charge parents for them. The *Education Act 1921* expanded the options of local authorities by enabling them to meet the cost of food from the rates.⁹⁵ We saw in Chapter Six the numbers of meals provided, as well as the number of milk meals and

⁹² Harry Hendrick, *Child Welfare* p.135.

⁹³ Harris, *Health of the Schoolchild*, p.120.

⁹⁴ *Education (Provision of Meal) Act 1906*, (6 Edw.VII, 57), sections 1-3.

⁹⁵ *Education Act 1921*, (11 & 12 Geo.V 51), sections 82-84.

free milk. However, we need to note that between 1931 and 1935, the numbers of children receiving free meals doubled, while those receiving free milk increased fivefold. Even so, wrote Hendrick, 'these meals hardly compensated for the inadequate diet of many poor children'.⁹⁶ Sir George Newman, while ignoring the increase in poor nutrition, asked, 'Can we be satisfied that all the expenditure on school meals is being wisely incurred'?⁹⁷ The answer must be 'yes'. The free, or cheap school meals and milk helped check the physical deterioration in children severely affected by the economic climate.

The Ministry of Health, and the Board of Education, faced with growing criticism for its refusal to acknowledge the link between ill-health and inadequate nutrition in areas of high unemployment, mounted a counter-offensive. They did not publish unfavourable reports from SMOs, and they often bullied or attempted to prevent hostile medical personnel against speaking out, as with Dr M'Gonigle or Sir John Boyd Orr, and blamed the poor for their own predicament. In 1934, as we have seen, the Board of Education sent a memo to Local Education authorities reclassifying the way nutrition was reported. Previously, children had been recorded as having normal nutrition or bad nutrition, but the reclassifying gave five levels, excellent, normal, slightly subnormal or bad.⁹⁸ The problem with recording malnutrition was the criteria for identifying it. Richard Titmuss, in 1938 suggested that without accepted criteria for malnourishment, local SMOs based their examination on the general average within their own area. For example, an SMO for an affluent area would most likely classify a child differently than an SMO for a depressed area, or, as seen above, when the MOH for Burnley reported poor nutrition in a different way to the MOH for Blackburn. A poorly nourished child

⁹⁶ Hendrick, *Child Welfare*, p.135.

⁹⁷ Hutt, *Condition of the Working Class*, p.87.

⁹⁸ CB Blackburn *Annual Reports*, 1934.

from an affluent area could be classified 'bad', while in a depressed area the same child could be classified as slightly subnormal, or even normal, depending on the area.⁹⁹ Charles Webster, in 1982, challenged the accuracy of the official statistics which underplayed or understated the true extent of ill-health among children. He believes that pressure was applied to SMOs and others to ensure that the full extent of ill-health was under-recorded.¹⁰⁰ Margaret Mitchell, in 1985, presented a similar argument. She quoted Mr Somerville-Hastings (1879-1967), a surgeon and Labour politician, who in 1936 said, 'Facts and figures produced by public officials concerning unemployment and conditions in the distressed areas must be taken with a grain of salt, for they do no more than interpret the mind of the party in power'.¹⁰¹ An article in *The Lancet*, in 1936, noted.

It may be said that the three principle objections can be raised to attempts to assess undernutrition by methods solely based on physique, on physical appearance or on superficial clinical appearance. These objections are: (1) the absence of standards of reference; (2) that such standards as do exist may be debased standards, and (3) that the worst and more obvious of the effects of malnutrition may be delayed.¹⁰²

Dr Butterworth, MOH for Lancashire County, in 1932 noted that, 'In Lancashire, there appears to be no direct evidence that the depression seriously affected the health of the community', and Webster asked, in 1982 why 'there were not even expressions of undue concern about high rates of infant mortality, twice, or even three times as high as in more prosperous areas'?¹⁰³ The government ignored or deflected the mounting evidence of poor nutrition and ill-health. Webster, however, believes that the Ministry's

⁹⁹ Richard Titmuss, *Poverty and Population. A Factual Study of Social Waste* (London, 1938), pp.97-100.

¹⁰⁰ Webster, *Healthy or Hungry Thirties*, pp.118-119.

¹⁰¹ Mitchell, *Women and Children*, p.112.

¹⁰² Leslie J Harris, from the Nutritional Laboratory, University of Cambridge and Medical Research Council, 'A Programme for Nutrition Surveys', *The Lancet*, 25 April 1936, p.966.

¹⁰³ Webster *Healthy or Hungry Thirties*, pp.114-115.

efforts to silence the critics 'proved to be counterproductive. The excessive optimism of official reports merely strengthened the public and expert suspicions that the nation was facing a serious health problem.'¹⁰⁴ No one, however, realised just how serious a health problem was being created, not just for the children of the 1930s, but their children and their grandchildren.

It was in the 1930s, that epidemiologists began to study the role certain factors in early childhood possibly played in determining adult mortality. In 1934, three Scottish researchers, W Kermack, A McKendrick and P McKinley, wrote a paper which drew attention 'to certain regularities in the vital statistics of Great Britain, and to indicate their possible significance in interpreting the past and predicting the future'. They believed the data they had collected and studied 'behaved as if the expectation of life was determined by the conditions which existed during the child's early years' and came to the conclusion that the first fifteen years of life were of the greatest importance in the health of adults.¹⁰⁵ Epidemiological research had since cast doubt on some assumptions made by Kermack *et al*; however, recent studies have supported their underlying thesis about the foetal and childhood origins of adult disease.

In 1974, Sir Dugald Baird (1889-1986), a Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at Aberdeen University, associated low birth weight with high perinatal mortality rates which were higher in the North of England and Scotland, and argued that both were influenced by the quality of the mother's diet during pregnancy.¹⁰⁶ A high carbohydrate intake in early pregnancy suppresses placental growth, especially if

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* p.115

¹⁰⁵ WO Kermack, AG McKendrick, & PL McKinley, 'Death Rates in Great Britain and Sweden. Some General Regularities and their Significance', *The Lancet* 31 March 1931, pp.698-703.

¹⁰⁶ Sir Dugald Baird, 'The Epidemiology of Low Birth Weight: Changes in incidence in Aberdeen, 1948-72', *Journal of Biosocial Science*, Vol. 6, No. 4, July 1974, pp323-341.

combined with a low dairy intake in late pregnancy; and suppressed placental growth means a low birth weight child.¹⁰⁷ The quality and quantity of food was related to income and the unemployed and low-paid subsisted mainly on nutritionally inadequate diets during the period being studied. The diet of the poor in this period was a high carbohydrate and low dairy food diet. Recent research has shown that low birth weight children run a risk of early mortality or chronic disease. In 1980, Baird submitted a paper to the *British Journal of Obstetrics*, in which he argued that as a result of social and economic influences many women in Britain, 'suffered a considerable reduction in their reproductive efficiency, as measured by stillbirth and perinatal mortality rates, due to the environmental conditions they experienced when they were young children, or even *in utero*'.¹⁰⁸ Baird also believed that females who were born and reared during periods of severe socioeconomic depression and environmental pollution 'may have grown up to be physiologically inefficient as well as anatomically stunted and will have high perinatal mortality rates throughout their reproductive lives'.¹⁰⁹ Females in North East Lancashire were born and reared during a period of severe socioeconomic depression and environmental pollution, to mothers who had suffered the same in the 1890s depression, and they had a high carbohydrate, low dairy food diet. We begin to see therefore, the possible consequences of poor living conditions and poor nutrition.

In 1986, David Barker and Clive Osmond published an article on the relationship between infant and childhood mortality and the incidence of cardiovascular disease in later life. They proposed that adverse conditions in the womb can give rise to restricted foetal growth and also result in setting physiological systems, thereby

¹⁰⁷ K Godfrey, 'Maternal nutrition in early and late pregnancy in relation to placental and fetal growth', *British Medical Journal*, 1996; 312:410 (17 February).

¹⁰⁸ Sir Dugald Baird, 'Environment and Reproduction', *British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, Vol.87, No.12, December 1980, p.1058.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* p.1066.

predisposing the individual to chronic disease in later life.¹¹⁰ They divided Britain into 212 local areas and found 'a strong geographical relation between ischaemic heart disease mortality in 1968-78 and infant mortality in 1921-25'. They also noted that bronchitis, stomach cancer and rheumatic heart disease 'were similarly related to infant mortality'. Their conclusion was that the geographical distribution of cardiovascular disease in England and Wales suggests that poor nutrition *in utero* and infancy programmes the body to adapt to a thrifty environment, and abundant or excess food later in life can lead to cardiovascular disease, or type two diabetes.¹¹¹ Barker and Osmond's paper has since provided the foundation for a highly influential research programme, focussing on the links between foetal and infant nutrition, and health in later life. Julie Owens, Professor of Obstetrics at the University of Adelaide, said recently, 'There is enough evidence stacking up for most of us to agree that low birth weight and health events decades later are causally related in humans'.¹¹² Mark Hansen, Director of the Development Origins of Health and Disease Program at the University of Southampton, says critics of the foetal origins of adult disease 'are dwindling in number'.¹¹³ Most epidemiologists today believe that the malnourishment of the 1930s is the cause of many health problems today.

In the early 1990s Barker and Osmond published a paper which compared inequalities in health in three North East Lancashire towns, Burnley, Nelson and Colne,

¹¹⁰ Barker, DJP, Osmond, C, 'Infant Mortality, Childhood Nutrition, and Ischaemic Heart Disease in England and Wales', in Barker, DJP, ed., *Fetal and Infant Origins of Adult Disease* (London, 1992).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* p.23.

¹¹² *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 March 2005.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

an area which concerns this thesis.¹¹⁴ In the three neighbouring towns, the mortality rates differ greatly. Socioeconomic conditions in the towns are similar, but below the average for England and Wales. The three towns were cotton weaving towns, and for six miles from Burnley through Nelson to Colne, there is hardly a break between rows of terraced houses. Yet the infant mortality rate varied greatly, and all three were above the national average. In the early part of the twentieth-century the infant mortality rate in Burnley was nearly twice the rate of Nelson, while Colne's was between the two. Barker and Osmond argued that conditions in the towns were the cause of much of the early infant mortality. Most of Burnley lies in a valley where two rivers, the Calder and the Brun, meet. There is also a high embankment that carries the Leeds and Liverpool canal running through the centre of the town. In addition, in the early nineteenth-century housing was built on land in the town which was too marshy to farm. Nelson and Colne are higher up the Pennine slopes. The climate is identical in all three towns, cold and damp with above average rainfall. Burnley, however, was more crowded and damp, and industrial settlement had begun earlier. Nelson had been developed more recently than Burnley and Colne and many Nelson inhabitants were first generation industrial workers. Burnley, Nelson and Colne now have very similar socioeconomic conditions, with Nelson slightly less favoured than Burnley and Colne, yet adult mortality in the 1990s follows the same pattern as the infant mortality earlier in the century. Because of the close proximity of the towns, environmental variables cannot explain the large differences in the mortality rates, nor can the medical care which is centred in Burnley and is almost identical in all three towns.¹¹⁵ The research of Barker and Osmond would suggest that the better physical health of Nelson's mothers and the

¹¹⁴ Barker, DJP, Osmond, C, 'Inequalities of health in Britain: specific explanations in three Lancashire towns', in Barker, DJP, eds., *Fetal and Infant Origins of Adult Disease* (London, 1992).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.71-76.

post natal environment is responsible for the lower infant mortality rate and consequently the adult mortality rate in Nelson, and would also suggest the same conclusions concerning the link between the infant mortality rate and the death rate be found in the rest of North East Lancashire, as the evidence above has shown. In fact records for Blackburn dated 1997 show the male infant mortality rates have risen steadily, and the death rates for boys aged less than one year are now roughly twice the national average, while in 1981, the rates were only just above the national average.¹¹⁶

In the early 1900s, much of Britain's population still lived in poverty in a polluted environment, and in North East Lancashire, the pollution and poverty was evident throughout the 1930s. Rickets had begun to rise again in the 1930s, and the fact that a Ministry of Health Committee blamed much of the difficult midwifery on rickets reveals that those mothers must have been malnourished in their infancy and childhood. Contemporary observers provided evidence of poverty and poor nutrition and its effects on children. Organisations such as the Save the Children Fund and the Women's Health Committee believed that the low benefits allowed to the unemployed created a risk of malnutrition. Experts like Boyd Orr, founding Director of the Rowett Institute, an internationally recognised centre for nutrition research who, during World War Two, would advise the government on diet and nutrition, claimed, in 1936, that half the country's population was undernourished.

Sir George Newman, while admitting in private that an investigation into maternal mortality would ultimately have just one ending, 'A great mass of sickness and sickness and impairment attributable to childbirth, which would create a demand

¹¹⁶ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Social Policy Research*, 126, August 1997.

for organised treatment by the state' when maternal mortality began to rise in the early 1930s; recommended instead, a diet for pregnant women far out of reach of most working class families. And diets recommended by the BMA or the Government's Advisory Committee on Nutrition made no recommendations for pregnant women, and were also out of reach for many. The government denied that poverty brought about by low wages or low unemployment benefits was the basis of infant or maternal mortality; instead, they deflected the blame onto the mothers.

Medical services, while not perfect, were adequate in the North East Lancashire cotton towns. Much more was done by health departments in the Lancashire weaving area than has been previously thought. Maternal and child welfare clinics were available, and mothers were encouraged to use them. In addition, the School Medical Service had been in existence since 1908. These services could not redress the poor living conditions, and the poor, inadequate diets deficient in protein, vitamins and minerals, would not enable children to build up a resistance to disease. Bread, margarine, jam and tea would make children appear adequately fed, but they would be malnourished. Medical services notwithstanding, unemployment, low benefits and low wages had a detrimental impact on the general health of children. The SMOs of Blackburn, Burnley and Preston, the main population centres of the Lancashire cotton area, all wrote of children's health showing a uniform decline, while the government used aggregated statistics to underplay the extent of poor health.

Modern research has shown that adverse conditions in the womb can predispose individuals to chronic disease later in life. Children in North East Lancashire today will suffer health problems caused by poor conditions in the 1930s, regardless of the improvement in health services by local authorities. The consequences of

unemployment and low pay are much more than have been thought, and the outcomes in the future will also be as undesirable. The areas of North East Lancashire covered by this study which suffered high, long-term unemployment in the 1930s are still disadvantaged in 2008. However, it is important to note that the Local Authorities in North East Lancashire, by their vigorous care for the community; for the children; for the sick; for the elderly; for the disabled, both physically and mentally; and the unemployed, prevented much more damage being done to that community.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has argued that the high long-term unemployment in North East Lancashire in the early 1930s was only partly a result of the Great Depression. During World War One the Indian textile market was cut off from Lancashire's cotton products and as a result the Indian domestic cotton industry expanded and overtook the Lancashire output. The industry in North East Lancashire was technologically stagnant with antiquated machinery, but employers, rather than modernising their factories, attempted to get more work out of their employees, or closed the mills. The closure of the mills had a physical and psychological effect on the people of North East Lancashire who had depended on cotton for so long. The Lancashire cotton industry had a tradition of married women working in the mills and their closure meant not only a loss of social contacts, but also of financial independence. Adult male unemployment was seen by most commentators as of prime importance, while juvenile unemployment, which was high in the textile area, was not seen as significant. Junior Instruction Centres were meant to maintain morale and employability but, as we have seen, did neither. Because of the over-reliance of North East Lancashire on cotton textiles, when the mills closed there were few other available jobs.

We have seen that poverty was cumulative among the long-term unemployed, and because unemployment was a major cause of poverty it was greater in the depressed regions. Because the North East Lancashire cotton industry had been in crisis since the early 1920s, the employees had used up their entitlements to unemployment benefit and had to rely on transitional payments, and then

unemployment assistance. These benefits were barely adequate to pay rent, clothe and feed a family. Economies had to be made, and it was usually the diet which suffered. Instead of food which built up health and fought disease, such as fresh fruit, vegetables, milk and eggs, many families lived on starchy high carbohydrate foods which assuaged hunger, but caused malnourishment, or even malnutrition. As we saw with unemployment, poverty meant an inadequate diet; the low-paid and unemployed could not afford to buy food which would give good health, so the one of the main effects of poverty was a poor diet leading to ill-health

Housing in North East Lancashire was substandard: many houses were old and unsanitary, not because of the industrial depression, but because of the way houses were built in colonies around mills in the nineteenth-century. What the industrial depression in North East Lancashire did was to make it difficult for people to improve their housing conditions. The adverse living conditions were invariably caused by poverty. High long-term unemployment meant that many unemployed, because of an inadequate income, continued to live in low-rent unsatisfactory houses. The Health Departments in the North East Lancashire towns were quite vigilant in inspecting houses and using Public Health Acts to compel landlords to improve houses, or to eventually demolish slum houses wholesale. The condition of the older houses caused health problems, and local authorities were building public housing, but the number of council houses built did not match the numbers of those needing to be rehoused. Those unemployed and low-paid who did move into council houses could only afford the rents by reducing expenses which were usually food.

This thesis has demonstrated that the welfare services in North East Lancashire were a network of community structures. Maternity and child welfare clinics were

available and although they only dispensed advice, the North East Lancashire towns set a high standard of care in their area and made great efforts to address the needs of the community. The Local Government Act, 1929, and the Poor Law Act, 1930, transferred poor law functions from poor law Boards of Guardians to Local Authorities. Children in need were cared for, as were the elderly and the sick, children at risk were monitored and removed from their homes if they were in danger from parents or relatives. The Education Sub-Committees worked with Health Departments and Housing Sub-Committees to assist families who were struggling. Children with disabilities were sent away to school if there were no facilities in the area for disabled children. Local authorities paid the expenses for these children, asking parents to contribute only if they could afford it. The infirm elderly, were accommodated in the Public Assistance Institution (Workhouse) if there was no-one to care for them. Although feared and reviled because of Poor Law connotations, the Institution cared for the destitute and those in need of assistance. Children who were Boarded-Out (fostered) were checked regularly and although they could be moved at almost a whim, they were also well looked after. Of course, not all children were well cared for, and some children 'fell through the cracks', nevertheless for the times, the local authorities in North East Lancashire performed an exceptional job considering the economic climate of the time and the money available to them in Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education grants.

The condition of the schools in North East Lancashire was the same as the housing: poor. Both national and local governments were aware of these poor conditions and had begun to take steps to remedy this when the economic crisis of the 1930s commenced. Dr Thierens, School Medical Officer for Blackburn, believed that

the health and education of the school children suffered from the poor conditions. His aim was to 'eliminate the old-fashioned school with its dark, badly-ventilated classroom where education and health inevitably suffer from the influences of unhygienic surroundings'. New schools were planned for every new public housing estate, however, the 1931 economy measure slowed down the building of new schools for a short period of time.

The School Medical Service and the School Meal Service provided vital assistance to children whose health had been compromised by poor living conditions before the industrial depression, and an insufficient diet caused by low income through unemployment. As we have seen in Chapter Seven, the School Medical Service was working well. Children were medically examined at least three times during their school life and more often if teachers or school nurses considered it necessary. Records for North East Lancashire show an increase in malnutrition and below normal nutrition during the 1930s, and the numbers of children requiring medical treatment also rose. Dr Thierens, MOH for Blackburn and Dr Lamont, MOH for Burnley, laid much of the blame for this at the feet of poor food intake; too much starchy food and not enough fruit, eggs and milk. However, the School Medical Service and the School Meals Service were the Local Authorities' weapons in the fight against ill health and malnourishment amongst children.

While we can assume on the basis of epidemiological research that the effects of poor conditions, poor nutrition and financial conservatism of the 1930s are causing health problems today, we must also be mindful of how much the Local Authorities in North East Lancashire did for their community. They depended upon grants from the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education to perform their duties, and those grants

were not huge. They did, however, use what money they received wisely. They provided care for those unable to care for themselves, the elderly and those with disabilities. A careful watch was kept on children who were quite possibly at risk. Sick and disabled children were cared for and educated. Pre-school children and pregnant women who needed treatment were given appropriate assistance. School-children were medically examined and received treatment if they needed it. Unsanitary houses were either repaired or demolished and people were rehoused under Public Health Acts, and those same Acts ensured living conditions improved, although slowly. We can be in no doubt that the actions of the Local Authorities in North East Lancashire made sure that the community was safe, that conditions were improving, and that their performance, considering the economic situation, was admirable.

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